

Staff Report

City WiFi Service

July 23, 2013

The July 9, 2013 City Council meeting included a Staff Report regarding the City-provided public WiFi service. At this meeting, the City Council requested additional information related to the four outdoor pilot project locations. The locations include:

Pilot Outdoor Locations

Brookside Park

Campustown Court

Hunziker Youth Sports Complex

Tom Evans Plaza

The following information is being provided in response to this request:

- ***What will be the disposition of the infrastructure if the service is terminated?***

The City owns the endpoint equipment and if the Council chooses, we could simply turn off the service and leave the equipment in place for some period of time. The service could be restarted if desired without purchase of new endpoint equipment, though the equipment is now five years old, is operating in a harsh environment, and will likely need to be replaced in the near future if we continue the service.

- ***What is the cost of eliminating two locations and maintaining the other two?***

The current contract includes a fixed cost of \$1,200 per year and a variable cost of \$750 per location. If the service is continued, we will need to renew the contract. The rates may vary, but will likely be similar.

There was a question about the cost of maintaining the Campustown Court and Tom Evans Plaza locations; under our current contract, the cost would be \$2,700 per year.

CITY COUNCIL DIRECTION SOUGHT

As you will recall from the previous report which is attached, the staff is seeking Council direction regarding the continuation of the City-provided public WiFi service.

Staff Report

City WIFI SERVICE

July 9, 2013

The November 27, 2012 City Council budget guidelines discussion included a suggestion for review of the public WiFi system, specifically a review of service for outdoor locations. City staff noted that the current contract for the service would expire August 2013, and would continue on a month-to-month basis after the expiration. Staff stated that the service would be reviewed.

Background

The FY 2006/07 budget included a City Council goal to “Facilitate One Community Through Both Physical And Relationship Connections” which included a city-wide WiFi feasibility study. The study was completed in 2007 and based on the results of the study, Council chose to implement a pilot project that included installation of a series of WiFi hotspots, funded by the City and offered to the public free of charge.

Potential WiFi hotspot locations were selected based on existing City infrastructure and a review of expected public use in different locations. In order to prioritize locations, the following evaluation ranking was used:

Priority Description

- A WiFi supports benefits beyond public access
- B Year round traffic, facilities sufficient to allow for laptop use
- C Seasonal traffic, facilities sufficient to allow for laptop use
- D Seasonal traffic, facilities might be sufficient to allow for laptop use

| <u>Location</u> | <u>Priority</u> | <u>Location</u> | <u>Priority</u> |
|------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Campustown Court | A | Tom Evans Plaza | B |
| City Hall | A | Ada Hayden Heritage Park | C |
| Community Center | A | Ames Youth Sports Complex | C |
| Brookside Park | B | Bandshell Park | C |
| Country Gables Park | B | Emma McCarthy Lee Park | C |
| Furman Aquatic Center | B | Moore Memorial Park | C |
| Ice Arena | B | Daley Park and Greenbelt | D |

Staff recommended the implementation of WiFi hotspots in locations with existing or planned City network infrastructure and in four pilot outdoor locations. The City-managed locations were primarily indoor locations used year round, had large public use, or would test the technology. The pilot outdoor locations were a test of the feasibility and public utilization of WiFi hot spots before consideration of expanding the number of hot spots.

Locations chosen for the project included the following:

Pilot Outdoor Locations

- Brookside Park
- Campustown Court
- Hunziker Youth Sports Complex
- Tom Evans Plaza

City Managed Locations

- City Hall
- Community Center
- Furman Aquatic Center
- Ice Arena
- Municipal Pool

Additionally, it was determined that locations with existing or planned City network infrastructure would be installed and managed by the City. Through the Request for Proposal (RFP) process, Council approved entering into a contract with an Ames based company, ICS Technologies, to install, maintain, and operate the pilot outdoor locations.

Current Status

The pilot outdoor location sites were installed and operational by the winter of 2008. The first widespread advertising of the availability of WiFi was completed with the distribution of the 2009 Spring/Summer Parks and Recreation Guide. A standard logo to identify City WiFi was developed, included in the Parks and Recreation Guide, and posted at each hotspot site. In addition to providing reports to the media on the new service, the City held a “Wire-Cutting Celebration” on May 28, 2009 to provide additional public notice.

The City-managed locations were installed and operational in the fall of 2009 and are managed by City staff. The wiring and access points for these hotspots serve both City staff and the public.

All locations have operated with minimal problems with two exceptions. When trees at Brookside Park become fully leafed, there are interference problems with the WiFi nodes. Electrical problems have also occurred as breakers are turned on and off for various lighting systems in the park. The Information Technology Division worked with ICS and identified a solution that resolved the leaf issue, but periodic electrical problems still occur.

The chart below provides information on use of the system by the public:

| Location | Individual Logins | | | Unique Users | | |
|--------------|-------------------|------------|------------------|-----------------|------------|------------------|
| | Average Monthly | Total 2012 | Change From 2011 | Average Monthly | Total 2012 | Change From 2011 |
| City Managed | 2,495 | 29,939 | 41% | 496 | 5,633 | 29% |
| Campustown | 499 | 5,985 | -33% | 75 | 899 | -38% |
| Tom Evans | 421 | 5,047 | -50% | 82 | 982 | -15% |
| Hunziker YSC | 98 | 1,170 | 19% | 34 | 408 | 16% |
| Brookside | 62 | 748 | 11% | 25 | 305 | 33% |

Also, since winter usage figures do not change from the averages above, staff believes that the outside WiFi figures for Tom Evans and Campustown are inflated because of usage from within nearby buildings.

Winter Usage (December 2011 – February 2012)

| Location | Average Monthly Logins | Average Monthly Unique Users |
|--------------|------------------------|------------------------------|
| Tom Evans | 508 | 90 |
| Campustown | 476 | 56 |
| Brookside | 11 | 6 |
| Hunziker YSC | 1 | 1 |

Summary

The implementation of the public WiFi hotspots was approved by City Council partly to test the demand of public Internet connectivity primarily for short-term usage such as checking e-mail or getting information using laptop computers or handheld devices. **This short-term use of the Internet appears to have shifted substantially since the program was started. Short-term outdoor access to the Internet is now accessed more commonly and conveniently using smart phones with faster 3G/4G data plans. Indoor WiFi connectivity for longer term Internet usage is available as a service provided by many businesses in Ames as well as the City. Data indicates that most outdoor locations are less in demand and usage seems to be falling as market penetration of smart phones continues to grow. The City-provided indoor (and Furman Aquatics Center) WiFi locations meet a longer term usage for the public attending meetings at City locations or waiting for family members participating in City programs and have continued to experience strong demand for use.**

The FY 2013/14 budget reflects continuing the service at the current costs (\$4,200 for ICS locations and \$7,868 for City-managed). The current contract expires in August 2013. **Staff would like Council input on direction regarding the continuation of this service.**

There are many options to consider, including the following:

- Continuing the service as currently offered while monitoring usage, and providing a report to Council at a later date.
- Expanding service to include additional outdoor locations.
- Eliminate some, or all, of the Pilot Outdoor locations, but continue the service to the City-managed locations which include all of the indoor locations and Furman Aquatics Center. Under this option the City would continue to offer access to private providers who offer service at City outdoor locations.