



CITY COUNCIL AGENDA STATEMENT



May 26, 2020

File ID: 20-0164

TITLE

RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF CHULA VISTA ADOPTING THE CHULA VISTA DIGITAL EQUITY AND INCLUSION PLAN

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Council adopt the resolution.

SUMMARY

The City of Chula Vista has a proud history of leadership in civic innovation. As part of the smart cities efforts the city has identified universal broadband internet access for all Chula Vista residents, communities and businesses as a priority. The city has made significant progress improving the quality of life of Chula Vista residents through the deployment of various innovation projects. However, there are still members of our community who struggle with quality and affordable internet access, access to devices and the knowledge or skills to utilize digital resources. These barriers are referred to as the Digital Divide. To help address the digital divide in the city, staff worked with Nutter Consulting to develop the City of Chula Vista's Digital Equity and Inclusion Plan (DEIP). The DEIP outlines goals, objectives and initiatives that will help ensure that Chula Vista residents, businesses and communities have access to devices, Internet connection, and digital literacy skills to fully participate in the local economy, in educational opportunities, and other activities. Digital equity and inclusion is more critical now with the current COVID-19 global pandemic. As Chula Vista residents are requested to shelter-in-place, Internet connection is critical to access government services, important public health information, online education, telecommuting for work, and mobile services.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The proposed activity has been reviewed for compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and it has been determined that the activity falls under a Statutory Exemption pursuant to Section 15262 (Feasibility and Planning Studies) of the State CEQA Guidelines. Thus, no further environmental review is necessary. Notwithstanding the foregoing, it has also been determined that the activity qualifies for an Exemption pursuant to Section 15061(b)(3) of the California Environmental Quality Act State Guidelines.

BOARD/COMMISSION/COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

Not applicable.

DISCUSSION

In 2017, City Council adopted Chula Vista's Smart Cities Strategic Action Plan. The plan includes four goals - to make the city more connected, responsive, transparent, and innovative. Specifically, the need for universal broadband internet access for Chula Vista residents is identified as a priority. The city has made progress improving the quality of life of Chula Vista residents through technology and innovation. However, there are still members of our community who struggle with ready access to the Internet (including cost and quality of connectivity), access to devices (i.e. computers, smartphones, tablets), and digital literacy. Building upon the goals and priorities of the Smart City Strategic Action Plan, in May 2019, the City engaged Nutter Consulting to assist staff in developing a Digital Equity and Inclusion Plan (DEIP) that would serve as a roadmap to help address the challenge of the digital divide in the city. The DEIP is an effort to understand who is impacted by the digital divide in Chula Vista and to create actionable strategies to help provide equal internet access to residents, communities and businesses to make our community stronger as a whole.

Creation of the DEIP:

The DEIP was developed through a collaborative process across city departments and represents the collective vision of city leadership, departments, and key regional stakeholders. The first phase of developing the DEIP began with a comprehensive review of existing city policy documents from the last 5 years to identify goals related to digital equity. This was to ensure that the DEIP aligns with existing goals in community engagement, sustainability, economic development, and other areas. Next, working closely with city staff, Nutter Consulting conducted 12 one-on-one interviews and hosted multiple workshops with regional stakeholders to gather input on the challenges and barriers facing different communities within Chula Vista. After concluding the interviews and workshops, city staff worked with Nutter Consulting to develop the goals and implementation strategies for Chula Vista's DEIP efforts.

The DEIP project consisted of the following goals:

- Defining the digital divide in Chula Vista
- Identifying connections between the City's digital equity and smart city programs
- Connecting Chula Vista's digital equity programming across the community
- Establishing specific Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for monitoring progress on bridging the digital divide locally
- Research and sharing best practices and case studies from other U.S. cities
- Developing a set of strategies, projects, partners, budget, and timeline for implementation

The proposed DEIP for adoption by City Council consists of three (3) goals which are supported by eight (8) objectives and thirty-seven (37) strategic initiatives. In addition, the DEIP includes four (4) supporting appendices that provide additional information on existing resources in Chula Vista, as well as digital equity & inclusion case studies & best practices from other cities across the United States.

Communities most impacted by the Digital Divide in Chula Vista:

To better understand the best actions for digital equity it is important to understand who the digital divide impacts locally. From the DEIP findings, disparities in internet usage and device access exist in the City of Chula Vista. From census data in 2017, an estimated 4.7 percent of households did not have access to digital devices and 11.7 percent of households did not have a broadband internet subscription. When analyzed by neighborhoods the data shows that there is an East and West digital divide in the city, with the West side displaying lower rates of internet access and use. According to the DEIP findings some of the common drivers of the local digital divide in Chula Vista include the lack of trust in use of technology, lack of understanding about the importance of technology, and affordability of internet access and devices.

Through research, dozens of stakeholder interviews and the stakeholder engagement workshops, the DEIP identified eight (8) of the population groups in Chula Vista most affected by the digital divide. These eight groups include disabled persons, homeless/housing insecure, job seekers, low-income and unbanked, migrants and refugees, non-English speakers, seniors, and students. Though not all residents affected by the digital divide may identify with one of these categories, the city wanted to recognize that these groups may have specific needs in accessing digital tools that differ from other members of the general public. These eight groups are not the only underserved populations in the city that need assistance, but the DEIP stakeholder engagement effort was able to give unique insight into this groups' needs.

Stakeholder Engagement:

It was critical to reach out to a broad range of local and regional stakeholders as part of the DEIP effort because the digital divide in Chula Vista spans multiple demographic groups. By reaching out to a diverse group of stakeholders, the city was able to gain feedback from practitioners that advocate on behalf of the needs of a wide group of the city's population. The following stakeholder groups were instrumental in the DEIP stakeholder engagement process:

- **Regional Agencies:** Chula Vista recognized the importance of engaging municipal agencies within the region. The San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), Port of San Diego, San Diego Airport Authority, City of Carlsbad, County officials from the San Diego Housing Commission and Aging and Independent Services Council were engaged for feedback and insights, along with state representatives from the Department of Rehabilitation. In addition, various City of Chula Vista Commissions were involved, including the Commission on Aging, Healthy Chula Vista Advisory Commission, Human Relations Commission, and the Sustainability Commission.
- **Community-Based Organizations (CBOs):** Community-based organizations serve as a critical touchpoint with the community and were instrumental during the DEIP stakeholder engagement process. These included various non- profits, foundations and advocacy groups such as the South Bay Family YMCA, Computers2Kids San Diego, Southwest Civic Association, and San Diego Live Well, the San Diego Futures Foundation and Cleantech San Diego.

- **Private Sector:** As both employers and service providers, the private sector plays a key role in improving digital equity in communities. T-Mobile and Cox Communications shared information on their existing digital equity programming for the residents of Chula Vista. In addition, Verizon, Black & Veatch, Brookfield Properties, Media 3 Communications, and San Diego Gas and Electric (SDGE) participated in the DEIP stakeholder engagement process.
- **Educational Institutions & Healthcare Providers:** Educational institutions play a vital role in digital equity, connecting students to academic resources and professional skills development. The Chula Vista Elementary School District, Sweetwater High School District, Southwestern College, St. Katherine's University, and San Diego State University (SDSU) were all involved in the DEIP stakeholder engagement process. In addition, San Ysidro Health and Scripps Health provided feedback into the Chula Vista community's health needs and online tools.

DEIP Stakeholder Workshops:

As part of stakeholder engagement, the City of Chula Vista hosted two workshops at the central library with key community stakeholders to deepen the project team's understanding of the local digital divide and to uncover opportunities for collaboration on digital equity projects. The first DEIP workshop was conducted in July 2019 and included over 50 attendees throughout the San Diego region, including community-based organizations, academic institutions, regional agencies, private businesses, and city staff. At this workshop, the city was able to gain feedback from practitioners that advocate on behalf of the needs of a wide group of the city's population and tailor strategies for the DEIP.

In January 2020, the city conducted the second DEIP workshop. The workshop was open to public feedback and participants had the opportunity to directly engage with and contribute to the first draft of goals, objectives, and strategic actions. The workshop was kicked-off by the Honorable Mayor Mary Salas and also had City Council members Jill Galvez and Mike Diaz in attendance. At the workshop, staff discussed the city's vision and priorities for improving digital equity in Chula Vista. In addition, city staff facilitated interactive breakout sessions with attendees for feedback that was used to frame the DEIP's priorities, strategies, opportunities, and recommendations. The list of workshop attendees included the regional public agencies, academic institutions, non-profits and private sector, including SANDAG, Port of San Diego, San Diego Airport, City of Carlsbad, Chula Vista Elementary School District, T-Mobile, AT&T, Verizon, Cleantech San Diego, Computers 2 Kids, and the San Diego Futures foundation.

Next steps:

Once the DEIP is adopted, successful implementation will depend on cross-departmental and regional collaboration. To ensure success, the plan's implementation will be led by the Smart Cities Working Group (SCWG), which was established in 2017 to help coordinate citywide innovation efforts and facilitate information sharing. The cross-functional working group meets periodically and includes the City Manager,

Assistant City Manager, Deputy City Manager, multiple department heads, and Police and Fire. In addition, Chula Vista will continue to work with our regional partners to identify opportunities for partnership and collaboration in digital equity and inclusion across our region.

City staff are excited about the significant anticipated benefits from implementation of the DEIP to city residents, communities and businesses. Some of the key areas that are anticipated to benefit the most from the implementation of the DEIP include:

- **Enhanced Public Safety:** By understanding the dynamics of the Chula Vista community in the creation of this plan, the city can prioritize bridging the digital divide for communities that struggle with connectivity, digital literacy, and device access. One of the biggest benefits of adopting DEIP is in the area of public safety especially for disabled persons, homeless/housing insecure, low-income, migrants and refugees, non-English speakers and seniors. By ensuring that our residents and communities have access to quality and affordable internet, devices and digital literacy our communities will be better connected to emergency services and public health information. The current COVID-19 global pandemic has made clearer that digital equity is even more critical. Many vulnerable members of our community are struggling with their daily lives under the shelter-in-place advisories. Internet connection is critical to access government services, important public health information, online education, telecommuting for work, and mobile services.
- **Support Economic Growth:** Supporting small businesses is a top priority in Chula Vista. The City's website hosts a variety of online resources, including licensing forms, data analysis, partnership directory, and educational opportunities. In response to the COVID-19 global pandemic, states and local governments have also elevated digital equity as a priority since shelter-in-place mandates have made the digital divide across the United States more pronounced with education, employment, government resources, and healthcare shifting rapidly online. To ensure that small businesses can leverage every available resource, it is critical for business owners to have quality and affordable internet access and the knowledge to access online resources. In addition, as employment opportunities in San Diego County increasingly shift toward jobs requiring proficiency with computers and mobile devices, it is will be more important than ever to prepare the future workforce for these opportunities, as well as assisting the current workforce in building these skills. The City of Chula Vista will work with local and regional workforce development partners to better understand the digital skills needed by jobseekers, as well as the potential to expand any existing programs.
- **Support Education for Needy Families:** With approximately 69,500 students throughout Chula Vista and the shift toward accessing educational tools and curriculum online, students impacted by the digital divide are at an increasing disadvantage as access becomes the central barrier to success for school-aged children. It is becoming increasingly critical for students to have Internet access, not only for homework completion, but also for job skill development. Through the DEIP, the City will collaborate with its strong academic institutions to promote digital inclusion for students in the community, including the Chula Vista Elementary School District and Sweetwater Union High School District. By supporting digital equity programs tailored to students, the City can help expand education and employment opportunities and address inequity among students.

- **Partnership Opportunities:** Internet service providers and private sector companies have partnered with cities to support device and Internet access programs, as well as devote funds for other digital equity initiatives. For example, AT&T, Verizon, Cox Communications, T-Mobile and Google all have programs to help address the digital divide in communities across the United States. The DEIP will serve as a roadmap for the City of Chula Vista to engage with telecommunications providers to find opportunities for future partnerships on digital equity projects.

We are excited about the leadership that City Council has demonstrated towards promoting collaboration and partnerships on our DEIP efforts. On April 21, 2020, the City Council approved a resolution for an agreement with T-Mobile to purchase 2,000 WIFI hotspots devices for needy families as a partnership with Chula Vista Elementary School District. The city will continue to ensure that our DEIP initiatives are sustained by long-term stakeholder engagement across our region.

DECISION-MAKER CONFLICT

Staff has reviewed the decision contemplated by this action and has determined that it is not site-specific and consequently, the real property holdings of the City Council members do not create a disqualifying real property-related financial conflict of interest under the Political Reform Act (Cal. Gov't Code § 87100, et seq.). Staff is not independently aware and has not been informed by any City Council member, of any other fact that may constitute a basis for a decision-maker conflict of interest in this matter.

CURRENT-YEAR FISCAL IMPACT

There are no current year fiscal impacts by this action. Any financial commitments related to the implementation of the Digital Equity and Inclusion Plan will be brought forward for City Council consideration along with the individual projects or programs being proposed

ONGOING FISCAL IMPACT

There are no on-going fiscal impacts by this action. Any financial commitments related to the implementation of the Digital Equity and Inclusion Plan will be brought forward for City Council consideration along with the individual projects or programs being proposed

ATTACHMENTS

1. Digital Equity and Inclusion Plan

Staff Contact: Dennis Gakunga, Chief Sustainability Officer