

## 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

<b><u>Location</u></b>	<b><u>Priority</u></b>	<b><u>Location</u></b>	<b><u>Priority</u></b>
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
Municipal Pool	B		

**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 direction regarding the continuation of the outdoor service.**

There are, at least, three options to consider in regards to outdoor service:

- 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.