

County General Plan – Communications Element

Remarks by Sean McLaughlin for Access Humboldt, September 9, 2010

Humboldt County's General Plan should include a visionary new Communications Element focusing on fundamental policies for informing and engaging communities to sustain democracy.

The General Plan can provide a solid policy framework to support local broadband media for the next generation.

County policies can help ensure that local broadband media networks serve public safety, health, education, civic engagement, economic development and other public purposes.

The Plan must affirm that: **Communication is an essential human need and a fundamental human right.**

From the Knight Commission report "Informing Communities: Sustaining Democracy in the Digital Age" (2009), there are three essential recommendations that should be adopted as goals in Humboldt County's General Plan:

A: Maximizing the availability of relevant and credible information: People need relevant and credible information to be free and self-governing.

B: Enhancing the information capacity of individuals: People need tools, skills, and understanding to use information effectively.

C: Promoting public engagement: To pursue their true interests, people need to be engaged with information and with each other."

To reach these goals, five important principles must guide the General Plan:

1. ENSURE UNIVERSAL ACCESS

Critical elements of universal access include:

- **Infrastructure access.**
- **Affordable access.**
- **Workplace access.**
- **Public access.**
- **Multi-cultural, multi-language and multi-ability information access.**
- **Mobile connections – future of spectrum**

County of Humboldt must engage with local, State, Tribal and Federal governments to require and develop improvements for communications service that people already have, as well as increased community access to other affordable, high-quality mobile devices and services.



2. SUPPORT DIGITAL LITERACY

Education must include next generation communications, such as basic digital literacy, media production, and e-commerce (how to start a business online).

3. PRESERVE NET NEUTRALITY

Principles include:

- Access lawful Internet content of choice
- Run applications and use services of choice (subject to needs of law enforcement)
- Connect choice of legal devices that do not harm the network
- Choose between multiple network providers, application and service providers, and content providers

County of Humboldt should endorse these principles and engage with other jurisdictions to adopt and enforce network neutrality rules and laws mandating the equal treatment of all communication consistent with these FCC principles.

4. PROTECT RIGHT TO PRIVACY

The freedom to hold opinions without interference requires safeguards to protect privacy. All members of the community must be protected from government and corporate surveillance.

The right to privacy includes:

- Personal data protection, including the collection and handling of data such as credit information, medical and government records
- Communications privacy, including the security and privacy of mail, phone, e-mail and other forms of communication

County policies in the General Plan should affirm and protect the right to privacy.

5. FUTURE CAPACITY: PLAN FOR BALANCE

Standards for broadband capacity are rapidly changing – so it's important not to get locked into obsolete technology goals. The General Plan must promote building networks that offer high-quality service, low latency, and the functionality to meet the service and application needs of our communications future.

The Internet is a global public infrastructure. Local communication networks must support open fast connections to the backbone of the Internet globally, at speeds that go beyond the past and current frontiers of communication and commerce.

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These comments incorporate work done by community based organizations working with Media and Democracy Coalition. <http://www.media-democracy.net/>