

## **Enable Rural Digital Lifestyle 2020**

### *Executive Summary:*

The purpose of this project is to rapidly expand broadband services (25 Mb / 3 Mb) to rural customers that we are unable to serve with our existing twisted-pair copper, coax or fiber-optic facilities. We will accomplish this through a mesh network of fixed wireless access points to deliver suitable broadband to rural customers.

The Covid-19 crisis that emerged in Q1 of 2020 exposed significant gaps affecting our most rural communities and their neighboring farms and acreages. With School and work-place closures, many families found it difficult, if not impossible to tele-work from home or have their K-12 or college age children participate in distance learning due to lack of suitable Internet bandwidth.

Furthermore, many rural residents and communities saw their local / regional medical clinics close partially or completely for several weeks making access to necessary medical assistance very challenging (especially for the many Senior Citizens living in rural Iowa). Access to Tele-medicine was severely limited due to Internet constraints of rural DSL or satellite broadband services.

The combination of the Covid 19 crisis and the limitations of rural Internet service is expanding a new 'geographic digital divide' that endangers the educational, health and economic opportunities of rural Iowans. This threatens the rural lifestyle and communities throughout Iowa.

Expanding the digital lifestyle benefits of effective broadband can provide the resources necessary to help these rural families not have to make a difficult choice between choosing where they live versus missing out on the fundamental life needs of good healthcare, a solid career or access to a quality education.

Furthermore, studies indicate there are growing mental health concerns for folks cut-off from contact with their extended family members, entertainment, sporting events and other quality of life activities that were changed or cancelled by Covid 19. These needs can be improved (to some degree) by broadband service (e.g. Skype/Facetime with Grandma in another town, or streaming a family movie on Netflix).

In summary, while broadband cannot resolve all the problems created by this Covid crisis, it can help improve the situation by empowering rural Iowan's with more resources to support the essentials of work, health and education as well as the lifestyle benefits afforded by today's Internet. We believe the fixed wireless model will help us most quickly reach a larger, more geographically diverse group of Iowans.