



MEMO

Date: August 3, 2022

TO: County Council Chair Barry Buchannan
County Executive Satpal Sidhu

CC: Tyler Schroder

From: Gina Stark, Economic Development Project/Broadband Manager

Re: Whatcom County EDI Funding Contract and Broadband Projects

Background

The Port of Bellingham (Port) applied and was awarded \$2 million from the Economic Development Investment Board (EDI) for the purpose of leveraging state and or federal grant funding to building broadband infrastructure in rural Whatcom County to serve our unserved (at or below 25/3 Mbps) and underserved (at or below (100/20 Mbps) populations.

The EDI recommendations of funding went before the County Council for approval. County Council approved the EDI funding recommendation with two pre-distribution requirements:

- 1) The Port received the broadband grant funding
- 2) The Port construct fiber to the home (FTTP) projects that provide service to the end customer

The purpose of this memo is to illustrate the Port and the Whatcom County Project has meet these two requirements. In addition to provide additional information regarding the projects.

Accomplishments

The County Council approved \$2million of EDI funding to be used as matching funding for broadband grants. The Port was able to leverage the EDI funding to



meet the matching requirements for two separate successful applications that resulted **\$8 million** in construction financing and two construction projects for a total of **73 miles** of open access fiber network and **1,540 homes/35 businesses** passed.

The first grant Port applied for was the Community Economic Revitalization Board (CERB) Rural Broadband Construction Grant. The grant was for \$3million with a \$1million match and total project cost of \$3 million. This will go to build 47.5 middle miles of open access fiber network and the design will be a lit PON fiber premise (FTTP) in area just north of the city of Lynden along the Canadian boarder. It will serve approximately 440 homes and 10 businesses. When the project is completed community members will have access to a minimum speeds of 100Mbps/100 Mbps symmetrical and up to 1Gbps/1Gbps speeds.

In November 2021 the Port applied to the Washington State Broadband Office for the Broadband Accelerated Grant. In January the Whatcom County Broadband Project was awarded \$4million. This project had a \$1million match from the County EDI making the total project cost \$5million. The service area for this project is located just east of Lake Terrell and west of the city of Ferndale. The network service area is 26 miles of open access fiber middle mile and the design will be a lit PON fiber to the premise (FTTP) that will serve approximately 1,100 homes and 25 businesses. Upon completion of the project community members will have access to speeds 100Mbps/100Mbps symmetrical minimum and up to a maximum speed of 1Gbps/1Gbps symmetrical.

We are working with local ISP provider to provide service on the network to community members. Each ISP provider we work with participate in the Federal Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) which provides financial assistance on internet service to qualified families. Some also provide discounted rates to families who are in need but are just shy of qualifying for this program.

Action

We are grateful to the County Council for approving these EDI funds that can be used as matching funds. They enable the Port to apply and submit successful applications. These build tend to cost more per home than in a more dense urban build due the less dense population, to how spread out the home are located, and how many home are off long drives. However, we know it is critical to build to



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these rural communities for education, health care, safety, and economic development. Signing these contracts will complete another part of both CERB and WSBO pre-contract obligations the Port must fulfill. We are requesting the County Council approve the contract between the Port and the County.