

Allegan County Community Broadband Initiative

by Steve Sedore & Jan Goswick

Allegan County continues to find ways to encourage the development of services to the public and businesses to stimulate economic growth and development through the use of technology and other tools. One such resource that we are particularly supportive of is the Michigan Broadband Stimulus Initiative. As part of the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), \$7.2 billion has been allocated by the federal government to improve broadband connectivity throughout the nation. The application process has been structured for businesses to submit projects to the State on behalf of local government and educational agencies. We are optimistic that the appropriate proposal will be accepted as both Allegan County's rural and agricultural environments are consistent with the core focus of this program, as we continue to face challenges with last mile efforts of Internet accessibility.

In addition to the ARRA, Allegan County will be releasing a Request For Proposal (RFP) for businesses to submit projects for establishing, increasing and enhancing broadband access throughout the County. Like the ARRA, one of the primary goals for this RFP process will be to begin efforts to bring high speed Internet service to the under-served and un-served areas of Allegan County. However, a key difference between the two is the County will be seeking solutions both in conjunction with and independent from ARRA funding. As an added element to the RFP process, for the first time in County history, we will release information regarding currently owned County infrastructure (i.e. towers, leased lines, existing fiber optic network, etc.) that bidders can choose to incorporate in their responses. The County owns several strategically placed towers that are currently being used exclusively for public safety. Given their positions throughout the County, they present excellent opportunities for bidders to expand on their proposed solution and deliver greater levels of service to Allegan County residents and businesses.

With the broadband stimulus project and the County's RFP efforts, it is our goal to have both initiatives compliment each other in purpose and time frames. We anticipate releasing the RFP within the next 30 days, so that responses will be received toward the beginning of the 2010 year. The State of Michigan has announced that the next round of stimulus funding is available now for application submission in January. With these two efforts, we are optimistic that Allegan County will see growth in our high speed Internet availability, for increased usage throughout our communities.

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