



COUNTY OF SONOMA

575 ADMINISTRATION
DRIVE, ROOM 102A
SANTA ROSA, CA 95403

SUMMARY REPORT

Agenda Date: 11/5/2024

To: Sonoma County Board of Supervisors

Department or Agency Name(s): Economic Development Collaborative

Staff Name and Phone Number: Ethan Brown 565-7589; Katherine DiPasqua 565-4893

Vote Requirement: Majority

Supervisorial District(s): Countywide

Title:

Professional Services Agreement for Fixed Wireless Infrastructure Analysis

Recommended Action:

Award and authorize the Director of Sonoma County Economic Development Collaborative, on behalf of and as the Fiscal Agent of the North Bay North Coast Broadband Consortium, to execute a Professional Services Agreement, in a form approved by County Counsel, with Etheric Communications LLC for a fixed wireless infrastructure analysis, with a not to exceed contract amount of \$383,763, and a term expiring June 30, 2027.

Executive Summary:

The Economic Development Collaborative (EDC) is recommending award of a new contract with Etheric Communications LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Etheric Networks Incorporated, in the amount of \$383,763, with a term expiring June 30, 2027. Etheric Communications LLC will conduct a fixed wireless infrastructure analysis for the North Bay North Coast Broadband Consortium (NBNCBC) Region, which includes Marin, Napa, Mendocino, and Sonoma Counties. This project fulfills Objective No. 4 of the NBNCBC's approved California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) California Advanced Services Fund (CASF) Consortia Account Grant workplan. Objective No. 4 of the CASF workplan requires the consortium to pursue activities that will lead to broadband deployment projects under SB 156 (2021) and AB 164 (2021).

Etheric Communications LLC will fulfill that objective by conducting a regional wireless infrastructure analysis to identify areas within the NBNCBC region that might be better suited for fixed wireless infrastructure versus in ground, wireline infrastructure. Sonoma County serves as the Fiscal Agent for NBNCBC and will oversee the contract. The NBNCBC Management Team will coordinate with Etheric Communications LLC to ensure the deliverables meet their individual needs, but Sonoma County, as the Fiscal Agent, will ultimately be responsible for determining that Etheric Communications' work is satisfactory and meets the terms of the agreement.

Discussion:

The North Bay North Coast Broadband Consortium (NBNCBC) consists of Marin, Napa, Mendocino and Sonoma Counties (Member Counties). Its activities are funded by a combination of State grant funds and the budgets of the Member Counties. Its purpose is to promote the deployment of broadband infrastructure and the adoption of broadband services by residents and businesses within the NBNCBC region. In December 2023, the Board of Supervisors approved the extension of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Member Counties for continued participation in the NBNCBC through December 31, 2027.

NBNCBC has received funding from the California Public Utilities Commission’s (CPUC) California Advanced Services Fund (CASF) Rural and Urban Regional Broadband Consortia Account (CASF Consortia Account), which is intended to assist NBNCBC in planning broadband infrastructure deployment projects within the NBNCBC region.

Given the high cost of deploying fiber optic cable, particularly in the low-population density, rural, coastal, and mountainous areas found within the NBNCBC region, alternatives are being considered, including fixed wireless infrastructure. This contract will be for a Fixed Wireless Infrastructure Analysis to determine the cost and utility of fixed wireless as last-mile and middle-mile solutions, and to provide a basis for comparison to fiber-to-the-premise (FTTP) solutions.

A Request for Proposals (RFP) for the Fixed Wireless Infrastructure Analysis was published on the Sonoma County Supplier Portal and advertised for bids on October 7, 2024. Proposals were due by 2:00 p.m. on October 21, 2024. Three proposals were received, and all were deemed complete. Members of the NBNCBC Management Team reviewed the proposals and determined that Etheric Communications LLC best met all the qualifications for providing a fixed wireless infrastructure analysis in the NBNCBC region.

Etheric Communications LLC was launched by Etheric Networks, Inc. in 2021 and is a duly qualified firm with significant experience evaluating and modeling fixed wireless options in Mendocino, Napa, Marin, and Sonoma Counties. Etheric Communications LLC is located in San Mateo, CA.

The Fixed Wireless Infrastructure Analysis will be used to determine the following:

1. Feasibility of fixed wireless solutions to provide a minimum of 100 MBPS download and 20 MBPS upload speed connectivity to as many unserved addresses within as much of the NBNCBC region as possible.
2. Which areas within the NBNCBC region are best suited for fixed wireless. And which areas, if any, are not feasible for fixed wireless due to geographic barriers.
3. The backhaul/middle-mile requirements to connect the last mile network to the larger internet and how much it would cost.
4. The utility of fixed wireless as an alternative to fiber optic middle mile solutions.
5. The costs to implement fixed wireless solutions so that they may be compared to the costs of providing fiber optic solutions.
6. The costs of operating and maintaining fixed wireless solutions and their affordability to the end consumer.

The County’s EDC staff will process payment to Etheric Communications LLC on a time and material basis, in accordance with the CPUC CASF grant reimbursement guidelines and annual not-to-exceed amounts, based on the deliverable schedule below.

Deliverable	Description	Due Date
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Agenda Date: 11/5/2024

1	Communications Tower Inventory	1/31/2025
2	50% High Level Design Report	1/31/2025
3	100% High Level Design Report	6/30/2025
4	30% Low-Level Design Report	1/31/2026
5	100% Low-Level Design Report	12/31/2026
6	Final Report	12/31/2026

Strategic Plan:

This item directly supports the County’s Five-year Strategic Plan and is aligned with the following pillar, goal, and objective.

Pillar: Resilient Infrastructure

Goal: Goal 4: Implement countywide technological solutions to promote resiliency and expand community access.

Objective: Objective 1: Leverage funding and seek grants to expand communications infrastructure within the community to improve equitable access to broadband, wireless, and cell phone services.

Pillar: Resilient Infrastructure

Goal: Goal 4: Implement countywide technological solutions to promote resiliency and expand community access.

Objective: Objective 2: Leverage existing fiber optic infrastructure and grant opportunities to expand wireless and broadband access across County.

Racial Equity:

Was this item identified as an opportunity to apply the Racial Equity Toolkit?

No

Prior Board Actions:

12/12/2023 - North Bay North Coast Broadband Consortium Memorandum of Understanding and Letter of Support for Federal Last Mile Funding Account Applications ([<?](#)

<https://sonoma-county.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=6443343&GUID=C404C43E-73CB-4BCD-9BBF-F8BBB56860BA&Options=&Search=>>)

FISCAL SUMMARY

Expenditures	FY24-25 Adopted	FY25-26 Projected	FY26-27 Projected
Budgeted Expenses	\$221,550	\$102,060	\$60,153

Additional Appropriation Requested			
Total Expenditures	\$221,550	\$102,060	\$60,153
Funding Sources			
General Fund/WA GF			
State/Federal	\$221,550	\$102,060	\$60,153
Fees/Other			
Use of Fund Balance			
General Fund Contingencies			
Total Sources	\$221,550	\$102,060	\$60,153

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

The total cost of the Fixed Wireless Infrastructure Analysis is \$383,763 and it is fully funded by the California Public Utilities Commission’s (CPUC) California Advanced Services Fund (CASF) Consortia Account Grant. Sonoma County, on behalf of and as the Fiscal Agent of NBNCBC, will pay the Consultant for satisfactory work performed, subject to grant funding constraints, on a time and materials reimbursement basis. There are sufficient appropriations in the FY 2024-25 budget to accommodate this contract, and the remaining costs will be included in future fiscal year budgets.

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

No additional impacts on Economic Development Collaborative beyond existing obligation to staff and serve as Fiscal Agent for the NBNCBC.

Attachments:

Agreement

Related Items “On File” with the Clerk of the Board:

None