

Explain the importance of high speed broadband access to town economic and community development.

What is "high speed broadband?" The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) says the term broadband refers to high-speed internet access that is always on and faster than the traditional dial-up access. Broadband can include: Digital Subscriber Line (DSL), Cable Modem, Fiber, Wireless, Satellite and Broadband over Power Lines (BPL). Over the years the speed associated with high-speed broadband has changed as the ever growing technology has changed. Bottom line is the data supports that if you have access to broadband internet it is better for the community.

What are the benefits?

The internet is important in developing communities because it allows for faster communications and improved learning. In schools we are using the internet to connect with many more outside resources. We can watch a lecture being given by a world expert in another country. That person would not come to a local high school in Wisconsin otherwise.

With the help of the internet we can communicate quickly. This helps humanitarian aid during natural disasters, military/police during civilian rescue and combat, and 911 operators send emergency aid to people who need it. Now with wireless internet you can reach more people from anywhere. With increased access we can quickly respond to people who need help.

Even if you can't talk face to face, with the internet we can talk and share information anywhere in the world. This helps businesses communicate with employees and clients wherever they may be. The technology can make a small business in a town in Wisconsin become a global international company simply by connecting that company with a potential customer anywhere in the world. Broadband internet access provides the ability to share video, large data files, software, and engineering specifications very quickly in real time between businesses and customers. A small company in a Wisconsin town never would have this opportunity otherwise.

The Center for Urban and Rural Affairs at the University of Minnesota published findings on the economic benefits broadband had on rural communities. This publication addressed five major areas for benefits. They include economic growth, business advantages, education and labor market advantages, rural sourcing, and telehealth.

For economic growth, this publication pointed to multiple studies that show employment grows, new business establishment grows, and gross domestic product all grew after high speed broadband came to a community.

For business advantages, e-commerce is cited as a driving advantage. Businesses in Wisconsin towns with stable high speed broadband can take advantage of sales communicated over the internet. For example, my mother works for a small community based independent pharmacy. That pharmacy's software and sales transactions are all done over broadband internet. When a prescription is processed it is sent over the internet to the insurance company and instantaneously provides the pharmacy information about if the medication is covered, what the customer has to pay and what the pharmacy is paid. Without broadband this transaction would not occur.

In the area of education and labor markets broadband allows students to access education from their home. A student has the ability to take a course at a highly regarded university but still remain in their community. Broadband also allows current employees access to continuing education from anywhere in the world. An independent insurance agent in a town in Wisconsin can access training from the corporate office in New York, allowing

them the ability to improve their services all while remaining in their Wisconsin town.

Rural sourcing was also noted to be a benefit of broadband. This concept is one where employers seek employees from rural areas as cost of labor may be lower. This concept also reduces the outflow of young people from rural communities where the cost of living and small town charm really benefits young people and the employers workforce. By using broadband companies can outsource to the rural towns instead of outsourcing to other countries.

Lastly, broadband can have a significant impact on health care. Telehealth is a mechanism to exchange health information via video, audio and data exchanges between health care providers and patients. This gives access for patients to high quality health care providers but allows them to stay at home in their town. For example, in Wisconsin as we are hit with the opiate crisis, people in some towns in Wisconsin may not have access to a substance abuse counselor and an addictionologist who can provide medication to help overcome addictions to opiates. Today because of telehealth and broadband access, a pharmacy in a town in Wisconsin can connect with a counselor and addictionologist providing the patient an

assessment and therapy session. Any hands on treatment is then provided in the local town pharmacy. This is not possible without broadband service.

With increased broadband internet access, a town can improve education, public health, communication, and the economy. We can build up the community around us by simply unleashing broadband internet for our town residents.

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