



# CITY COUNCIL STAFF REPORT



October 26, 2021

## ITEM TITLE

Grant Acceptance, Appropriation & Agreement Approval: Accept Grant, Allocate Funds and Approve Agreement with T-Mobile USA to Continue to Provide WIFI Hotspot Service to Disadvantaged Families

**Report Number:** 20-0191

**Location:** No specific geographic location

**Department:** Community Services – Library

**Environmental Notice:** The Project qualifies for a Categorical Exemption pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act State Guidelines Section 15301 Class 1 (Existing Facilities) and Section 15061(b)(3).

## Recommended Action

Adopt a resolution accepting Emergency Connectivity Funding in the amount of \$480,000, allocating \$144,000 from PEG funds, and authorizing the City Manager to renew an agreement with T-Mobile USA to continue providing WIFI hotspot service to disadvantaged families, and appropriating funds for that purpose **(4/5 Vote Required)**.

## SUMMARY

In March 13, 2020, as a result of the escalating number of COVID-19 virus cases nationwide, the County supported 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. In order to continue to provide WIFI hotspot service to disadvantaged families, staff is asking for grant acceptance, fund allocation and approval of an agreement with T-Mobile USA, which provides the service lines and internet connectivity devices used in this program.

## 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) 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 2020, the city adopted the Digital Equity and Inclusion Plan, and one of the initiatives cited is the need to improve access to Internet connectivity in the home and access to functioning devices for students to complete course work. Staff have applied and were awarded the Federal Communications Commission's Emergency Connectivity Funding to support the service for the upcoming service cycle.

To support digital inclusion and address the digital divide, staff recommends the renewal of service for 2,000 WIFI hotspot devices, provided by T-Mobile USA, that would be funded from the available balance of the Public, Education and Government Fund and the FCC's Emergency Connectivity Funding. These devices would be circulated through the Chula Vista Public Library to the community with the priority being for students. 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.

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 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.

### **Public, Educational, and Governmental (PEG) Funding**

Partial 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.

#### Emergency Connectivity Funding

The remaining funding will be from the Federal Communications Commission's Emergency Connectivity Funding. The FCC's Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF) is a \$7.17 billion program that will help schools and libraries provide the tools and services their communities need for remote learning during the COVID-19 emergency period. ECF will help provide relief to millions of students, school staff, and library patrons and will help close the Homework Gap for students who currently lack necessary Internet access or the devices they need to connect to classrooms.

For eligible schools and libraries, the ECF Program will cover reasonable costs of laptop and tablet computers; Wi-Fi hotspots; modems; routers; and broadband connectivity purchases for off-campus use by students, school staff, and library patrons.

#### **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 2021-22 PEG budget will be increased by \$144,000 from the PEG Fund available reserves. The remaining \$480,000 will be funded from the Emergency Connectivity Funding. No General Fund impacts are anticipated as a result of this project

#### **ONGOING FISCAL IMPACT**

No ongoing General Fund or PEG fund impacts are anticipated.

#### **ATTACHMENTS**

1. T Mobile Renewal Agreement

*Staff Contact: Tracy Lamb, Director of Community Services and Joy Whatley, City Librarian*