Tell us about Connexion and its impact that it has had on the Fort Collins community.

On August 29th, we will celebrate our one-year launch anniversary!

Over the last year, Connexion staff, our & Power and vendor partners have worked tirelessly to bring Fort Collins Connexion to our community. Construction is full swing with more neighborhoods coming online every week and new customers signing up for service daily.

What concerns do residents have about broadband access?
Access to fair, affordable, equitable service is the number one concern of residents. Connexion came about as a direct result of lack of ubiquitous service in Fort Collins from the local incumbents.

How has the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic impacted broadband connectivity or spurred action to increase and/or diversify connectivity in Fort Collins?

When COVID first began, we had realized the potential risk to the supply chain and took preemptive measures to ensure enough equipment was ordered and in stock to support our build out.

The first month was difficult to get some crews to come to Colorado due to overall fears of COVID. This slowed us down slightly, but since then we are back up to our normal workload and schedule. Since March 2020, the demand for quality broadband connectivity has become even more critical.

Continue reading Fort Collins’ Story here.
Driving through Stillwater on a cold day in October, you'll see a flood of orange lining Main Street. The monochrome palette is not a mistake or a strange coincidence. For people in Stillwater, orange represents loyalty and unwavering support for Oklahoma State University, or “OSU.” Normally, OSU boasts “America’s Greatest Homecoming Celebration.” Students, alumni, and Stillwater residents alike join in a week-long party filled with so many events that it is easy to forget that football is the centerpiece. Community pride is not limited support for OSU, but also for local businesses and artists who bring people together.

Oklahoma, a largely rural state with a significant portion of Native American land, is ranked 47th in the nation for internet connectivity. Broadband access is a statewide problem, leaving about 800,000 residents disconnected. While Stillwater is more connected than most, only around 82% of people have a broadband subscription. Nearly a fifth of the population still lack a connection that is more essential than ever for business, education, healthcare, and many other basic necessities.

Continue reading Corian's Policy Note here.

**AUSTIN AND DETROIT MAYORS APPOINTED TO THE FCC'S INTERGOVERNMENTAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

Chairman Ajit Pai recently announced the new members of the Intergovernmental Advisory Committee (IAC). Austin's Mayor Steve Adler and Detroit's Mike Duggan were two of twelve municipal members appointed to the Committee. Members will work to increase broadband deployment and adoption. (FCC)
Indiana. More than 500 homes are expected to benefit from the launch of a rural gigabit fiber network expansion project in Indiana. Smithville, an Indiana-based broadband provider, deployed 36 miles of new fiber-optics and network equipment in addition to upgrading 117 of their existing copper-based-service customers to fiber connectivity. NCC member municipalities Auburn, Bloomington, Chesterton, and South Bend are located in Indiana. (Broadband Communities)

Minnesota. The Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition launched a speedtest initiative to gather more accurate information on broadband connectivity in rural areas of the state. The pilot portion of the program is happening in St. Louis, Koochiching, and Itasca counties. The test can be accessed online. Minnesota is home to six NCC municipalities including Duluth, Gaylord, LeRoy, Monticello, Windom, and Winthrop. (Redwood Falls Gazette)

New Mexico. With an expected $154.2 million state investment in broadband infrastructure, state lawmakers met to discuss the future of broadband connectivity across New Mexico. The most recent New Mexico Science, Technology, and Telecommunications Committee discussion can be viewed online. Legislative committees have been meeting to learn about pertinent issues as they begin to draft bills to be introduced in the 2021 session. Albuquerque and Socorro, two NCC member cities, could benefit from digital infrastructure investments. (Farmington Daily Times)

North Carolina. CarolinaLink, the policy advocacy group representing North Carolina’s broadband cooperatives, launched a new site during North Carolina’s Rural Broadband Week. Users can find information about advocacy issues on the site. NCC municipalities in North Carolina include Chapel Hill, Charlotte, Davidson, Raleigh, Salisbury, and Wilson. (The Courier Tribune)

San Antonio, Texas. Fifty of the city’s most disconnected neighborhoods are expected to benefit from the work of the ‘Connected Beyond the Classroom’ initiative. The program will leverage city-owned fiber infrastructure to connect students for the upcoming academic year. (Muni Networks)
Members of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce Urge Chairman Pai to Expand the FCC’s Lifeline Program. On August 13, 2020, fifteen members of the committee chaired by Representative Frank Pallone, Jr. sent a letter to Chairman Pai asking for unlimited voice minutes and mobile data for Lifeline participants throughout the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic. Committee members requested a response by September 3, 2020. Lifeline, a program designed to be an aid in times of need and disaster relief, is a tool for local officials who are working to ensure that low-income residents can get online.

Members of Democratic Caucuses Call to Modernize Broadband for Rural and Tribal Lands. During the Democratic National Convention, members of the House Rural and Native American Caucuses issued calls for expanded broadband infrastructure and adoption, highlighting the negative impact that limited connectivity has had on rural and Tribal communities nationwide.

As Coronavirus Forces Many Schools Online this Fall, Millions of Disconnected Students are Being Left Behind. The Coronavirus pandemic has given new urgency to the existing digital divide where a reported 17 million students nationwide did not have access to high-speed internet access at home. Other barriers such as affordability and language limitations exacerbate the issue. Many schools have been forced to implement stopgap measures but need long-term connectivity solutions to bridge the divide.

“Preserving and expanding access to phone and broadband services for low-income residents is more critical than ever. As we deal with the COVID-19 crisis, our economy and government services are becoming almost exclusively digital. We must ensure that everyone in our society can participate and have the opportunity to better their lives. Our public policy must meet this challenge.”

- Mayor Lovely Warren
  Rochester, New York

Washington, DC
NCC Makes Recommendations for State Lawmakers to Address the Homework Gap. NCC’s Executive Director Francella Ochillo recently addressed state lawmakers from across the country during a panel presented by Future Now. It focused on the homework gap and how states have dealt with the widening gap since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ochillo encouraged local and state-level officials to develop connectivity solutions that consider existing barriers to adoption.

Arlington Residents Are Pressuring Local Officials to Explore Public Broadband Options. NCC’s Francella Ochillo participated in a roundtable discussion in which residents are pressuring the County Board to establish a broadband authority in Arlington, Virginia, an NCC member municipality. Ochillo provided background information on the state of connectivity in Arlington and ways to increase adoption in the area.

Census Bureau Ends Counting One Month Early. Local leaders understand the far-reaching impact of an undercount in the 2020 Census. Next Century Cities’ Policy Associate Lukas Pietrzak wrote about how the Census Bureau’s decision to end the decennial count one month earlier than originally announced could impact communities across the country.

Pietrzak emphasizes that “the onus is on local officials to re-tool outreach efforts to increase participation rates within their communities.”

Member Resource Alert. In collaboration with Public Knowledge, NCC has developed a series of fact sheets detailing the benefits of broadband. Check out this resource on broadband and public safety featuring NCC member municipality Boston, Massachusetts.

Why Supporting Broadband is an Investment in Public Safety.

In the 21st century, robust high-speed broadband connectivity and advanced technology are fundamental to public safety. Broadband helps our government and citizens create community, connect to services, and assist first responders, firefighters, emergency medical personnel, and police officers in times of crisis. By ensuring local officials’ ability to address such issues, broadband contributes to the economic, social, and environmental well-being of communities. Key benefits of broadband include maintaining public safety, increasing productivity, and strengthening local government services. Click here to learn more!

Local Impact: Boston, Massachusetts

Despite the Boston Marathon bombings, residents experienced difficulties raising “911 requests” with pagers, particularly the calls that required a live operator to answer. According to the Boston Police Department, the ratio of emergency calls answered directly was higher for public safety calls than any other category. In response, the department launched a multi-year initiative to increase public safety communications networks in unincorporated and underserved areas. In this initiative, the department worked with local broadband providers to add capacity to emergency response, to make sure that calls are answered as quickly as possible. This initiative also helped to keep the public safe. The department also expanded its broadband network for public safety communications and increased the number of higher-speed connections to emergency response locations. This initiative helped to ensure that the emergency response teams could rely on their phones to keep the public safe. For more information, visit the broadbandnow.org website.
Please give us a brief overview on the status of broadband connectivity in Lafayette.

LUS Fiber is in a position to deliver broadband to the City of Lafayette on a 100% community-owned, all-fiber network. Our network is expansive, and systemwide we can provide services up to 10 Gbps. Lafayette is also served by major telecoms such as Cox Communications and AT&T.

What concerns do residents have about broadband access?

The main question we often field from the public is our timeline for expansion into a specific neighborhood, as well as concerns regarding general affordability, and LUS Fiber’s response is threefold. Our expansion efforts are ongoing, within the City of Lafayette, the surrounding Parish of Lafayette, and into our neighboring cities. We are constantly evaluating our services to offer even greater value and quality, not only when compared to other providers, but to our own past performance as well. And we are actively researching and developing new potential avenues for building and supporting connectivity within the community.

Has the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic impacted broadband connectivity or spurred action to increase and/or diversify connectivity in Lafayette?

As the residents of our community have adapted to learning and working remotely, in many cases a loss of income, and an overall greater need for connectivity with loved ones and the world, LUS Fiber’s robust, all-fiber network has exceeded, with unmatched reliability, the increased demand on and for broadband services. We have welcomed a substantial number of new customers dissatisfied with the congestion they’ve experienced on other networks, and we have rolled out new promotional options for greater access and affordability to those most affected by the current health crisis.

Continue reading about connectivity in Lafayette here.
OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEMBERS

OCC Webinar on Financing Broadband Networks in Rural Areas and on Tribal Lands. On Thursday, August 27, at 2:00 p.m. ET, the Office of the Comptroller of Currency is holding a webinar on the various sources of financing that are available to communities seeking to deploy new or upgrade existing networks. The webinar will focus on the lesser known role that banks play in financing projects. The discussion will explore why banks finance rural broadband, financing broadband expansion projects, why banks are incentivized to form partnerships with public agencies, and how new CRA standards broaden consideration for broadband financing. Register for the webinar here.

Building a Fiber Ring in Summit County, Ohio. Summit County, Ohio is seeking interested parties to aid in expanding FairlawnGig to County and Akron municipal buildings. The project is funded by CARES Act grants, and must be completed by December 30, 2020. Submissions will be accepted immediately. Additional information about the expansion project is highlighted in the press release announcing the project. The Request for Qualifications can be found here.

Developing a Digital Inclusion Database. The Local and State Policy team is developing a searchable database for our members that highlights digital inclusion and equity projects happening in your communities. Submit your digital inclusion, equity projects, and collaborations to Lukas Pietrzak via email at lukas@nextcenturycities.org today.

Wikimedia Foundation Issues Call for Tech, Law and Policy Fellowship. The Wikimedia Foundation seeks applicants for a remote Tech, Law and Policy Fellowship. The desired individual will have at least two years of legal and/or public policy experience. The fellow will work closely with public policy managers at WMF for the full duration of the fellowship, which will be at least one year in length. Learn more about the requirements and responsibilities here.
The Digital Divide and Access to Information: A Focus on Ohio Hispanic/Latino Community. The Ohio Commission on Hispanic Latino Affairs examined how the digital divide impacts Hispanic and Latino communities across the state. The report found that many residents primarily rely upon mobile technology for internet access, which is of particular concern as many communities move online in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Researchers identified specific solutions to address these connectivity and adoption issues.

How Increasing Broadband Competition Can Address the Adoption Gap. Voqal's director of telecommunications strategy, Mark Colwell, published an article on the need for more competition in the broadband marketplace. He explains its impact on the two main components driving the lack of connectivity: the access gap and the adoption gap. According to Colwell, "More can be done at all levels of government to drive greater competition in the broadband market, especially from municipal networks and cooperatives."

Profiles of Monopoly: Big Cable and Telecom. The Institute for Local Self Reliance (ILSR) issued a report examining broadband competition in communities nationwide. Using FCC data, the report analyzes statistics available for the largest internet service providers in the country including Comcast, Charter, AT&T, Verizon, CenturyLink, Frontier, and Windstream.

If you have stories to share, we would love to hear them! Please contact Brittany-Rae Gregory at brittany-rae@nextcenturycities.org.