

Wisconsin Towns Association 2019 Essay

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Imagine being able to work from a cabin in Birchwood or contacting a doctor while vacationing on the shores of Lake Superior. If high speed broadband access were available to all towns in Wisconsin, everyone would have efficient access to the internet, allowing people to work, shop, or obtain medical services from the location of their choice. High speed broadband access has the potential to provide economic and community development opportunities to towns throughout Wisconsin by ensuring everyone is connected no matter where he or she is located.

High speed internet access allows people using a computer to work from remote locations and this would provide towns throughout the state with an critical economic boost. For example, towns in places with abundant natural beauty such as Green Lake, Minocqua, or Spring Green could attract new permanent residents who could telecommute rather than drive to a job in a large metropolitan area. People choosing a peaceful and safe environment could be drawn to many other Wisconsin towns. This has the potential to reverse the trend of job seekers moving from smaller towns to larger cities and could attract new residents to towns. Increased demand for real estate in towns would cause property values to rise and increase the tax base, providing an economic lift.

High speed broadband access promotes connections and immediate access to critical information. This will increase the vitality of towns by allowing residents to tap into new data and important economic opportunities. For example, farmers can obtain up-to-the minute online radar or weather information useful for planting or harvesting crops and resort operators can use the similar data for tourism purposes or for timely communication regarding reservations. Similarly, as certain medical services become available online, people in towns throughout Wisconsin can obtain medical information and even “see” providers using virtual appointments. For towns with poor cell phone service, making clear calls using an online computer connection could be helpful and save residents the cost of having a land line.

With readily available high speed broadband access, people in towns throughout Wisconsin can take advantage of the same technological advances in online shopping and delivery methods as people living in larger population centers. Retail options are understandably limited in some rural areas and it can be prohibitively expensive to travel to centers with greater populations just to shop. Access to retailers with a significant internet presence such as IKEA or Walmart or vast online marketplaces like EBay or Amazon provide opportunities for obtain goods previously unavailable in some towns. High speed broadband access thus has a democratizing effect as well as preventing isolation to those in rural areas.

Some may argue that high speed broadband access is too expensive or that people will not use it. The reality, however, is that it is too costly not to provide it – lack of high speed broadband access may force some people to leave towns for places where it is available along with the related economic opportunities. People will take advantage of the benefits of high speed

broadband if they have ready access to computers. It is imperative that computers are accessible in local public libraries and town halls and that students grow up learning how to effectively access the internet using computers in schools equipped with wifi. For the investment that towns make in this technology, the overall economic benefits will outweigh the costs as citizens are increasingly satisfied with the options available to them and as they see their economies strengthening.