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COMMISSIONER
MAXINE HOLLEY
JAMES D. JOHNSON
DEAN MCLAMB
WILLIAM NEIGHBORS
DR. R. MAX RAYNOR



TOWN OF BENSON
P.O. BOX 69
303 EAST CHURCH STREET
BENSON, NC 27504
(919) 894-3553
FAX (919) 894-1283
www.townofbenson.com

TOWN MANAGER
MATT ZAPP

TOWN CLERK
TERRY HOBGOOD

FINANCE DIRECTOR
KIMBERLY T. PICKETT

TOWN ATTORNEY
R. ISAAC PARKER

MEMO

TO: Mayor Jerry Medlin and Board of Commissioners

FROM: Matt Zapp, Town Manager

DATE: April 5, 2019

RE: Funding Request- Internet expansion expert support

The Town of Benson has identified the deficiency of broadband internet service within our community as the highest and most critical economic development need. In response, the Town launched a Request for Information (on two occasions), asking for technical solution companies to resolve said need. Unfortunately, only one vendor has submitted a proposal during two separate RFI requests.

Concern/ Need- Staff has been in continuous communication with the NC Broadband Office and their team. Unfortunately, no member of the Town staff can decipher the technical aspects of broadband service and expansion across the community.

Current Status- The Town of Benson Economic Development Committee has researched this issue and the opportunities that exist. During the March 27, 2019 Benson EDC meeting, the team unanimously voted to support the use of a paid internet expansion consultant.

Staff has communicated with Andy Goethals of Create Connections, Inc. (CCI). Mr. Goethals assisted the Town during its process to bring Wi-Fi service to Historic Downtown Benson. The aforementioned project came in under budget and on time.

Technical Opportunity- As a Broadband Technology Expert, Andy Goethals and CCI will assist the Town on a project based (fixed cost) rate of \$150/hour. CCI will serve as technical liaison, facilitating the selection process to bring broadband connectivity to the community. Mr. Goethals will research potential vendors and bring forward viable partners to the Board of Commissioners for consideration.

Transparent Disclosure- Mr. Goethals and the CCI business model provides carrier wholesale pricing to customers throughout North Carolina and other areas. If the Town of Benson engages Mr. Goethals for technical support on its broadband project, CCI (and Mr. Goethals) desires to retain the opportunity to benefit from a wholesale service agreement with the selected fiber/internet partner.

Anticipated Benefit- The incumbent providers (Charter and CenturyLink) do not service stranded areas throughout southern Johnston County. Residents and local businesses will benefit from the opportunity to purchase broadband internet. Mr. Goethals and CCI will aid the Town Board in researching, selecting, and launching a public-private partnership to reach this goal.

Project Cost- The proposed project rate is \$150 per hour. The research portion of said project is anticipated to cost less than \$5,000.

Funding Request- The Town of Benson EDC requests funding approval to engage Andy Goethals and Create Connections, Inc. to aid the Town in the research process to bring Broadband service providers forward. The Board of Commissioners retain the final authority to engage any/all public-private partnership agreements related to this need.

Action Item- We look for the Board of Commissioners to act on this request during the April 9, 2019 Board meeting.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please contact me at 919.894.3553 or via email at mzapp@townofbenson.com.