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TOP STORY

Council approves \$57K to hire broadband consultants

By Greg Bowen The Herald-Zeitung
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City Council is moving forward on a plan that would bring speedier Internet to New Braunfels.

On Monday, council approved without comment spending about \$57,000 in 4B funds to hire broadband consultants Magellan Advisors to facilitate the development of a public/private partnership that would provide the faster Internet service.

Under the plan, the city would build a poles-and-wires, utility-like infrastructure system for fiber-based, high-speed Internet and hire a private firm to provide and operate the Internet services via the city's system.

The operator would pay the city a share of its revenues, Magellan's Courtney Violette of Denver, Colo., said during a joint council/4B workshop on the subject in late March.

If the plan works, faster, more reliable and more affordable broadband would become available in New Braunfels, giving users improved play of video content on smartphones and other devices and helping the city retain and recruit tech-dependent businesses.

An initial system that would serve businesses in five areas across the city is estimated to cost somewhere in the \$3.4 to \$5.3 million range, according to Violette. Businesses customers would pay about \$150 per month.

The system could be expanded to serve residential areas. Typically that expansion would occur after a certain percentage — about 40 percent — of residents in a residential area agree to become customers. The system could eventually be scaled-up to serve the entire city.

Assistant City Manager Kristi Aday said during the March workshop that local officials have been looking into ways to improve the city's broadband services for about 18 months.

Last year, as part of that effort, Magellan was hired to conduct a Broadband Feasibility Study which found the lack of fiber-based Internet to be a major roadblock for local businesses.

On Monday, council approved the hiring of Magellan for Phase 2 of the Broadband Feasibility Study as part of its 18-item consent agenda, in which routine and non-controversial items are approved in one motion without separate discussion of the items.