



March 22, 2021

Dear Supervisors:

The term *Shovel Ready Broadband Project* was bandied about frequently during the heady days of the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) fund distribution. Unfortunately, Mendocino County had no projects planned, so the County was bypassed.

In the twelve ensuing years, we have all experienced the stagnation of the widening Digital Divide, during an era when work, school, commerce, and social life has become increasingly dependent on connectivity.

We have learned from and reacted to these painful lessons by taking the following actions:

- In 2011, the Board of Supervisors authorized the formation of the Broadband Alliance of Mendocino County (BAMC) to act as the lead entity for broadband policy in the County, without adequate resources to tackle difficult task of closing the Digital Divide.
- In 2012 – 2014, BAMC and the County participated in the 16-county Golden Bear Broadband project but the CASF application was not approved by the CPUC.
- In 2013, BAMC partnered with MCOE and MCOG to apply for a Caltrans Environmental Justice grant. The grant would have funded a countywide survey of approximately 11,000 MCOE students, faculty and staff to collect actual ground truth mapping data for the entire county. The results would have shown the extent of the Digital Divide problem for the first time. The grant was not approved.
- In 2014, BAMC and the County joined with Marin, Napa and Sonoma counties to form the North Bay North Coast Broadband Consortium (NBNCBC) which is authorized and funded by the CPUC. The NBNCBC Manager is Tom West, who, with local support from BAMC, has played a pivotal role in the creation of the Plan being presented today.

With these and other initiatives, we are now in a strong position to access the Broadband provisions of the 2021 American Rescue Plan, recently signed into law by President Biden. Furthermore, an unprecedented amount of Federal broadband dollars is anticipated in coming years from the Accessible, Affordable Internet for All Act, and the Leading Infrastructure for Tomorrow's America Act, among others.

NBNCBC has created a *Shovel Ready Broadband Project* that, if funded, will finally and permanently close the Digital Divide in Mendocino County. This plan is being presented to the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors today, March 22, 2021. This plan is ready for funding.

We strongly recommend that the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors:

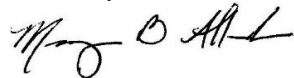
- (1) embrace and incorporate this comprehensive broadband plan into their strategic planning process; and
- (2) establish a position to research and chase down federal/state grant opportunities, initiate grant applications, monitor federal/state telecommunications legislation, continue engagement with the NBNCBC, and in coordination with BAMC, attend quarterly meetings.

In this ongoing effort, the Broadband Alliance and the Community Foundation will continue to offer the following support:

- (1) quarterly public outreach meetings, the maintenance of the BAMC website, email and social media presence; and assistance with targeted community outreach activities, and
- (2) professional communication capabilities that will include periodic newsletters to the public and constituent groups such as education, health care, agriculture, small businesses, non-profits, incorporated cities and special districts; outreach flyers; and annual reports as needed.

Households, businesses, and organizations without access to broadband are increasingly disadvantaged. In the Covid-19 era, the constant state of emergency has pushed the issue of broadband connectivity into focus. Broadband is now recognized as a vital utility, an integral part of work, school, and society, and we want to help. With continued collaboration and fiscal support, the Broadband Alliance and the County of Mendocino can make critical progress on this issue in the years ahead.

Sincerely,



Megan Barber Allende
President/CEO



Kathy Wylie, Chair
Broadband Alliance of Mendocino County

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