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Broadband grant application withdrawn, YVEA announces plans for Craig buildout

CRAIG, COLORADO, NOVEMBER 25, 2018 — The Moffat County Broadband Initiative (MCBI) experienced a significant change to its course of action this month.

After investigating a potential partnership with Yampa Valley Electric Association (YVEA), revising its Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) application and presenting to the State Advisory Committee, MCBI leaders announced this week that the City of Craig and Moffat County have withdrawn their application for state funding for broadband construction.

“We are thrilled that our hard work toward building a design and cost model for a municipal broadband network has brought us to a decision to instead support partner Yampa Valley Electric Association in constructing and operating a fiber-to-the-premise network,” said Michelle Perry, executive director of Craig/Moffat Economic Development Partnership (CMEDP) and broadband project champion. “Our end goal was to contract with private providers to offer last-mile service to fully meet the needs at our community anchor institutions, businesses and residences.

“With YVEA’s engagement with our committee and subsequent announcement of a broadband network plan, we are satisfied that our goals for service to our health, public safety, education and government facilities will be met. This model will allow for construction of the critical infrastructure needed for a solid economic foundation for our community’s sustainability.”

MCBI’s revised plan included 14.7 miles of middle-mile fiber infrastructure serving 38 community anchor institutions in Craig and the buildout of a Meet Me Center. YVEA CEO Steve Johnson explained that the cooperative intends to offer the same open-access network MCBI had planned while including similar middle-mile infrastructure and fiber extending to those entities and residences that sign up for service.

“We have similar interests to the City of Craig — to serve our member organizations, businesses and residents. This project falls in line with our mission of providing critical infrastructure to our members,” Johnson said. “The work done through the Moffat County Broadband Initiative — with the City of Craig, Moffat County and CMEDP at the helm — acted as a catalyst for us to enter the broadband space, as many electric cooperatives across the country are doing. The collaboration within the community is making this buildout possible.”

MCBI is a joint effort of several local community anchor institutions, led by City of Craig, Moffat County and CMEDP. In addition to those three entities, Memorial Regional Health, Colorado Northwestern Community College, Moffat County School District and Moffat County Local Marketing District have also contributed to a three-year contribution for CMEDP to

complete the administrative work for the network. Because the project objectives have been met earlier than planned, 2019 contributions will not be collected and any unused funds will be equitably returned to funding partners, Perry said.

Craig Mayor John Ponikvar said this collaborative effort with YVEA is the “best possible outcome” the City and the MCBI committee could have envisioned.

“We initially were pursuing building a municipally owned broadband network to meet our community’s needs for this essential building block of a sustainable community and economy,” Ponikvar said. “With YVEA’s intention to construct a similar network and offer service directly to customers, we are confident this will meet our constituents’ need for abundant, resilient, affordable internet for business and leisure.”

Johnson noted that YVEA is currently modeling its network design and will be in touch with members soon with internet service offerings.

For more information on the Moffat County Broadband Initiative, visit ci.craig.co.us/government/broadband or contact Perry at 620-4370 or director@cmedp.com.

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Photos:

MCBI 1: Michelle Perry, executive director of Craig/Moffat Economic Development Partnership (CMEDP) and Moffat County Broadband Initiative champion, presents Nov. 7 to the State Advisory Committee about the City of Craig and Moffat County’s request for project funding through the Colorado Department of Local Affairs’ Energy/Mineral Impact Assistance Fund Grant.

MCBI 2: Moffat County Broadband Initiative and Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) officials pose for a photo following a grant presentation to the State Advisory Committee on Nov. 7 in Burlington. Pictured, from left, are Craig City Manager Peter Brixius, DOLA Regional Manager Kimberly Bullen, Craig/Moffat Economic Development Partnership Executive Director Michelle Perry, DOLA Executive Director Irv Halter, Craig City Councilman Derek Duran, Yampa Valley Electric Association CEO Steve Johnson, Mammoth Networks Vice President of Colorado Operations Evan Biagi, DOLA Regional Manager Greg Winkler and Craig Mayor John Ponikvar.