

Palo Alto makes fresh pitch for Google Fiber

City manager cites existing collaborations with Google as reason why Palo Alto should be selected for Google's fiber-optic project

by [Gennady Sheyner](#), Palo Alto Online Staff, Uploaded: Tuesday, March 1, 2011, 9:23 AM

As Google winnows down the field of applicants for its highly coveted "Google Fiber to Community" project, Palo Alto is making a last-gasp push to convince the high-tech giant to turn the city's longstanding fiber dreams into reality.

Google had planned to select one or more U.S. communities for its ultra-high-speed Internet initiative by late 2010 but postponed the selection until "early this year" because of the "incredible" level of interest, company spokesman Dan Martin told the Weekly. Though the Mountain View company still plans to announce its chosen community or communities early this year, it doesn't have a specific date for announcing the decision, Martin said.

The company received bids from nearly 1,100 communities nationwide, Martin said. Given the intense competition, Palo Alto submitted a follow-up letter to Google in mid-February highlighting the history of cooperation between the city and the company and making a fresh pitch for why the city should be chosen.

The letter from City Manager James Keene to Milo Medin, Google's newly hired vice president for access service, cites several examples in which Palo Alto's and Google's fiber efforts currently intertwine, including Google's fiber experiment at Stanford University.

Google announced last fall its plan to install a fiber network at Stanford -- a project that would bring ultra-high-speed Internet access to about 850 faculty homes on Stanford's property. The project would be a precursor to the highly coveted "Google Fiber for Communities" that caused ripples of excitement across the nation.

To complete its Stanford project, Google reached out to Palo Alto's Utilities Department to ask if it could use the city's own dark-fiber system. The city and Google are now working on an agreement that would enable Google to stretch its fiber network beyond Stanford University and link it to the city's fiber network, said Josh Wallace, account representative for the city's fiber service.

Wallace said the city sees Google's Stanford venture as a "bona fide dark-fiber community project" and that it's happy to assist with the implementation.

"They're formerly a Palo Alto company, and we'd love to help them out," Wallace told the Weekly. "They're a great customer."

The Stanford project is one of several Keene cited in his letter to highlight the close links between Palo Alto and Google. The company that Google chose to operate the Stanford network, Sonic.net, also happens to license the city's dark-fiber system, Keene said. He also mentioned the fact that Google has been Palo Alto's fiber customer since 2005 and that the company currently licenses the city's dark fiber to connect to the

Palo Alto Internet Exchange -- a neutral hub that allows different Internet service providers to exchange network traffic.

Fiber is one of many areas where Palo Alto and Google overlap. Google was headquartered in Palo Alto between 1999 and 2006, before it moved to Mountain View. Sergey Brin and Larry Page both studied at Stanford University before they co-founded the company, and Stanford is one of several institutions that submitted letters to Google in support of Palo Alto's bid.

Palo Alto is also home to many Google employees, some of whom formerly worked for the city, Wallace said. Last year, a group of more than 30 Google employees raised \$500,000 for the Palo Alto Library Foundation, which is raising money to furnish the city's rebuilt libraries.

Despite the shared history, Palo Alto officials aren't taking the city's candidacy for granted. A year ago, city officials and local technophiles residents [boogied for a video](#) in front of a giant "Palo Alto for Google Fiber" sign in hopes of catching Google's eye. The city's notoriously tech-savvy residents also flooded the company with e-mails and [postings urging it to choose](#) Palo Alto.

Palo Alto officials also know that Google's involvement in Stanford's fiber network won't necessarily have any bearing on the larger project. Google has persistently maintained that the two projects are completely separate -- a position that Keene acknowledged in his letter.

"Nevertheless, with the Stanford project next door to our community and our fiber providing essential communications support, the City would appreciate an opportunity to discuss bringing Google fiber to Palo Alto," Keene wrote. "We realize we have a lot of competition, but Google's selection criteria for Fiber for Communities appear to be closely aligned with many factors in Palo Alto."

Palo Alto has been working to bring a high-speed fiber-optic network to the city masses for about 15 years. Its latest effort to establish a citywide system faltered in March 2009 when a high-tech consortium charged with building the system saw its financing collapse and withdrew from its partnership with the city.

Meanwhile, the city's utilities department is considering other ways to expand the city's existing fiber system, which currently has 154 licensed connections and which generates about \$2 million in annual profits. The city has recently hired consultants to evaluate the potential market for a municipal fiber system and to look at ways to attract private investment to the project.

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