

Metronet fiber system set for 2013 in Decorah

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DECORAH, Iowa --- The city will be rich in fiber once a proposed network is in place, according to officials.

The Decorah Metronet project, a planned fiber-optic network, will enhance communication between local agencies, and officials expect it will be in place by the summer of 2013.

The city is pursuing the initiative with four other "anchors" as part of an intergovernmental agreement.

The others are the Decorah School District, Luther College, Winneshiek Medical Center and Winneshiek County.

Metronet will feature multiple interconnected, end-point locations, including City Hall, the Winneshiek County Courthouse, Winneshiek Medical Center, Keystone Area Education Agency, Luther's Preus Library, Decorah Public Library, St. Benedict School, the city's wastewater treatment and water department and a variety of public schools.

Planning for the Decorah Metronet began more than three years ago, according to City Administrator Jerry Freund.

The "springboard" for the project, estimated to cost slightly more than \$742,000 plus engineering fees, was a \$520,000 broadband technologies opportunities program grant from federal stimulus funds.

Freund applied for the funds with assistance from the other members of the agreement. The grant is also tied into a larger application submitted by the Iowa Communications Network.

Decorah is one of only two "sub-recipients," according to Freund. The anchors will split remaining costs.

Freund said Metronet represents "a great opportunity for this community."

"It's a chance to reduce costs now and in the future for broadband needs, and it can provide quick, immediate backup storage in case of an emergency," he said.

Jon Lubke is the county's geographic information system and information technology coordinator.

"The network will also allow the county to consolidate much of its hardware infrastructure and applications, while adding redundancy and disaster recovery options," he said.

The Decorah School District is already realizing the value of fiber. Officials installed 72 strands two years ago when leased lines no longer kept up with demand, according to Kurt DeVore, director of information.

Fiber-optic cable is in place to all the district's buildings, except West Side.

West Side will be connected when the Metronet lines are installed and the district becomes part of the loop.