



COUNCIL AGENDA: 06/29/2021
FILE: 21-1611
ITEM: 3.9

Memorandum

TO: CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Councilmember Sylvia Arenas

SUBJECT: SEE BELOW

DATE: June 28, 2021

Approved

Sylvia Arenas

Date *6/28/21*

SUBJECT: ACTIONS RELATED TO THE AGREEMENTS BETWEEN THE CITY OF SAN JOSÉ AND THE EAST SIDE UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT FOR COMMUNITY WIRELESS NETWORK

RECOMMENDATION

1. Approve staff recommendations.
2. Direct staff to move expeditiously toward completing the “fiber pull” for Mt. Pleasant and Silver Creek High Schools. Advance these two project sites quickly, with as small a gap as possible behind the other project sites.
3. Direct Staff to develop both digital and printed multilingual collateral to help school districts, non-profits, neighborhood groups, Council offices, Project Hope and Digital Inclusion Fund grantees outreach for the program.
4. Direct staff to bring forward a community adoption strategy for SJ Access as part of their next report on digital inclusion to the Neighborhood Services and Education Committee.
5. Direct the City Manager to work with CETF to align efforts so that focused technical assistance can be targeted to residents within the SJ Access network areas. Include an update on this effort in the Digital Inclusion Year One Final Report.

BACKGROUND

Since the onset of the pandemic, thousands of San José families have faced the challenge of navigating distance learning. One of the primary barriers for our most vulnerable in accessing a quality education online is having no Wi-Fi connectivity or poor Wi-Fi connectivity. This issue was made worse for families who share apartments or homes due to San Jose’s high-cost of living – internet bandwidths were depleted, unable to meet the demand upwards of four or five children and adults simultaneously trying to access video conferencing. Having a strong, reliable internet connection has become a necessity for all families and determines a student’s ability to go beyond attending class but to actively participate and stay engaged.

In June 2020, the City Council approved the Digital Inclusion Workplan, with one of the major project areas being the Access East Side Community Wi-Fi program. For the length of this project, East Side Union High School District (ESUHSD) has been a true and dedicated partner to the City of San José. The success of this partnership is evident in the usage data. The most mature installations have the steadiest and largest amount of utilization and the newest, Yerba Buena High School, is growing at a steady rate. On any given month, more than 90,000 unique users access the free Community Wi-Fi network. Thank you to the Digital Equity Coalition for helping build community support for this project, and for their advocacy and vision to ensure that every resident in California and across the nation has Internet access to connect to the online resources they need to live and thrive, including telehealth, jobs, unemployment benefits, food and housing assistance, and distance learning.

Staff has excelled in navigating unforeseen project challenges with minimal delays. I ask that they continue doing so as construction begins for the Mt. Pleasant and Silver Creek High School service areas in District 8. While students are expected to return to in-person learning in Fall 2021, having free and reliable access to Wi-Fi will remain critical as ever, especially as more school-based activities remain virtual and/or hybrid. The digital divide existed long before the pandemic and will persist unless we continue to invest in infrastructure and programs that help address the connectivity gap for vulnerable residents of all ages.

To support members of our community in accessing this public benefit, I ask that staff create multilingual versions of a flyer that explains the program, its active service areas (James Lick, Overfelt and Yerba Buena High Schools) and how to get connected. Both digital and printed collateral should be made available to community partners doing outreach in those areas. I also ask that staff bring forward a community adoption strategy to the Neighborhood Services Committee as part of their next report on digital inclusion, which can serve as a roadmap to ensure that our communities feel confident in their ability to navigate the use of the network. Aligning our digital inclusion efforts, including the work being led by the California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF) for the City of San José, will help ensure that residents living within the SJ Access service areas receive technical assistance that is relevant to their needs and lived experiences.