

March 22, 2023

To Whom it may concern:

I am the City Clerk and a resident in Stout. My husband, daughter and I feel very lucky to be able to call Stout home. I grew up here and can remember when then Qwest internet was brought to town for us to have a dial up connection to AOL. I eventually moved out of town to Cedar Falls, but after my husband and I had our daughter, we knew we wanted to be back in this area for the school district. We found a house in Stout, and we were ecstatic! We moved to town 9 years ago. We called for internet service, which was the exact same internet service that had provided my dial up when I was in my teens, it was just under the name Centurylink. They hooked us up to the service and it was horrible. We could not even use their internet service to get on their website to pay the bill they sent us every month. Through many phone calls, they finally admitted that they did not have adequate space on the service they hooked us up to. They knew their company could not provide us with quality internet, but they also knew there was no other internet in town so they could do what they wanted. They have not made any upgrades to the system since I lived here as a kid 30 years ago. Most of the boxes in town are open or broken.

After knowing they hooked me up to services, they knew they couldn't provide, I went to work in search for an internet provider that would come to town. Everyone turned me down. I finally pleaded a case to Unggoy and got them permission to use the elevator site in town to provide internet to the city. We knew this equipment would not be super-fast or perfect, but it was something. Over time, more people were added to the service, that to my understanding is much like cell service, it has become more and more congested with more traffic and no upgrades to the system. I have reached out to Unggoy, and they have stated that we have the most up to date equipment and software that is available to this type of service. We have many families in Stout. We have many kids in town that have to use the internet for homework. For the size of this community, we have several households that have an individual that works from home. If this is the best equipment that this type of internet service can provide to the City, it isn't enough unfortunately. It gets overloaded and people can't do what they need to do. We live in a world that is very much run by having almost constant access to reliable internet. Stout is very far behind in that movement. Working and learning remotely during the pandemic was an incredible challenge for every household in town. We continue to face this challenge daily.

As the City Clerk, my internet access is imperative for my daily work. I have to be connected to the State of Iowa websites for reports and the budget. If it's rainy, windy, or snowy, our internet signal is compromised. If a tree has grown too much, our internet signal is compromised. It is a very foggy day such as today as I am writing this, my internet is buffering.

Our city has a post office that houses boxes for just under 200 people. The internet is important for their daily scans of packages and important mail.

Our City also houses a fire department. We are very proud of the years and years of experience that we have at our fingertips when tragedy occurs. They need reliable internet for calls, weather alerts and trainings.

Our daughter needs reliable internet almost daily for school. Part of her daily homework is a spelling list. One of the things she can pick is to e-mail her spelling words to her teacher. She sometimes hits send and it just keeps spinning. We just hope it arrives to her teacher. She needs to do research for projects and there are so many times that the internet is "too busy" for anyone else to be on it.

I have reached out to CFU multiple times in the last several years. They have fiber at an acreage a few miles out of town. They had said "keep checking back" every time I would call for quite some time. On my last call, they said that they would not be willing to bring internet out here.

Internet is so important to keep people connected to their livelihood and their education. Stout is an amazing community. Bank statements, doctor's notes, office visits, tax forms, grocery shopping, school and activity registration, important weather announcements, our jobs have all partially or completely moved online.

You could not pick a better place to raise a family. Choosing to live in rural community is the best choice we made as parents. It was the best choice my parents made, but in today's world, our little piece of perfection still needs to have access and we do not have that. The residents in Stout deserve to be afforded the opportunity to have a reliable connection to all of the things necessary in day-to-day life.

As a resident and as the Clerk, I care very much about Stout and its future. I appreciate your time and all efforts that are being put in to trying to help our community.

Thank you for considering us.

Brooke Spencer

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