

Fiber optic recruitment moves forward

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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Wyatt: Potential operator impressed with survey responses

When the Gothenburg Improvement Company surveyed the community about telecommunication needs, members wanted at least 1,200 responses.

The 1,227 surveys that were recently completed impressed a potential fiber optic operator, said GIC fiber infrastructure committee chair Nate Wyatt.

“It provides him with a good sampling of the community’s needs and interests,” Wyatt said.

Wyatt said the potential operator will assemble and analyze the data received in both printed and online surveys.

“I’m cautiously optimistic we are advancing the agenda,” he said.

The GIC has tried to recruit a local fiber optic service provider for several years, Wyatt said, so the overwhelming response from the community is special.

Wyatt said he was told that the next highest survey response from a community similar in size to Gothenburg was the return of 375 surveys.

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Locally, surveys were sent with city utility bills to 1,491 residential households and 350 businesses that may have more than one account.

The community responded through printed or online surveys.

How the community responded will “go a long ways in bringing infrastructure to the community,” Wyatt said.

GIC and Gothenburg Chamber of Commerce members used a grassroots effort to spread the word about the importance of completing the survey.

Wyatt said they talked to organizations, church congregations and others and shared a multi-media presentation created for the effort.

“Volunteers even went door to door,” he said.

GIC president Mike Bacon likened the effort to the recruitment of Baldwin Filters in 1990 when the GIC tried to convince the Fortune 500 company there was sufficient labor for the facility to locate in Gothenburg.

“We used volunteers manning bank phones for two to three nights and called people to see if they would go to work for a specified wage,” Bacon recalled.

Volunteers called hundreds of people and printed out names, telephone numbers and addresses. They then delivered a book of labor candidates to the Baldwin Filters president to prove that more than enough eligible workers were available.

“We told him he could call anyone on the list and that sealed the deal,” he said.

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In the latest effort, Bacon said the 1,200 survey return target (for a 60% penetration rate) was set by Wyatt to show that Gothenburg was exceptional.

“So the return rate proves that Gothenburg is exceptional and that there is an unmet need for high quality internet, cable and phone service at a competitive price,” he said.

Bacon described fiber as important to the community’s future as roads and highways.

“It is a tool to bring people here who can telecommute to London or Paris,” he said.

Selling the vision of that is what the GIC does well, Bacon said.

“Nate and his team really did an outstanding job,” he said. “And Gothenburgers have always made good decisions when they are given the facts.”

Without fiber, Bacon said the city will remain in a “digital desert” and limited to coaxial or copper technology to deliver data.

“The citizens of Gothenburg deserve better,” Bacon said.

With AT&T and Google investing in fiber installation in high-density markets, he said a town of 3,600 in the middle of Nebraska is not on their radar.

“So, as Gothenburg always does, we will fix it ourselves,” he said.

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