

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MARCH 4, 2010

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER 

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF A POSSIBLE CITY RESPONSE TO GOOGLE FIBER FOR COMMUNITIES PROJECT INFORMATION REQUEST

ISSUE: Possible City response to Request for Information (RFI) from Google to participate its Fiber for Communities Project.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council determine if it wishes to authorize the City Manager to submit a response to Google indicating the City of Alexandria's interest in being one of the sites for its high speed Fiber for Communities Project. The response is due on March 26.

If the City proceeds with the response, as part of the application we would seek community input on how such a high speed fiber optic network could be an advantage to the city. This information would be obtained via Twitter, Facebook, eNews, and other means such as a block poll on the City's home page. We also would seek input from partners such as health care facilities, the public and private schools, the Alexandria Campus of institutions of higher education, non-profits and individual community groups. The City's Commission on Information Technology has expressed an interest in the City pursuing the fiber optic trial, and has indicated a willingness to assist with citizen outreach to determine and assess citizen support for this trial.

DISCUSSION: On February 10, Google announced that it is planning to launch an experiment to make Internet access better and faster. The company plans to build and test ultra-high speed broadband networks in one or more trial locations across the country. According to Google, its networks will deliver Internet speeds more than 100 times faster than what most Americans have access to today (over 1 gigabit per second, fiber-to-the-home connections). Staff estimates that the service Google describes could be approximately 10 times faster than the fastest service currently offered by Comcast or Verizon FiOS Internet services.

Google's stated goal is to experiment with new ways to improve Internet access, by specifically encouraging:

- Next generation apps – Google wants to see what developers and users can do with ultra high speed networks.
- New deployment techniques – Google will test new ways to build fiber networks and will share key lessons learned.
- Openness and choice – Google will operate an “open access” network, giving users the choice of multiple service providers.

The company plans to offer the service at a competitive price in selected locations to at least 50,000 and potentially up to 500,000 people. Google has not clarified whether it intends to build one network or multiple networks during the pilot phase, or when the next step in the process will be announced.

Google is asking local governments and residents to express their interest in the fiber optic trial and to provide information about their respective communities by completing an electronic request for information form. Requested information includes the jurisdiction’s demographic data; economic mix, including jobs by pre-identified categories, institutions of higher learning and hospitals/health care facilities; level of community support for the trial (would require staff to survey the community); available physical facilities and resources, including pole attachments and conduit availability; public right-of-way policy and management process, including description of historic districts, undergrounding policies and environmentally sensitive areas; approved construction methods for installing fiber to home networks; regulatory obligations; and a statement of why Google should select Alexandria.

The majority of the demographic information, construction policy, and locale specific information is available via City documents. Information on pole attachments and pole attachment fees would be obtained from utility providers. The majority of staff time to respond to the RFI would be spent pursuing community partnerships and determining community wants and needs within the timeframes mandated by the RFI. To be invited to submit a proposal in the future would involve more than detailing the City’s desire for competition. The City would have to demonstrate how the entire community or significant segments of the City would benefit in innovative ways from access to an ultra high speed Internet alternative. Responses to the RFI are due by March 26.

An expression of interest in the Google project would be consistent with City Council’s encouragement of consumer broadband choice, and with the City’s past efforts to bring multiple telecommunications providers to the market. We have found that the Alexandria community is already very engaged in use of the internet. Alexandria leads the nation in on-line giving to charitable organizations and the City provides a prime location near the nation’s capital to serve as a pilot for Google’s ultra high speed internet service

According to published reports, many communities throughout the United States have already announced plans to seek a Google network. Interested communities in Virginia include the City of Hampton, and a joint bid by the City of Charlottesville, Albemarle County, and the University of Virginia. Topeka, Kansas has mounted a campaign to be selected for the pilot and has renamed their city “Google, Kansas” for a month to promote their involvement in the RFI process..

FISCAL IMPACT: It is difficult to predict the cost to the City if we were selected by Google to participate in their high speed Fiber for Communities Program. Although promotional documents indicate that Google will cover the costs of building the network, the cost of this service to Alexandria's residents and businesses is unknown. It is also unclear at this point what, if any, financial obligations the City might incur if the system is deployed. A response to Google's RFI at this time would not be binding, and the City would negotiate a specific agreement in accordance with law for any network Google may eventually build in Alexandria. It is likely we will need to add staff resources if we are selected for this highly competitive project, but we would assess this further if selected.

With respect to preparation of the response to the Google RFI due on March 26, we estimate an additional 40 hours of staff time would be required of staff from several City departments.

STAFF:

Rose Williams Boyd, Director of Citizen Assistance

Thomas Trobridge, Director of Information Technology Services (ITS)

Craig Fifer, E-Government Manager

Suellen Savukas, Division Chief, IT Project Management Division, ITS



COA Contact Us: Google Fiber for Alexandria, VA

william.euille, frank.fannon, kerry.donley,

Corry Robb to: alicia.hughes, council, delpepper, paulcsmedberg,
rose.boyd, jackie.henderson, elaine.scott

Please respond to Corry Robb

03/09/2010 08:26 AM

20

3-9-10

Time: [Tue Mar 09, 2010 08:25:59] Message ID: [19858]

Issue Type: Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Council Members

First Name: Corry

Last Name: Robb

Street Address: 3810 Vermont Court

City: Alexandria

State: Virginia

Zip: 22304

Phone: 2023676855

Email Address: corry.robbs@gmail.com

Subject: Google Fiber for Alexandria, VA
Dear Mayor, Vice Mayor and Council Members -

I am writing in support of

bringing Google Fiber to Alexandria, VA. Recent news reports suggest

Alexandria
is considering submitting a request for information (RFI) to

have Google Fiber installed. This is a great idea
for many reasons:

-

National exposure that partnering with Google brings - would draw tech

savvy individuals from across
the National Capital Region and the entire

U.S.

- Increased commerce that the ultra high speed internet would

afford

- Possible tie into wireless Alexandria to make the city even more

connected

Detractors point to the city's budget shortfalls as a major

reason not to submit an RFI, claiming that the

Comments:

city can't afford to participate. I believe the city's budget problems are exactly the reason that we should look into the possibility of Google Fiber. Increased commerce and tourism brings increased tax revenue that would cut the budget deficit. Google Fiber would also make Alexandria, VA 'The Place To Live' in NOVA and would help increase residential and commercial assessments.

I am willing to volunteer my time to help in any way I can with the RFI. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely -

Corry M.

Robb



COA Contact Us: Google high-speed internet

william.euille, frank.fannon, kerry.donley,
Carlos Pineda to: alicia.hughes, council, delpepper, paulcsmedberg,
rose.boyd, jackie.henderson, elaine.scott

03/06/2010 02:45 AM

Please respond to Carlos Pineda

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3-9-10

Time: [Sat Mar 06, 2010 02:44:48] Message ID: [19753]

Issue Type: Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Council Members
First Name: Carlos
Last Name: Pineda
Street Address: 1136 N Pitt St.
City: Alexandria
State: VA
Zip: 22314
Phone: 7035492690
Email Address: pinedace@gmail.com
Subject: Google high-speed internet
Dear city council,

I live in the residential neighborhood of Canal Way
(<http://www.canalway.org>) and many of us have always had different kinds of
issues with internet service, whether it is Comcast cable (for some of us,
it constantly fails with 15-20 minute daily interruptions... for some of
us it may be worse) or Verizon DSL (which is known for having various sort
of problems, with one of their main routers failing in the area) We do not
have FiOS service in our area and we may have to wait for it several years
before it becomes available. In any case, I am a strong believer of
non-subscription/contract-based service. As I understand it, FiOS service
is very fast, but we must also sign a contract or agreement with FiOS in
order to pay less for their service, as opposed to a monthly service, which
may end up being more expensive. Verizon DSI works the same way. In any
case, we would like to have as many options as possible when it comes to
choosing internet providers. This will boost competition in the area as
well as the possibility of price reductions and/or better service for all

Comments:

of the city residents.

After reading and spreading this article

(<http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/local/Alexandria-a-potential-test-site-f>

or-new-Google-technology-86421632.html) with my neighbors, we would like to

encourage you to respond to Google's "request for information,"

which, as the article states, is the first step in the bidding

process.

It is likely that my neighbors will also contact you regarding

the article listed above.

I would appreciate any information regarding

the bidding process and/or any information related to it.

Thank

you.

Regards,

Carlos Pineda