



VILLAGE OF DOBBS FERRY BOARD OF TRUSTEES AGENDA

MEETING DATE: APRIL 26, 2022

AGENDA ITEM SECTION: DISCUSSION AND RESOLUTION ITEMS

AGENDA ITEM NO. : 7

AGENDA ITEM:

DISCUSSION: DISCUSSION TO AUTHORIZE THE VILLAGE TO ACCEPT GRANT FUNDING FOR THE CDBG WESTCHESTER COUNTY PLANNING AGREEMENT - C-CDBG-CV-20-35

RESOLUTION: CONSIDER A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE VILLAGE TO ACCEPT GRANT FUNDING FOR THE CDBG WESTCHESTER COUNTY PLANNING AGREEMENT - C-CDBG-CV-20-35 ; AND AUTHORIZE THE VILLAGE ADMINISTRATOR TO SIGN THE CDBG WESTCHESTER COUNTY PLANNING AGREEMENT - C-CDBG-CV-20-35

ITEM BACKUP DOCUMENTATION:

1. MEMORANDUM DATED APRIL 21, 2022 FROM KENDRA GARRISON/SUPERINTENDENT OF RECREATION TO MAYOR ROSSILLO AND THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
2. PROJECT NARRATIVE: DOBBS FERRY COVID RESPONSE
3. DRAFT RESOLUTION



DOBBS FERRY

NEW YORK

Parks & Recreation Department

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MEMO

To: Mayor Rossillo & Board of Trustees

CC: Melissa Ferraro, Village Administrator

From: Kendra Garrison, Superintendent of Recreation

Date: April 21, 2022

Re: Westchester County CDBG Program – Installation of Wi-Fi Access

The Village was recently awarded \$32,000 in CDBG grant funding for the installation of Wi-Fi access in the Embassy Center, Library and parks. This grant was submitted back in the fall, by Alissa Fassman and under the guidance of Interim Village Administrator, Richard Leins. Unlike other grants, this one is not a matching grant, so it does not require the Village to allocate any funds at this time, unless the total project cost (once its bid out) comes in over the \$32,000.

I have attached the project narrative that was submitted for the grant so that you may have a better understanding of what we are looking to do with the funding.

It is my recommendation at this time, that the Board accept the funding and that we move forward with this project.

Project Narrative: Dobbs Ferry COVID Response

The Challenge

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic numerous public and private institutions instituted and/or expanded online services in order to reduce the kind of human interaction that threatens health and safety due to the threat of viral transmission. Access to the internet has become vital to everyday needs in our Village. From remote learning in our Dobbs Ferry School District; to online permitting, payments and services conducted entirely online when our local government offices closed; to online healthcare appointments; to the remote work requirements implemented by private industry - those who could not access the internet at home have faced daily challenges throughout the pandemic crisis.

Project Goal: WiFi access in public facilities in low/moderate income areas

To expand public access to the internet in Dobbs Ferry, our project would increase the strength of our WiFi in two of our municipal buildings facilitating exterior access to the internet, and would install new WiFi capacity in two public spaces where it did not exist previously. We would also install exterior furniture at two of the sites where it does not already exist to facilitate exterior wifi access. At the Community Center, we would upgrade our HVAC filtration to include MERV-13 filters. These four sites are located in two distinct areas of our Village (See Map A) both of which are situated in low and moderate income block groups. All four project locations are freely open to the public at no charge.

1) The Library: WiFi expanded and strengthened

The Dobbs Ferry Public Library is a critical hub for the Village. Well beyond book circulation, the Library offers educational programming, classes for children and seniors, computer and tech classes for adults, assistance with tax preparation, public access to computers and technical, and a frequently used space for work and after-school study. Prior to the renovation of the Embassy Community Center, the Library served as the sole heating and cooling center in the Village, providing an important comfort retreat in critical times, particularly valuable to residents without access to air conditioning at home, and electric charging capacity through roof-top solar panels in times of outage. It is now one of two locations for residents to find refuge in crisis periods.

The Library's seven public computers were used on a daily basis prior to the pandemic, with an average of 250 sign-ins per month. Prior to the pandemic, our wireless system averaged 750 connections per month. Those connections were almost all from inside the library during open hours, as our current system is outdated and underpowered for the size of the building. During Covid, when we were shut down our average went down to 40 connections, probably from people sitting right in front of the library doors. When we reopened last summer, connections only went back up to 125 per month, and then during the second surge when we had curbside only service, that number went down to 80 connections per month. When the library had to close to in-person appointments last spring and this winter, providing curbside service only due to the surge in virus cases, the computers could no longer be used, and the weak WiFi access did not extend to the exterior of the building, cutting off a critical service for our community.

The Library building is constructed of cement block walls, and it only has three access points to serve the entire space. Internet speed currently clocks at 300 Mbps. Current industry suggestion for proper coverage is to have seven access points and 1G speed to provide optimal service to users both inside and outside the building.

In addition to providing computer and wireless access, prior to the pandemic, the library circulated approximately 850 eBooks per month, which are only accessible via the internet. Since Covid happened our usage has increased 177%, an average of 1500 eBooks read per month. Clearly, when people's access to the library building is limited, those with internet in their homes can seamlessly continue reading and learning from home. An expanded wireless network will allow us to serve people in our community with less access in their homes.

To meet community need during COVID, with the help of the Friends of the Library, a citizen group, the Library purchased the equipment and service for 10 Wifi Hotspots to circulate to library users. These were purchased to assist families with school children needing remote access to their classes. The Library also recently got a connection to the Westchester County PC Users Group, who have donated two refurbished laptops to the library. These will eventually be available to circulate to people in need of computer access, and to use for computer training.

Another way we are assisting families with distance learning at this time is by working with SPRING Community Partners, a local non-profit organization that serves the most needy families in our school district. The DFPL is providing space free of charge for students to work with SPRING's homework helpers to keep the kids on track with their studies. SPRING provides their own laptops and we provide wireless internet service in a combined effort to assist families with children who have fallen behind since Covid. We can imagine in another pandemic lockdown scenario, that we would be able to provide tented remote learning opportunities in our courtyard, a safer alternative.

Strengthened WiFi capacity at our Library would allow residents with mobile, laptop and ipad devices to access the internet in our entryway courtyard which has newly installed benches (Photo A) and on our exterior patio (Photo B). For families with children at home doing distance learning, this would be an invaluable resource. Coupled with our anticipated laptop lending program, we believe we will be able to assist families that might not otherwise have access for their children to stay on top of their studies.

The strengthened WiFi would also allow residents to spread out with their devices throughout the building in order to maintain social distance, without having to concentrate in the areas where the signal is strongest. Finally, the strengthened WiFi would allow for more people to access the system at the same time without losing speed and bandwidth.

2) The Embassy Community Center

The newly renovated Embassy Community Center was completed during the pandemic. Our virtual re-opening ceremony took place on December 18, 2020. Prior to its renovation, the facility served as an important community hub for seniors and children, and both constituencies are eager to return to the in-person programming they once enjoyed as soon as it is safe. The Embassy Community Center has long served as the place where seniors come for daily lunches through the nutrition program operated by the Town of Greenburgh. The Embassy Center has been the location for exercise classes, senior programming, and community events, a place for seniors to socialize, as well as a location for after-

school programming for children. When in-person activities are safe, this programming will resume once again.

With the installation of solar panels and an efficient heating and cooling system, the Embassy Center is now the primary heating and cooling center for the Community, with charging capacity provided by solar energy and an updated back-up propane generator in times of outage and crisis. This space is particularly valuable to those without access to air conditioning at home. There are three separate spaces in the facility including a large event space to allow for socially distanced activity. The space serves as our senior hub, and when we reach sufficient vaccination levels, we will be able to provide opportunities for social interaction for our seniors who have suffered from extensive isolation during this pandemic crisis.

Currently, WiFi in the facility does not reach beyond the activity room. The project would strengthen and expand WiFi capacity that would cover the large event room, and extend outdoors to the exterior patio behind the building, better supporting social distancing and other safety practices. Seniors, the largest demographic served by our Embassy Community Center, have also been the demographic the most challenged by the expansion of online services. Expanded WiFi in the Community Center will help our Senior Advocate and other Recreation staff serve as an important resource for questions about new online service requirements.

In addition to expanding the WiFi capacity, this project would install exterior furniture in the small courtyard at the rear of the building. Tables, chairs, and heating lamps would enable students and seniors alike to conduct work, access medical appointments, and other critical online tools when it is not safe to work indoors. To help make the interior of this important facility safer during a pandemic, this project would also upgrade interior air filtration with MERV-13 air filters.

3) Memorial Park

Memorial Park is a public park in one of the low/moderate income block groups in our Village. It contains a playground, a baseball field, and is home to our Recreation Department office which during the pandemic and while our Community Center was in the process of renovation, has served as a location for after-school programming. The park is easily accessed from apartments and multi-family housing in our downtown area.

The WiFi installation project would install hardware in the Recreation office that would extend the WiFi reach to cover the playground area and exterior seating areas around the building. Public exterior access to WiFi would serve residents who have had to rely on mobile, laptop and other digital devices to conduct every day activities, and benefit parents supervising their children at play. By extending the reach in the park, residents would not have to rely on interior office hours for public WiFi access.

This project would also install eight picnic tables in the wi-fi accessible seating area near the building so that afterschool classes and senior activities could continue to run even when it is safest to hold public gatherings outside.

4) Gould Park

Gould Park is the second largest public park in our Village, and is located in a neighborhood home to low and moderate income households. The park is in easy walking distance to the Middle and High School,

and serves as a place where youth and families gather. The park contains a sports field, a basketball court, a playground, a pool and a picnic area under a large maple tree. The WiFi installation would cover the entire upper half of the park from the restroom facilities across to the picnic area and playground.

The Gould Park playground is in the process of being improved with CDBG funding. Its renovation is scheduled to be completed this summer, and the new design, produced in partnership with the County planning department, ensures that the site will be an important and comfortable gathering place for our residents. By extending WiFi access to both Gould and Memorial parks, these 24-hour public spaces become not only an important source for rest and recreation, but can serve as a public lifeline to critical online activities as requirements for internet access continue to expand.

Demonstration of Project Need

The dramatic shift to online services in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that public internet access is no longer a nice-to-have amenity, but is instead critical to the provision of basic societal needs. The following are a few examples of why public internet access is so important to our residents who do not have access at home:

- 1) The Dobbs Ferry School District shifted to 100% remote learning in the spring of 2020. While the school was able to provide Chromebooks for the students who did not have access to devices at home, the District did not provide public internet access to families that did not have it. Several private companies provided free mobile hotspots, but relying on the generosity of private industry in times of crisis cannot be a matter of public policy.
- 2) Municipal offices closed to public access at the height of the pandemic surge. To protect public employees, we encouraged residents to conduct government business remotely as often as possible. Some government services were provided by appointment only. We instituted a new online system for permits and have been exploring additional online services to reduce in-person contact and improve efficiency. In the course of these changes, we have come to understand just how many of our residents do not have internet access at home, particularly seniors.
- 3) After-school programming and homework assistance: The Springhurst Children's Center is a private provider of affordable afterschool care based at the elementary school. During the pandemic they lost access to their space when the school district was forced to expand to all corners of their facility to accommodate social distancing requirements. The program serves many of our neediest facilities who receive financial assistance from a local non-profit, SPRING Community Partners. The afterschool program was forced to operate out of a tent with no access to WiFi for school work. By expanding WiFi access in our parks and public facilities like our community center, we would have an opportunity to collaborate with such programs to ensure that children without internet access at home have the opportunity to do their school work in times of pandemic crisis.

National Objectives and the expansion of public WiFi access

One of the primary objectives of the CDBG grant assistance program is to improve the lives of low and moderate income residents. As has become painfully obvious in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, low and moderate income people are disproportionately disadvantaged by the requirements of an increasingly internet-based society. Whether it meant not being able to access adequate healthcare

because online portals, appointment systems, and information were difficult to reach, or economic opportunities were restricted because of a lack of internet access, our local government has come to the realization that internet access is becoming a critical need for health, safety and well-being.

By situating public internet access in our public spaces, some interior facilities and some exterior 24/7 public spaces, the Village of Dobbs Ferry improves access to those who do not benefit from and/or cannot afford the internet at home.

**RESOLUTION OF THE VILLAGE OF DOBBS FERRY BOARD OF TRUSTEES TO AUTHORIZE
CONTRACT WITH WESTCHESTER COUNTY FOR CDBG PROGRAM
(INSTALLATION OF WI-FI ACCES)**

WHEREAS, the Village of Dobbs Ferry was recipient of an award of funds totaling \$32,000 under the Community Development Block Grant ("CDBG") program for the project to install Wi – Fi access in the Embassy Center, Library and parks; and

WHEREAS, in connection with the CDBG program and applicable regulations, the County of Westchester, as the entity overseeing the release and coordination of grant funds on behalf of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, requires execution of an agreement setting forth the Village's obligations; and

WHEREAS, the Village Board herby acknowledges the award of grant funds in the amount of \$32,000 from the Community Development Block Grant ("CDBG").

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT

RESOLVED, that the Board of Trustees of the Village of Dobbs Ferry hereby authorize the Village Administrator to execute and sign Contract Number: C-CDBG –CV-20-35 with the County of Westchester in connection with receipt of grand funds under the CDBG Program for Installation of Wi- Fi access.