



CITY COUNCIL AGENDA STATEMENT



April 21, 2020

File ID: 20-0151

TITLE

RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF CHULA VISTA INCREASING THE PUBLIC EDUCATION GRANT FUND (PEG) BUDGET AND ENTERING INTO AN AGREEMENT WITH T-MOBILE AND POTENTIALLY OTHER TELECOMMUNICATION PROVIDERS FOR A TOTAL AMOUNT OF \$650,000 TO PURCHASE WIFI HOTSPOT DEVICES AND SERVICES FOR DISADVANTAGED FAMILIES (4/5 VOTE REQUIRED)

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Council adopt the resolution.

SUMMARY

On March 13, 2020, due to the escalating number of COVID-19 virus cases nationwide, with many cases in the State of California, the City of Chula Vista Director of Emergency Services issued a Proclamation declaring a Local Emergency. As a result of the current crisis, various actions have been taken throughout the County to prevent the spread of the virus including the closure of all schools and the movement toward distant learning. 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. Disadvantaged families in our community have also been difficult to reach with information on the COVID-19 crisis. Without broadband access to the internet, our community is at greater risk due to the inability to reach many in our community in a timely and easily accessible manner. In order to increase access to disadvantaged families, the City recommends purchasing 2,000 WIFI hotspot devices and service from T-Mobile. Staff is continuing to negotiate with other telecommunication providers to determine if additional hotspot devices and service plans are available.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The proposed Project has been reviewed for compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and it has been determined that the Project qualifies for a Categorical Exemption pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines Section 15301 Class 1 (Existing Facilities), Section 15303 class 3 (New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures), and Section 15061(b)(3), because it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the activity in question may have a significant effect on the environment. Thus, no further environmental review is required.

BOARD/COMMISSION/COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

Not applicable.

DISCUSSION

The immediate move toward distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the disparities in digital access within segments of our communities. 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. Those without access to devices at home must rely on public institutions, libraries, schools, or community centers for Internet access. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these resources are not available making it essential that the City and education partners pursue other opportunities to support our community. In May 2019, the City began a multi-phase project to develop a Digital Equity and Inclusion Plan (DEIP) with a set of strategies aimed at improving digital equity including access to Internet connectivity in the home and access to functioning devices for students to complete course work. Staff plans to present the DEIP to City Council for consideration in May 2020. As part of this effort, the City hosted a stakeholder workshop at the Civic Center Library on July 29, 2019 to identify the communities most impacted by the digital divide in Chula Vista. Representatives from the Chula Vista Elementary School District, Sweetwater Union Highschool District, multiple regional public agencies and community-based organizations attended the workshop. The stakeholder workshop identified students as one of the most impacted groups by the digital divide in the City.

In an effort to support digital inclusion and address the digital divide, staff recommends the purchase of 2,000 WIFI hotspot devices that would be funded from the available balance of the Public, Education and Government Fund. These devices would be circulated through the Chula Vista Public Library, in partnership with the Chula Vista Elementary School District (CVESD), to the community with the priority being for students in grades K-6. These WIFI hotspots would also offer the community the ability to have access to unlimited data at 150 Mbps speeds with filtering in compliance to the Children's Internet Protection Act. The City is also in discussions with Sweetwater Union High School District (SUHSD) to determine if there are opportunities to partner with them as well.

Currently, the Chula Vista Public Library has 12 WIFI hotspots that are frequently circulated throughout the community. The current devices circulate to library card holders for seven days a week at no cost. These additional devices would circulate for a two-month period (to support families and students), with an option for renewal. The additional devices would address an immediate need for families and students within the Chula Vista community. One WIFI hotspot device would provide students access to the Internet without time restrictions and allow connections for up to six devices at a time. By providing more hotspot devices for the public to access, the city would significantly improve access to the Internet and support digital inclusion while addressing the educational gap that is created by the digital divide.

The City solicited proposal from various telecommunication providers and received a favorable quote from T-Mobile. The City will continue to work with the other providers to see if additional opportunities exist. The monthly service charges proposed by T-Mobile is \$20/month. The City is currently negotiating with CVESD on funding the monthly service fee for their students. The final terms with CVESD and T-Mobile or

other providers are subject to final terms to be approved by the City Manager and City Attorney. This item is being brought forward at this time in order to move forward with the purchase and service of the WIFI hotspot devices as they are in high demand and the City does not want to lose out on the opportunity.

Public, Educational, and Governmental (PEG) Funding

Funding for this project will come from the PEG access fee provided to the City as a result of the franchise agreements with Cox Cable and AT&T. PEG funds can be used for capital purchases of facilities, equipment and services that promote the publication of government information. PEG funds traditionally have been spent on public access cable programming. However, funds also are used by local governments to provide citizens with access to “other electronic information” about the services they provide and issues they face, providing information to citizens of an educational nature, and providing public meeting coverage. Under the terms of federal and state oversight of cable television franchises, funding for public access to the cable network is available for specific purposes including installation of infrastructure supportive of Public, Education and Government access.

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

The FY 2019-20 PEG budget will be increased by \$650,000 from the PEG Fund available reserves. No General Fund impacts are anticipated as a result of this project. CVESD has proposed to fund two months of service charges to complete the Spring 2020 school year for a total of \$80,000. We anticipate that there may be additional offsets if SUHSD participates in the program and if the partnership with the schools extends into the 2021 school year.

ONGOING FISCAL IMPACT

No ongoing General Fund or PEG fund impacts are anticipated. Staff will pursue reimbursements from Federal or State funding for expenses incurred due to the COVID -19 crisis.

ATTACHMENTS

None.

Staff Contact: Eric Crockett, Deputy City Manager and Joy Whatley, City Librarian