



City of Baltimore

City Council
City Hall, Room 408
100 North Holliday Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

Legislation Text

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INTRODUCTORY*

CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL R
(Resolution)

Introduced by: Councilmember Clarke

A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning
Improving Broadband Internet Access in Baltimore

FOR the purpose of supporting efforts to improve access to broadband internet service in Baltimore, and calling for the development of City policies to advance these efforts as well as a comprehensive broadband development and implementation plan for Baltimore City.

Recitals

Internet access is essential to function in today's society and the need to make use of it seems to increase every day. Internet access is necessary in almost all aspects of daily life including applying for a job, renewing a driver's license, doing homework, or just being part of and actively participating in one's community. In order to be effective, that access must occur at adequate speeds.

Faster bandwidths are also necessary for telemedicine, distance learning, public safety, and economic development. Increasingly, many work from home and also require higher bandwidths. Companies choose to locate in those communities with improved infrastructure and leave those with poor infrastructure.

Although Baltimore has always been a city that embraces innovation and understands the value of infrastructure, in regards to internet access we are in danger of falling behind. Within Baltimore, 20 to 40% of residents do not connect to the Internet at home through wired access. Regarding our schools and libraries, the Federal Communications Commission has set a goal of one Gbps (gigabits per second equal to 1000 megabits per second) per 1000 students. But many of our schools have bandwidths far deficient from these standards, and the available bandwidth within the school walls is even more limited.

The recent Baltimore Broadband Coalition survey of over 1100 respondents showed 97% were

dissatisfied with the choices they have for broadband in Baltimore. Of those who do connect at home, most have the choice of only one provider, allowing no effective competition for Internet services. Because of this, Baltimore consumers generally pay more and have limited ability to tailor their services to their needs.

Baltimore's internet access problems are exacerbated by a relative lack of fiber-optic cable. Fiber-optic cable is necessary to achieve fast Internet speeds and for further distances; a gigabit signal (1000 Mbps) can travel over fiber for more than 35 miles. Over copper, that same signal can travel only 300 feet. While these cables are widely deployed in the counties surrounding our city, they are not commonly deployed to Baltimore homes and businesses.

The recently released Smarter City Task Force draft report acknowledges these problems and recognizes the importance of broadband in mapping out a series of goals and strategies for harnessing technology to build a stronger city.

Previous attempts to address these issues have been unsuccessful in Baltimore City and it is important that we take all necessary steps to ensure that the effort proposed by the Smart City Task Force does not meet a similar fate.

The City owns and should retain valuable and important assets that will be an integral part of a broadband plan such as the conduits through which fiber can pass and poles to which that fiber can be attached. City policies regarding these assets, and other matters, will be critical to determining the success or failure of any effort to bring better internet access to Baltimore. For example, fiber deployment cost can be markedly reduced by an effective city dig-once policy; and, by adding broadband review to the City's site plan review process and master plan studies.

To coordinate City policies and development efforts in the public and private spheres a broadband plan for Baltimore must be rapidly developed. This will require collaboration with multiple stakeholders. Timely execution is critical.

As part of the plan, an entity must be identified to lead the city's efforts to deploy fiber-optic infrastructure and oversee fiber network operations. This can be City government itself, but may be more appropriately an external organization recognized, supported and facilitated by the City. Effective leadership, delineation of entity scope, and adequate funding are essential.

The broadband plan must also include widespread deployment of fiber to all homes, businesses, and other institutions in a balanced strategy that benefits all Baltimoreans. The plan should initially target our schools and libraries and areas of concentrated aggregate demand for broadband as identified by the Baltimore Broadband Coalition to create free Wi-Fi zones around them and in other public spaces and areas of large public gathering.

The goal should be an open fiber infrastructure promoting competition among Internet service providers that can both provide low-cost connectivity options for those with low incomes and offer commercial stakeholders and anchor institutions connectivity operations superior to existing choices.

There are critical steps that the City can, and must, take now even before a full broadband plan is developed. As part of the ongoing renegotiations of the television franchise with Comcast, the city

should explore how quality of service and performance expectations are included as well as establishing appropriate performance standards. Newly negotiated agreements including the distributed antenna systems should consider the city's need for future broadband options. Baltimore City government must decide on the role it wishes to play in implementing a broadband plan, whether that role is to lead development of a municipal broadband utility or to actively facilitate efforts to create an entity outside government and then move forward with effective implementation.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE, That the Council supports efforts to improve access to broadband internet service in Baltimore, and calls for the development of City policies to advance these efforts as well as a comprehensive broadband development and implementation plan for Baltimore City.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor, the Co-Chairs of the Smarter City Task Force, the Chief Information Officer, the Baltimore Broadband Coalition, the Director of Transportation, the Director of Planning, the CEO of Baltimore City Public Schools, the Director of Finance, the Director of Public Works, and the Mayor's Legislative Liaison to the City Council.

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