RESOLUTION - ACTION REQUESTED 2020-369

MEETING: July 7, 2020

TO: The Board of Supervisors

FROM: Dallin Kimble, County Administrative Officer

RE: Ratify a Letter of Support for EDA Grant to Fund Regional Broadband Plan

RECOMMENDATION AND JUSTIFICATION:
Ratify a Letter of Support for the Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA) Grant to Fund Regional Broadband Plan, and Request a Waiver for a Grant Match

On behalf of the five county region (Mariposa, Tuolumne, Calaveras, Amador and Alpine), Tuolumne County’s Director of Innovation & Business Assistance is submitting an application to fund a feasibility study for a regional broadband plan. Due to the severe economic impact of COVID-19, along with the multitude of natural disasters suffered by the region in the past few years, the counties are requesting that no match be required for this grant application. The EDA’s standard grant match requirement is 50% of the grant requested, and 20% if the jurisdiction is economically distressed. The EDA does make exceptions of the grant match policy and will waive match requirements in certain circumstances.

Mariposa County, like counties across the country, is simultaneously experiencing a dramatic loss in revenue even as additional business sectors are reopening. The County has experienced twelve disasters in 4 years, including COVID-19, multiple catastrophic wildfires, damaging floods, and government shutdowns that closed the gates to Yosemite National Park. This letter, which was requested on June 13 and was due on June 19, specifically requests a waiver of the grant match due to extreme conditions causing unique financial circumstances.

Given the urgent need for a regional broadband plan and the short time frame, staff has already sent this letter of support and recommends approval of this request to ratify that action.

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY OF BOARD ACTIONS:
The Board routinely approves or ratifies letters of support that it determines to be in the best interest of the county.
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ALTERNATIVES AND CONSEQUENCES OF NEGATIVE ACTION:
Do not approve. Staff would notify recipients of a retraction in that event.

ATTACHMENTS:
Letter of Support_EDA Broadband_Mariposa County  (PDF)

RESULT:  ADOPTED BY CONSENT VOTE [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER: Miles Menetrey, District V Supervisor
SECONDER: Rosemarie Smallcombe, District I Supervisor
AYES: Rosemarie Smallcombe, Marshall Long, Miles Menetrey
EXCUSED: Merlin Jones, Kevin Cann
A. Leonard Smith, Regional Director
Seattle Regional Office
Economic Development Administration
915 Second Avenue
Seattle, WA 98174

June 16, 2020

A. Leonard Smith:

The Mariposa County Board of Supervisors wishes to express its support for the Central Sierra Broadband Roadmap application. This application, which is a response to the Economic Development Administration’s CARES Act Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA), meets the EDA’s stated desire for programs that create future policies, permitting standards, priorities, business access and social economics for broadband infrastructure in California’s Central Sierras.

Mariposa County, and the Central Sierra Region, has historically lacked affordable, quality, and large-bandwidth internet service. At least 1,463 households in our region remain completely unserved, while the inconsistency and inequality of services in other areas continue to affect our economy, educational access, social capacity, use of telemedicine, and the safety of our first responders.

As part of the Central Sierra Consortium, Mariposa County has collaborated with neighboring jurisdictions to decrease network costs, maximize public and philanthropic funds for broadband infrastructure, increase public access to broadband and leverage scarce resources for maximum benefit across the region. While access to broadband has improved in some “middle mile” areas of our county, many of the rural areas, and even some of our unincorporated towns, still require substantial infrastructure investment. That investment is challenged by long distances, difficult topography and the effects of the many disasters that have affected our area.

In the last four years, Mariposa County has experienced twelve (12) local emergencies that have contributed to the challenge of developing broadband infrastructure. From catastrophic tree mortality that killed approximately 10,295,000 pine trees to the two largest wildfires in our county’s history to major floods and other crises now including novel coronavirus, our county has experienced extraordinary loss over and over again. Our financial reserves are now less than a single month of payroll and, as a tourism-driven economy, we’re still digging out from the effects of extended closures and stay-at-home orders.
Mariposa County recognizes the critical need for a Central Sierra Broadband Roadmap, unfortunately we are not in a position to provide a match at this time. General Fund impacts of the novel coronavirus alone are projected to be in excess of $14 million (22%) for the coming fiscal year and we’re diligently working to reduce costs and limit the number of jobs that will be lost.

With appreciation for the EDA’s consideration of our application, we join now with our sister jurisdictions to request that the Central Sierra Broadband Roadmap be funded entirely through grant dollars without a local match. We hope that CARES Act funding will make this request possible and offer our gratitude again for your consideration.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Kevin Cann, Chair
Mariposa County Board of Supervisors