



Information and General Services Agency

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NEVADA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS Board Agenda Memo

MEETING DATE: October 12th, 2021

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Steve Monaghan, Chief Information Officer

SUBJECT: Resolution to execute a contract with Ascent Environmental, Inc to develop a broadband programmatic environmental impact report in an amount not to exceed \$276,000 for a term of October 12, 2021 through August 31, 2022 and amending the FY 2021-22 Information and General Services Administration Budget (4/5 affirmative vote)

RECOMMENDATION: Approve resolution

FUNDING: \$226,000 from the PG&E settlement funds and \$50,000 from a grant from the California Emerging Technology Fund. A budget amendment is included to increase the FY 2021-22 Information and General Services Administration Budget.

BACKGROUND: Broadband is a top Board of Supervisors' priority, becoming a standalone Board Objective in 2021. The State of California has allocated \$1 billion dollars in rural community last mile broadband funding. The Federal government has previously allocated billions of dollars in broadband grants and is close to allocating billions more in Congress's pending major infrastructure bill. There is an expected industry broadband construction capacity shortfall forecasted that will take place once these funds start being allocated to communities. As such, communities that are the readiest, will be first in line to start construction projects, where the remaining communities could be years out.

Communities just like Nevada County will competitively compete for this funding across our State and the Nation. The County broadband team's goal and strategy to securing funding for our community is to make our County as Broadband Provider friendly and attractive, and local broadband projects as "shovel ready" as possible. A major component on both of these fronts is to lessen the environmental review, uncertainty risk, and approval burden of cost and time for broadband construction

projects.

Further, it is the objective of the Nevada County Board of Supervisors to strive to achieve Digital Equity so that all Nevada County residents have access to broadband infrastructure to improve their quality of life. A Countywide Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (EIR) is intended to comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) effectively and efficiently to facilitate accelerated deployment of ubiquitous broadband infrastructure in Nevada County

The purpose of the Countywide Programmatic EIR is to analyze the overall impacts and benefits from approving and permitting the construction and installation of ubiquitous high-speed Internet infrastructure throughout Nevada County so that each proposed broadband project can be evaluated in the context of the net contributions to advancing the official policy of the Nevada County Board of Supervisors. The Programmatic EIR will:

- Provide a reliable foundation of data and acceptable methodology to assess impacts for any specific broadband deployment project.
- Avoid duplication of effort to gathering and analyzing factors that remain constant from project to project.
- Identify known environmental and cultural assets to be protected and/or restored with an approved set of preservation measures and/or mitigations.
- Inform the development of ministerial processes and procedures to streamline county broadband project approvals and permitting.
- Save time and money for both the County of Nevada and broadband project applicants, resulting in greater government and economic efficiencies, reducing the amount of County staff time required to review broadband projects and avoiding duplication of applicant costs.

It is further intended that the adoption and certification of a Countywide Programmatic EIR by the Nevada County Board of Supervisors will provide a legal rebuttable presumption for broadband deployment project sponsors to potential prospective litigation objecting to their proposed projects.

The County is currently actively working with Spiral Fiber on a proposed fiber broadband project to serve an estimated 10,000 homes and 400 businesses. This EIR is designed to benefit any and all potential fiber Broadband Providers' construction projects. It will also include project-specific analysis of the Spiral Fiber near-term project to assist in moving this project to formal County approval.

\$50,000 in funding for this project comes from the California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF). CETF President Sunne McPeak has been actively working with your county broadband team on this project as they would like to see it become a

transferable best practice across California for other counties to implement. The remaining funding will come from the PG&E settlement funds your Board designated earlier this year to support a variety of county broadband initiatives including this specific project. The CEO's office is looking at the possibility to leverage American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding for this project if allowable. The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) has allocated \$50 million in broadband technical assistance grants that the County may be able to apply for in early 2022 to assist in covering these costs as well.

The County's Purchasing Agent approved a sole source procurement process with Ascent Environmental, Inc. as they are the only environmental firm to have performed an environmental report for a Nevada County Fiber to the Home project (Race Communications), have deep knowledge of the area's environmental issues and County's requirements pertaining to broadband construction, and as time is of the essence for the County to be prepared and competitive for the pending State and broadband Federal funding opportunities.

Item Initiated by: Steve Monaghan

Approved by: Steve Monaghan