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SONOMA COUNTY

Broadband Update

December 3, 2024

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Summary of Recommended Actions

A. Receive an update on the County's Broadband Program.

B. Approve use of $2,350,000 in previously allocated ARPA funding, dependent on the outcome of County's Last Mile Federal Funding Account (FFA) Grant application, as follows:

    a. Delegate authority to EDC Director to execute a funding agreement with GSCA for construction of the Walsh Landing and/or Jenner project areas, in an amount not-to-exceed $2,350,000, to the extent that the FFA grant is not awarded for Walsh Landing or Jenner; and

    b. Approve a funding agreement with GSCA for additional low-level design services, for the balance of said ARPA funds not needed for broadband construction in the Walsh Landing and/or Jenner areas, up to $2,350,000.

C. Delegate authority to the EDC Director to execute an agreement with Comcast for a one-time bulk purchase of internet subscriptions to be used by underserved persons, in an amount not-to-exceed $200,000 using previously allocated ARPA funding

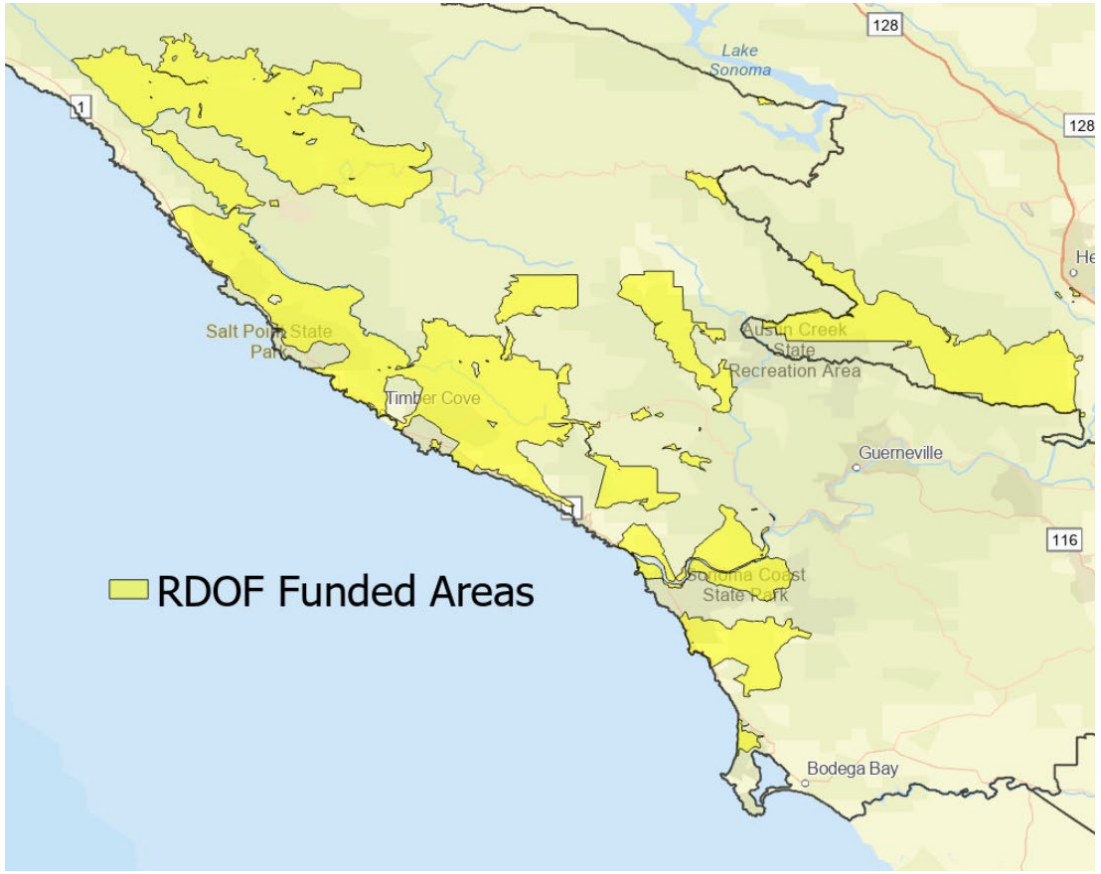
Infrastructure Deployment

- Golden State Connect Authority, on behalf of Sonoma County, applied for Last Mile Federal Funding Account (FFA) funding for the four project areas below in September 2023
- Staff are expecting announcement from the CPUC on County's application in mid/late December
- Low-level design for the FFA project areas is being completed now, funded by a Local Agency Technical Assistance (LATA) Grant

FFA Project Areas	Network Mileage	No. Unserved Households	District	Middle Mile Connection
Jenner	4.87	86	5	Hwy 1
Walsh Landing	12.18	183	5	Hwy 1
Southeast Santa Rosa	24.96	278	3	Hwy 101
East Cloverdale	44.42	298	4	Hwy 101

Complications Due to RDOF Funding

- Federal Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) grant awarded to Frontier Communications in 2022 is blocking new grant funding to most of West County.
- Under RDOF, Frontier has 6 years to construct the network and is obligated to complete 40% of it by Dec 2025.
- CPUC has indicated that the County's FFA application in Walsh Landing and Jenner overlap with RDOF, and those areas are not likely to be approved for funding



ARPA Recommendation for Infrastructure

- In December 2021, the Board approved the use of **$3 million** in ARPA towards Broadband initiatives
- Since then:
  - $1,500,000 set aside for low-level design on 8/1/23
  - $450,000 allocated for EDC Staffing on 5/9/23 & 3/5/24
  - $1,050,000 remains unassigned
- **Infrastructure Recommendation:**
  - Increase allocation of ARPA for infrastructure uses to $2,350,000 to fund construction of the Walsh Landing and/or Jenner project areas, and depending on the FFA award in said areas, use any remaining balance for additional low-level design.

Digital Needs Assessment

Countywide Findings

- 80% of Low-Income HH are paying more than $30/month on internet, despite being eligible for low-income internet plans.
- 60% are receiving service speeds below State/Federal standards (100/20 MBPS) and yet majority (66%) are paying at least $50/month.
- 44% reported having no devices or only a smartphone. That figure increases to 53% when isolating for households with school-aged children.

Area Specific Findings

- Reported reliability of internet service varied across the County, with 71% reporting reliable service in Santa Rosa, compared to 54% in Guerneville area.
- The need for devices also varied, with 68% in Cloverdale reporting having no device or only a smartphone, compared to 28% in the Guerneville area

ARPA Recommendation for Digital Equity

Time-Limited Internet Subsidy Program

- Allocate $200,000 of ARPA for underserved residents living in affordable housing complexes throughout the County.
- Award a contract with Comcast for the purchase of approximately 556 subscriptions, at the rate of $359.40 per subscription, good for one year of free internet service at a minimum speed of 100/20 MBPS.
- The subscriptions will be distributed in approx. ten affordable housing complexes throughout the County, with roughly two sites in each supervisorial district.

Rendering of Casa Roseland in Santa Rosa

Current & Upcoming Grant Opportunities

1. Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) Grant

2. Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) Digital Equity Competitive Grant

3. Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) Digital Equity Capacity Grant

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Questions?