



Legislation Text

File #: 2023-0025, **Version:** 1

To: Sonoma County Board of Supervisors

Department or Agency Name(s): County Administrator's Office, Economic Development Board

Staff Name and Phone Number: Christel Querijero, (707) 565-2431; Ethan Brown, (707) 565-7170

Vote Requirement: Majority

Supervisorial District(s): Countywide

Title:

Informational presentation from Golden State Connect Authority

Recommended Action:

Accept an informational presentation from Golden State Connect Authority

Executive Summary:

Over the last two years, the federal government and California legislature have passed legislation to support planning and building broadband infrastructure. The County of Sonoma monitors legislation and has identified possible pathways to bring broadband infrastructure funding to the county. The county anticipates that the state will make funding for broadband infrastructure available in the spring of 2023. One pathway for expanding broadband access is a partnership with Golden State Connect Authority.

Golden State Connect Authority, a regional Joint Powers Authority of which Sonoma County is a member, was established to increase access to reliable, affordable high-speed internet for residents and businesses. Golden State Connect Authority is positioning itself to finance broadband infrastructure with numerous mechanisms including state and federal funding while preparing to build, own and operate broadband infrastructure in member counties. Golden State Connect Authority plans to operate an open-access network, inviting internet service providers such as Sonic, Comcast and AT&T to provide internet services to residents.

This presentation is an opportunity for the Board of Supervisors to learn about Golden State Connect Authority.

Discussion:

Many unincorporated areas of Sonoma County have long experienced limited broadband availability. The Board of Supervisors has long supported increased access to Broadband by joining and nominating a Board member to sit on the North Bay North Coast Regional Broadband Consortium, allocating funding for staffing to support broadband initiatives, and supporting broadband-related legislative priorities. In 2021, the Board of Supervisors took significant action to start to close the internet availability gap by directing staff to research options to expand broadband access. The Board's actions are reaffirmed by recent state and federal laws that fund and facilitate broadband planning and infrastructure, including Senate Bill 156, the American Rescue Plan Act, and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

On August 18, 2021, the Board of Directors of Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC) voted

unanimously to approve the formation of a Joint Powers Authority (JPA), Golden State Connect Authority. Golden State Connect Authority is comprised of 39 rural California counties and is designed for the purpose of increasing access to reliable, affordable high-speed internet for the residents and businesses of those counties. On October 5, 2021 the County of Sonoma adopted a resolution to join Golden State Connect Authority.

Golden State Connect Authority is governed by 39 Supervisors from member counties, including a Board member from the County of Sonoma.

Through the collective efforts of its members, Golden State Connect will pursue initiatives to:

1. Expand the internet in rural counties through the pursuit of technical assistance and funding for member counties.
2. Install and operate open-access, municipal internet infrastructure starting with select initial locations and then expanding to additional sites.

On Dec. 6, 2022, the County of Sonoma accepted close to \$500,000 in funding from the California Public Utilities Commission in the form of a Local Agency Technical Assistance grant, with no required match. On behalf of the County, Golden State Connect Authority will complete a refined high-level broadband network design for unincorporated areas with little or no internet service and low-level, construction-ready design for priority areas. The Board of Supervisors will have an opportunity to provide input on the selection of priority areas.

After the completion of the high-level design, the Board of Supervisors will have more information to inform a conversation on broadband delivery models. One of the models the Board may choose to consider is inviting Golden State Connect Authority to build, own and operate broadband infrastructure in Sonoma County. Golden State Connect Authority would operate an open-access network, inviting internet service providers such as Sonic, Comcast, AT&T, and others to provide internet services to residents using Golden State Connect Authority's infrastructure. This model lowers the cost for service providers to enter the market, creating a competitive environment to spur high-quality services at affordable prices.

In addition, or as an alternative to a partnership with Golden State Connect Authority, the Board may consider supporting private providers who apply for state funding to build in areas with little to no internet service. This model may result in relatively quick buildouts, however, the likely outcome is that only a single provider would be available in the area.

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

Prior Board Actions:

12/6/22 - California Public Utilities Commission Grant and Broadband Update

4/5/22 - Economic Development Department Broadband Analyst (Resolution No. 22-0123)

12/14/21 - ARPA Funding Allocation (File No. 2021-1386)

10/5/21 - Golden State Connect Authority JPA - Broadband (Resolution No. 21-0409)

6/8/21 - Access Sonoma Broadband Action Plan (Resolution No. 21-0263)

FISCAL SUMMARY

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

None

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

None

Attachments:

A. Golden State Connect Authority presentation

B. Executed Joint Powers Agreement between the County of Sonoma and Golden State Connect Authority

Related Items "On File" with the Clerk of the Board:

None