

NEWS RELEASE



Office of Communications

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 16, 2020

CHULA VISTA ADOPTS GROUNDBREAKING PLAN TO CLOSE DIGITAL DIVIDE
Plan will guide efforts to make technology more accessible to vulnerable communities

As the coronavirus pandemic drives public services online, the City of Chula Vista has set out a comprehensive strategy to connect more of its community members to the internet.

The Chula Vista City Council voted unanimously on May 26 to adopt a Digital Equity and Inclusion Plan, which lays out a series of actions the City will take to ensure every Chula Vista resident has affordable access to high-speed internet, as well as the skills and devices needed to use it.

Chula Vista is the first city in San Diego County to adopt such a plan.

“None of us saw COVID-19 coming when we were working on this plan, but this crisis has emphasized how critically important it is for our entire community to be able to connect to services online,” said Mayor Mary Salas. “Many of our residents who need services, like food deliveries for seniors or unemployment information, don’t have a smartphone or high-speed internet. That really makes a difference in our ability to meet people’s needs.”

The Digital Equity and Inclusion Plan helps the City identify where the digital divide exists by providing key statistics. Key figures include:

- Broadband internet service is available at 98.2 percent of residences in Chula Vista
- Approximately 11.4 percent of Chula Vista residents do not have a broadband Internet subscription
- Approximately 4.7 percent of Chula Vista residents do not have a device they can use to connect to the internet.

Among the groups most impacted by the digital divide are disabled residents; the homeless and housing insecure; job seekers; low-income and unbanked residents; migrants and refugees; residents who do not speak English; seniors; and students.

The plan defines digital equity as “the condition in which all individuals within our community have access to technology devices, Internet connection, and digital literacy skills, giving the freedom to fully participate in the

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economy, education, and other opportunities.” Digital inclusion is defined as “the actions undertaken by the City and local stakeholders to improve digital equity with intentional strategies to overcome barriers to access and use technology.”

“Digital equity is no longer optional,” said Councilmember Steve Padilla. “The post-COVID-19 world requires us to look deeply and act swiftly on this issue. I’m happy that Chula Vista is taking the lead in San Diego County.”

The plan lays out a series of goals, objectives and strategic actions the City will take to bridge the gap.

Some of the goals require the City to expand and improve the technology services it provides to residents, such as computer classes offered through the library and senior center, as well as enhancing the accessibility of the City website for people with disabilities and people who speak a language other than English.

Other actions outlined in the plan require the City to pursue grants and partnerships with outside organizations to offer new programs and services to residents, such as mobile WiFi hotspots and free or low-cost computing devices.

The City Council’s adoption of the plan was the culmination of a year-long process of research, interviews and community meetings. The City consulted with regional and state agencies, such as the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) and the California Department of Rehabilitation, as well local agencies, including the Chula Vista Elementary School District. The City also worked to gather information and input from the private sector, including T-Mobile, Cox Communications, Verizon, Media 3 Communications, and San Diego Gas & Electric. Community-based organizations, such as South Bay Community Services and the Chula Vista Community Collaborative, were also consulted.

The adoption of the Digital Equity and Inclusion Plan came just a month after the City Council voted to spend \$650,000 to purchase 2,000 WiFi hotspot devices for families with children who need internet access for virtual and online classes. The Chula Vista Elementary School District distributed the hotspots at the end of May to foster youth, homeless youth, special education students and other families who could not otherwise afford internet access.

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