



# County of San Mateo

## Inter-Departmental Correspondence

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**Department:** INFORMATION SERVICES

**File #:** 20-979

Board Meeting Date: 12/8/2020

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**Special Notice / Hearing:** None  
**Vote Required:** Majority

**To:** Honorable Board of Supervisors

**From:** Jon Walton, Chief Information Officer

**Subject:** Authorization to Apply for and, if Granted, Accept Community Connect Grant Funds from the United States Department of Agriculture Rural Utilities Service

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

Adopt a resolution:

- A) Authorizing and directing the Chief Information Officer, or the CIO's designee, to prepare and submit an application for funds from the Community Connect Grant Program administered by the United States Department of Agriculture Rural Utilities Service, in response to its notice of funding opportunity to provide financial assistance for expanding broadband internet access to residents in rural and economically-challenged communities in an amount not to exceed \$1,500,000; and
- B) Authorizing and directing the Chief Information Officer, or the CIO's designee, to act on behalf of the County of San Mateo to accept grant funds in the event the application for funds is approved and to complete any and all documents required for the acceptance of the awarded funds and required compliance reports; and
- C) Authorizing the use of an amount not to exceed \$225,000 of the annual SMC Public Wi-Fi funds to support the ongoing operations of the project and to meet the Grant Program's fifteen percent matching contribution requirement.

### **BACKGROUND:**

The County of San Mateo has made significant investments in deploying public internet access to the underserved residents of San Mateo County in both the urban and rural areas. These improvements have resulted in over 1,000,000 hours of use per month by the public. Since the beginning of the COVID pandemic, the need for free, unlimited internet access for students to distance learn, and for families to access government and health care information, became even more critical. To address this need, the County of San Mateo Board of Supervisors allocated \$6.3M in CARES funding so that the Information Services Department could partner with local school districts to identify the families in need and expand the SMC Public Wi-Fi program to address these needs. These CARES-funded

improvements are ongoing and are scheduled to be completed by December 31, 2020.

**DISCUSSION:**

While the current SMC Public Wi-Fi program and its expansion via the CARES-funded projects serves many areas of the County, it is estimated that between \$80-\$100M in additional one-time funding would be needed to continue expanding this program to additional areas of the County that remain underserved.

This grant would enable the County to continue expanding the coverage of SMC Public Wi-Fi to the area south of Pigeon Point Lighthouse to Año Nuevo and Butano Creek, where there is currently little or no service, nor are there any plans by commercial providers to serve these areas.

Pursuant to the USDA grant guidelines, the proposed grant project must include a location that will either be located at an existing facility or would involve construction of a community access center with free, broadband service for an initial period of two years. This center must be open to the public for 40 hours per week over a seven-day stretch, be staffed by community volunteers, and have at least two work stations for community members to utilize. If such a center were to be funded and built, it would become part of the County's Public Wi-Fi inventory, and ongoing maintenance beyond the first two years would become part of the County's budget.

The Community Connect Grant Program is a competitive grant program with a minimum grant award of \$100,000, and a maximum grant award of \$3M, with a fifteen percent matching contribution requirement. ISD is seeking to use up to \$225,000 of the annual SMC Public Wi-Fi funds to support the operations of the project and to meet the matching contribution requirement which will expand SMC Public Wi-Fi to underserved residents and businesses in this area.

County Counsel has reviewed and approved the Resolution as to both form and content.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

If this grant is awarded to the County, a matching contribution of fifteen percent is required by the County, a potential fiscal obligation ranging from \$15,000 to \$225,000. ISD will use up to \$225,000 of annual SMC Public Wi-Fi Measure K funds to support the operations of the project and to meet this matching contribution requirement. There is no new Net County Cost.