

# Broadband Planning

## DIGITAL INCLUSION AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

### Worksession #1

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#### BROADBAND: WHAT'S THE NEED / WHAT'S AT STAKE?

- Public participation and input into public policy is increasingly a community value, while opportunities for civic engagement are migrating to digital forums/formats.
  - o Individual stories and values increasingly contribute to public policy.
  - o Stories are best told via video. Video is exponentially growing as a key communication mode.
  - o Online tools are needed.
- In-person means of civic engagement no longer secure sufficient participation to be considered relevant or representative. The expectation is online participation – and not always in real time. Digital participation is the new paradigm.
  - o The City will need to undergo a paradigm shift to digital public participation.
- Civic engagement and digital inclusion are dependent on broadband availability, adoption and utilization.
- Local government's customer service is enhanced via online tools. There is growing interest and need to provide/obtain City services and data (transactional services) online.
- Person-to-person communication is increasingly dependent on video/audio.
- Capacity-building: Tool use competency and digital literacy are critical to civic engagement.
- ONI goals require online tools.
  - Diversifying and increasing civic engagement.
  - Increased capacity and decentralizing.
  - Expanding public input and impact on public policy.
  - o The trend and goal is for all people and organizations to be content producers as well as consumers.
- Transparency and access to public documents and information: People expect to be able to get all manner of public information online – it is broadband-dependent.
  - o The goal is “transparency of government”. The only way to achieve that affordably is digitally.
    - Portland's current protocols and interface for public access to documents and information are restrictive and not seamless.
- The City has “gotta use the tools” or else those who expect to participate digitally will not do so.
- There are significant disparities in capacity/ability to use broadband-based digital tools. These disparities include:
  - o Availability: Affordability.
  - o Adoption: High percentage without computers or online access in the home.
  - o Utilization: Lack of ability to use the tools.
- Economically-disadvantaged demographic groups are adopting at a rapidly growing rate, mostly among the young, but via mobile devices. The older generation among those groups are being left out.
- The MHCRC Ascertainment Study surfaced the importance for students of having broadband in their home, and a high percentage do not.
- Affordability is the key issue: Adoption will come with affordable availability.
- Migration to mobile: City residents and City services are increasingly mobile.
- Movement toward the semantic web is increasingly dependent on big broadband.
- There is a spectrum of availability: None -> Mobile -> Anchor point -> Home.

## ISSUES, BARRIERS, CONSTRAINTS

- Video storage is a barrier.
- There are barriers to access, adoption and utilization based on:
  - o Age
  - o Affordability (a key barrier)
  - o Access (human and machine)
  - o Language
  - o Skills (a key barrier)
  - o ADA
- City policies and the City's web interface are barriers to transparency and access to public information.
  - o Portland Online is outdated and restrictive.
- The organizing principle (platform) is not yet clear.
  - o Centralized (City-managed) or decentralized?
  - o Will Web.3 solve this or is a strategy needed to organize data/content?
- Scarce staff resources especially as long as in-person, snail mail and electronic systems ALL need to be maintained. This will be significant during the transition to all-digital.
- Lack of open data, e.g. home energy useage data; high percentage of government data that is not available; data not in searchable formats.
  - o This is a barrier to apps development. A policy shift – beyond FOIA standards – is needed.
  - o The movement is toward more structured data.
- The perception that local government doesn't have a role in proving broadband services. Incumbent monopolies have co-opted public sentiment via lobbying that “the market will take care of it.”
- Broadband is viewed under the old paradigm. “While broadband is viewed as a utility it is completely in the hands of the private sector.”
- Lack of competition:
  - o No alternative provider.
  - o No service or cost options.
  - o Corporate control.
  - o N open access / choice of ISP.
  - o Restrictive terms of service for other ISPs and service providers.
    - E.g. long term service contracts block competition / create a barrier to entry.
- Lack of consumer protection.
- Pole resistance in neighborhoods.

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Ubiquitous access at an affordable price
  - Partnering with providers as “good citizens” of the community.
    - Could start with small pilot projects.
- Continue to push the regulatory authority of the City.
- “Right to digital access” adopted as city value.
- Seek ways to grow competition, including non-corporate alternatives like co-ops.
  - The City should play a coordinating and facilitating role.
  - “As a community, providing for those who can't afford \$80 per month broadband.”
- Publicly-built and owned infrastructure, most likely via a public private partnership.
- Maximize, and leverage for the long term, Comcast's program for \$9.95 per month for 3 years for families qualifying for the reduced cost lunch program).
- Establish an “equity lens” on broadband issues in City government.
  - Access alternatives.

- Use of social media.
  - % of franchise fees to community grants to address inequities.
- Leverage and enhance City grants programs.
- Greater leverage of PCM and other public training resources.
  - Better marketing of these resources.
- All public buildings have wifi / access points / electrical outlets.
- Partner with public spaces to provide wifi, tied to the broadband backbone that already exists.
  - Align policies to support this.
- There is an opportunity to engage youth, diverse communities and all of those not engaged before.