City of Columbus

Legislation Details (With Text)

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Title: To authorize the Director of the Department of Technology to enter into agreements with Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) and Franklin County Educational Service Center (ESCCO) for broadband access and learning devices to 10,000 students; to authorize the expenditure of $1,500,000.00 in federal CARES Act Funding to reimburse Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) and Franklin County Educational Service Center (ESCCO) for the above; and to declare an emergency. ($1,500,000.00)

Sponsors: Rob Dorans, Elizabeth Brown

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Attachments: 1. 1793-2020 EXP, 2. CoC_MORPC_ESCCO_MOUv4.pdf

Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result
7/30/2020	1	CITY CLERK	Attest	
7/29/2020	1	MAYOR	Signed	
7/27/2020	1	COUNCIL PRESIDENT	Signed	
7/27/2020	1	Columbus City Council	Approved	Pass

BACKGROUND:

This ordinance authorizes the City of Columbus, Department of Technology, to enter into an agreement with Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) and Franklin County Educational Service Center (FCESC) hereinafter referred to as MORPC and ESCCO. Under the terms of the agreement, or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), the City will reimburse MORPC and ESCCO $1,500,000.00 in federal CARES Act Funding for broadband access and learning devices to 10,000 students.

According to the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA), digital inclusion refers to "the activities necessary to ensure that all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to and use of information and communication technologies. "This includes but is not limited to affordable internet, internet-enabled devices, digital literacy training, and technical support. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, Franklin County struggled with disparties in access to digital technology. Furthermore, Columbus is well above the national average in two key statistics (households that did not have access to fiber optic broadband (e.g., cable) and households that had no access to broadband of any type (e.g., cellular data, "hotspot" device), which indicates our region is lagging behind similarly sized cities/regions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made digital inclusion an even more pressing issue - Americans are working from home in unprecedented numbers, and most school-aged children are expected to utilize some form of remote education. Lack of a fast, reliable, and affordable internet connection and an appropriate device to access the internet makes everyday life extremely difficult, and only compounds existing structural inequities in our community. The number of families in

Franklin County without internet access is unacceptably high. Both a short-term/COVID-19 related response and a long-term strategy are necessary to reduce and eliminate historical, institutional and structural barriers to universal broadband access and use of digital technology.

The City, MORPC and ESCCO will enter into this MOU in which the City will provide $1,500,000.00 in federal CARES Act funding to MORPC and ESCCO, under certain conditions, so that MORPC and ESCCO may acquire the broadband connectivity and learning devices needed for the City of Columbus students enrolled in public and chartered school districts in Central Ohio and to achieve the goal of providing sufficient access to enable remote learning devices for all students.

While long-term strategies for universal broadband adoption should continue to be pursued, the pilot program outlined in this document seeks, first and foremost, to address digital access needs for households with school-aged children, who will be starting the 2020-2021 school year in less than 60 days. Additionally, some funding sources connected to the COVID-19 response, namely CARES Act Funding, have a short timeframe for implementation. Given these conditions, the following parameters below were identified to guide the development of the pilot program:

The target start date for implementation should be around August 1, 2020, and the program should last for a minimum of one (1) year, tentatively August 1, 2020 through July 31, 2021. The program should be designed such that funding covering the entire program period can be expended by December 30, 2020. Given the need for rapid implementation, the program should require no new infrastructure development, and ideally no equipment installation by the provider (e.g., home cable installation). As total demand is currently unknown, the program should start with a modest estimate and be scalable to meet higher demand. The program should favor existing relationships, funding strategies and implementation models. The program should be flexible and additive, allowing for a range of partners to participate and should not preclude other strategies from advancing simultaneously.

FISCAL IMPACT:
The City has received federal CARES Act money to assist with the funding of municipal operations during and related to the COVID-19 pandemic. These funds are available to provide to the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) and Franklin County Educational Service Center (ESCCO) for the above-described purpose.

EMERGENCY DESIGNATION:
Emergency designation is being requested so that the said funds may be transferred at the earliest possible date.

To authorize the Director of the Department of Technology to enter into agreements with Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) and Franklin County Educational Service Center (ESCCO) for broadband access and learning devices to 10,000 students; to authorize the expenditure of $1,500,000.00 in federal CARES Act Funding to reimburse Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) and Franklin County Educational Service Center (ESCCO) for the above; and to declare an emergency. ($1,500,000.00)

WHEREAS, due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, many City of Columbus students enrolled in public and chartered school districts will be learning virtually during the 2020-2021 school year; and

WHEREAS, for the same reason, Columbus City Schools students in grades prekindergarten to 12th grade will engage in blended learning and in virtual instruction; and

WHEREAS, it is important to the City of Columbus, and crucial to the success of all of the City's students, that they have broadband internet access and needed learning devices; and

WHEREAS, the NDIA and AECOM Broadband reports recently demonstrated insufficient access for students in Columbus, and in order to provide broadband access and computing devices for students to learn virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic; and

WHEREAS, only the MORPC and the ESCCO estimates that $1,500,00.00 would be needed to provide broadband connections and personal computers for ten thousand (10,000) students; and

WHEREAS, the Mayor shares a vision with MORPC and ESCCO that all students should have the tools and resources that they need to succeed; and

WHEREAS, the City has available federal CARES Act Funding that can be used to assist MORPC and ESCCO with this initiative and has agreed to reimburse MORPC and ESCCO $1,500,000.00 for broadband access and learning devices for 10,000 students; and

WHEREAS, the City, MORPC and ESCCO will enter into this MOU in which the City will provide $1,500,000.00 in federal CARES Act funding to MORPC and ESCCO, under certain conditions, so that MORPC and ESCCO may acquire the broadband connectivity and learning devices needed for the City of Columbus students enrolled in public and chartered school districts in Central Ohio and to achieve the goal of providing sufficient access to enable remote learning devices for all students; and

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in the need for broadband connectivity access and learning devices for 10,000 students; and

WHEREAS, expenditure of CARES Act funding to enter into agreements with MORPC and ESCCO to enable the City to reimburse MORPC and ESCCO $1,500,000.00 for broadband connectivity access and learning devices to 10,000 students is necessary to address virtual learning due to the emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic public health emergency; and

WHEREAS, such expenditure of funds has not been previously accounted for in the 2020 Budget; and

WHEREAS, an emergency exists in the usual daily operations of the Department of Technology in that it is immediately necessary to authorize the Director to enter into agreements with MORPC and ESCCO to enable the City to reimburse MORPC and ESCCO $1,500,000.00 for broadband access and learning devices for 10,000 students, for the immediate preservation of the public health, peace, property, safety and welfare; now therefore:

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF COLUMBUS:

SECTION 1. That the Director of the Department of Technology be and is hereby authorized to enter into an agreement, or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), with Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) and Franklin County Educational Service Center (ESCCO) to enable the City to reimburse MORPC and ESCCO $1,500,000.00 in federal CARES Act Funding for broadband access and learning devices to 10,000 students.

SECTION 2. That the expenditure of or so much thereof as may be necessary is hereby authorized to be expended from federal CARES Act Funding as follows in the attachment to this ordinance **(Please see 1793-2020 EXP).**

SECTION 3. That the City Auditor is authorized to make any accounting changes to revise the funding source for all contracts or contract modifications associated with this ordinance.

SECTION 4. That the funds necessary to carry out the purpose of this ordinance are hereby deemed appropriated, and the City Auditor shall establish such accounting codes as necessary.

SECTION 5. That for the reasons stated in the preamble hereto, which is hereby made a part hereof, this ordinance is hereby declared to be an emergency measure and shall take effect and be in force from and after its passage and approval by the Mayor, or ten days after passage if the Mayor neither approves nor vetoes the same.