

Mendocino County lays out first official broadband goals

Reliable telecom sought for residents, businesses

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Mendocino County has established five goals for telecommunication within its borders, as the internet connection for many homes and businesses is notoriously unreliable. And in some parts of the county, it is nonexistent.

A report published in May by UC Berkeley [considered Mendocino County as “unserved,”](#) meaning virtually no household has access to fiber-based broadband at reliable speeds, or speeds that meet PUC or FCC standards.

According to the report, 39 percent of Mendocino County households (9,637) had download speeds lower than the PUC minimum standard of 6 mbps, as of Dec. 15, 2015, and 24 percent (8,238) had no AT&T broadband. Those numbers placed it in the bottom 10 of all California counties. Zero households were reported to have met the minimum FCC standard, 25/3 mbps.

The goals, adopted by the Board of Supervisors on July 11, are to obtain reliable telecommunication services for residents, businesses and government agencies; to have affordable, high-speed broadband in all homes; to have internet-reliant businesses through broadband infrastructure development; to adopt policies for broadband deployment; and to develop a county-wide comprehensive broadband plan by 2019.

In order to achieve these goals, the county will need to communicate directly with providers on connectivity issues and work with the California Public Utilities Commission, as well as find outside resources, like grant programs, according to the presentation put together by Broadband Alliance of Mendocino County Chairwoman Trish Steel.

Supervisor Carre Brown pointed out that limited access to broadband not only serves as a barrier to entry for businesses, but often hinders operations in a more technologically-advanced economy.

“Businesses that operate today are being, more and more, being mandated to electronically file reports,” she said.

The county Broadband Plan would ideally be a model for other rural counties struggling with the same internet issues, according to the presentation, and each city would be encouraged to develop its own tailored plan for inclusion. This plan is an effort for Mendocino County to take its internet problems into its own hands, as well as address the “digital divide” separating rural and urban areas, according to Steel.

“(Providers) make their decisions based on business plans, not necessarily community needs,” she said.

The Broadband Alliance will be considering the potential uses for healthcare and public safety in its plan and how broadband can be used to develop the local economy.

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