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News Digest

Fiber Internet finally making headway at City Council

The city's 12-year exploration of a speedy fiber Internet service may finally come to fruition next month.

The City Council is expected to discuss on July 7 and 14 a possible partnership with two businesses to expand the current 40-mile fiber ring into a far-reaching service for local businesses.

The proposal up for review is from PacketFront and 180 Connect, an Internet-service provider and infrastructure firm, respectively.

The city manager's report containing proposal details will likely be available online July 3, earlier than otherwise so the public has time to examine it, Mayor Larry Klein said.

A fiber-to-the-premises connection, or FTTP for short, is orders of magnitude faster than cable services currently offered by telecommunications companies, Klein said.

It could help the city attract and retain businesses — as well as benefiting residents, he added.

Unlike earlier proposals, the current one saddles the city with no financial obligations.

Since completing the nearly \$1.9 million fiber network in 1997, the city's considerations of expanding the service have been hampered by cost concerns.

A 2004 estimate put the cost of a citywide network at \$35 million — City Hall was even considered as collateral on the debt.

Klein was explicit this time around that the Web firms bear responsibility for building and financing the network.

"It's not really a partnership because the city's not putting anything up," he said. At most the city would provide unused portions of the fiber network — currently, about 40 businesses pay to use it — and waive some permitting fees, he said.

If the council likes the proposal, it could vote as soon as September to go forward, he said.

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