

Four Communities, Four Broadband Paths

Communities have different goals for improving broadband and follow different paths to reach their goals.

By Lisa Gonzalez / *Institute for Local Self-Reliance*

An increasing number of communities of varying sizes and from different states are investigating the possibilities of publicly owned broadband networks. Some consider fiber optic deployment an economic development investment. For others, self-provisioning is the best way to take control of their connectivity expenses or ensure network neutrality. In still other communities, businesses and residents drive the investment as a way to encourage competition because they aren't happy with incumbent services.

In the following pages, we profile four communities at various stages of experience with publicly owned broadband networks. They vary in size and character, and each has specific reasons for choosing to build a fiber optic network. Each of the four municipalities offers information and lessons for those that follow.

In **Ocala, Florida**, the community began providing gigabit services to local businesses years ago and eventually started offering similar connectivity to residents. To this town, fast, affordable, reliable internet access is just another service a city should offer its citizens.

Fairlawn, Ohio, has a similar attitude and has taken a similar path, but its trajectory moved faster than Ocala's. Fairlawn became a role model for other small cities that lack the benefit of an electric utility. In keeping with its

philosophy that every premises should enjoy high-quality internet access, Fairlawn is finding new ways to partner and expand its footprint.

In Texas, where the law regarding municipal broadband was unsettled, **Mont Belvieu** didn't wait to be told what it could or couldn't do. This small town not far from Houston went to court for clarification of the state's legal limitations. As a result, it is now in the process of connecting residents with the kind of internet access their Houston neighbors pine for – and it cleared the way for other Texas towns to do the same.

Last is the story of **Lyndon Township, Michigan**, whose residents voted to approve a modest property tax increase to fund fiber optic deployment. They wanted to own their fiber infrastructure when no incumbents would provide the services they needed.

Like every local community, these four municipalities have unique characteristics and needs, and the people living in them are the best judges of how to solve local connectivity problems. As they've moved forward, they've broken ground for high-quality internet access not only in their communities but also for others that face similar challenges. ❖

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