

There was a time when having an electric or telephone line connected to a home or a business was a novelty. Both quickly became necessary tools of 20th-century life, commerce and education. Here in the 21st century, a robust and affordable broadband internet connection is no longer a novelty. As with electricity and phones, success in any endeavor now often depends on your ability to connect with the rest of the world from your desk at work or your kitchen table at home.

Sadly, much of our city is currently served by internet connections that are neither robust nor affordable - and some neighborhoods are not served at all.

Recognizing that, the Gainesville City Commission has been working with no less goal than making Gainesville the most connected city in America. Our Broadband Connectivity Subcommittee has been meeting and researching for months and the city is now on the brink of issuing a Request for Proposal to find a vendor that can help us build the road map to reach that lofty (but necessary) goal.

What we hope to learn through this process is how we might best connect every household and business in Gainesville via the best-possible connection, including the gold standard of "fiber to the home."

What do we mean by "Gainesville?" We are asking for multiple answers to that, including providing the service within the city limits only, including the urban services area (which includes the GRU service area) and including those boundaries in addition to the other municipalities in Alachua County. We will come back with answers to how such installations might work logistically, how they might be prioritized and what the costs for installation and for monthly service would be.

Through GRU.COM the people of Gainesville already own hundreds of miles of fiber-optic cable spread across the city. With that in mind it's hard to imagine that GRU will not be a part of the plan, and potentially the primary provider. But we are not locked into any service or installation provider at this point. All options are on the table, and the city welcomes participation from the private sector if that turns out to be the best option.

As of right now we are less-concerned with who will dig the lines and who will offer the service than how this massive - but entirely necessary - infrastructure project will be rolled-out, how long it will take, how much it will cost and how it will be paid.

There are several examples of cities that have made an effort at this, with varying degrees of success. Every city has approached it differently, and none is a perfect model for us to work from. Each, however, has pieces from which we might (and will) borrow ideas.

What will success look like? Imagine the Gainesville as a place where every child can complete her homework from her kitchen table instead of having to arrive at school early or stay at the library late. Imagine Gainesville as a place where every no entrepreneur has to pack up the

company and leave for another city because they just can't get a fast enough connection here. Imagine Gainesville as a place where every family's connection to the world is as robust and complete as any other, no matter their neighborhood. That's the goal. That's what the most connected city in America looks like.

What would failure look like? Failure would look like not trying. Failure would be the cost of all the businesses who leave our city and all the children whose education needs we are unable - or unwilling - to meet.

Your city commission has made a priority of achieving success in this regard. Not every city in America is willing to do what it takes to be connected at the level that is necessary. We believe Gainesville has the potential and the will to deliver success to all our residents. This is a key component of the "New American City," and settling for less is not an option.