

May 4, 2024

Dear Santa Clara County Board President Ellenberg and Honorable Supervisors,

On May 7, 2024, please request that Item 12: Response to Board Referral Relating to Digital Equity Strategy, go back to the drawing board and examine options for a municipal broadband service or JPA as the original referral directed. As school board trustees and community members from across Santa Clara County, we know firsthand how important Internet access is for our most vulnerable students and families. We appreciate the work you did to close the digital divide when we first wrote to you in 2020, but the short-term solutions implemented then do not meet the long-term needs of our community. After over two years of anticipation, the "Digital Equity Strategy" prepared for May 7th washes its hands of a county role in broadband, which is unacceptable.

The Digital Equity Strategy as presented does not address the direction given by the Board in its original referral on broadband on December 14, 2021:

*...the report back should identify options, cost estimates, a timeline for construction and implementation, and, to the extent possible, the amount of federal and state funding available. The options should be specific to a County-administered municipal broadband service, or one administered in partnership with other local government agencies and non-profits through a Joint Powers Authority.*

The Technology Services and Solutions Department instead focused on defining digital equity and singling out only 28% of those without adequate Internet access for support.

We need an actual analysis of what it would entail to pursue broadband county-wide. Santa Cruz County's Broadband Strategic Master Plan acknowledges the challenges of broadband and the need for partnerships, but still explores concrete strategies and costs. Why, when we had contracted with CTC Technology and Energy in 2021 (who also prepared the Santa Cruz plan), did we not develop a similar document? Municipalities across the county, like Mountain View and Los Altos Hills, are trying to figure this out on their own. What we need is a county-wide approach to coordinate and maximize these efforts.

Federal and state funding available now, as well as [California's Broadband for All Action Plan](#), prefer broadband infrastructure development as a long-term solution for closing the digital divide. From the California Public Utilities Commission's (CPUC) [Last Mile, Federal Funding Account scoring rubric](#), "Project technology choice: Fiber optic infrastructure is scalable and enables the next generation of application solutions for all communities. An application proposing to invest in fiber optic infrastructure will receive credit." Focusing county efforts on wireless solutions does not meet the needs of the future and decreases public trust in future broadband initiatives.

The Federal Affordable Connectivity Program ended in April, kicking an unknown number of socio economically disadvantaged county residents off of their Internet plans this past week. How many

of our students and families now cannot access critical government online services like medical care, housing and food assistance? While the Digital Equity Strategy alludes to many residents relying on subsidized, low cost Internet service plans, it does not take into account the loss of the very Federal funding that made those plans possible.

Thank you for your work since 2020 to connect residents of Santa Clara County to the Internet. We hope on Tuesday you will request an analysis of broadband implementation that meets the original direction given for this referral. Internet access is a human right, and in the heart of Silicon Valley it should be a given that every household is connected to high-quality broadband.

Sincerely,

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