

Summary of Proposed EDA Grant Proposal Request

The Economic Development Administration grant proposal seeks funding to allow the County to expand infrastructure for delivery of wireless high speed Internet to areas lacking adequate service. Two new towers will be included in this proposal, one located on the Government Center grounds and the other on Miller Hill in the western side of the county.

The economic shutdown caused by the ongoing novel coronavirus pandemic created a new reliance on online tools to sustain economic activity, transition to online learning both for students, business and agribusiness and increased use of telemedicine for seniors and families. The availability of broadband Internet within our rural county is uneven and where available often fails to meet the 25/3 standard used by federal entities to evaluate broadband adequacy.

This grant proposal specifically seeks to build two new county-owned towers that would fill in gaps among tower infrastructure within the county. With the addition of the new towers, the County would have a tower network that could be leased to Internet service providers willing to expand their service to deliver fixed-wireless broadband service to a significant portion of our rural county. Estimated cost of tower construction is \$600,000 plus funds to cover additional infrastructure. Costs for additional infrastructure are being developed.

The problem of inadequate broadband within Leelanau County has been acutely felt by businesses and employees, schools, and families in the county during the pandemic shutdown. Prior to the pandemic Leelanau County's GDP per capita represented 6% (\$33,500) of the State GDP per capita which is \$52,900, The COVID-19 impact on jobs in Leelanau County is dramatic. With the exception of the Grand Traverse Band, County Government and the Leelanau Public Schools the vast majority of Leelanau's businesses are considered to be small business, with 44 percent either sole proprietors or having fewer than 20 employees. The economic impact on Leelanau's small businesses and workforce places Leelanau County in the highest risk category in our 10-county region.ⁱ

Prior to the COVID-19 crisis in Leelanau county, lack of available broadband Internet access represented a gap between the haves and have nots in terms of extended education and employment opportunities. Now, for public school students and staff this lack of access may be a linchpin that could lead to a cascade of failures that shut the door on public education in our county. Schools do not have the means to provide broadband Internet services at student and staff homes, but will still be held responsible for providing remote education on an equivalent level to onsite education.

Other examples of how lack of adequate Broadband contributed to COVID 19 impact include:

- Children of farm workers unable to access online school lessons, making it hard for farmers to retain and attract labor.
- Farmers unable to attend webinars and virtual meetings to obtain education and information on managing their crops, herds, equipment, etc.
- Retail stores that had not developed an online sales capability forced them to cease operations during lockdown.

- Restaurants unable to facilitate online sales struggled to operate on a restricted take-out bases or shut down completely.
- Business customers also impacted, unable to readily access services from online.

The lack of broadband availability was identified as a critical issue prior to the pandemic by the Leelanau Internet Futures Team, who have worked for the past three years to implement a Community Action Plan in collaboration with Leelanau County officials. If the Leelanau County Board of Commissioners provides authorization for the Emergency Management Director to pursue this Economic Development grant, with the assistance of LIFT in grant preparation, and if the grant is awarded, provision of high speed services accessible throughout Leelanau County will be greatly improved.

ⁱ Fourth Economy Research Consultants, May, 2020