

City to discuss fiber-optic options with residents

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LONGMONT -- About 1,280 businesses sit within 500 feet of Longmont's fiber-optic loop. It wouldn't take a lot to close that gap, city telecom manager Vince Jordan said.

But, he added, most of those businesses don't even realize it.

"It's very straightforward," Jordan said. "But for the most part, it hasn't occurred to them."

That's the sort of thing the city wants folks thinking about. So, in July, Longmont Power & Communications will hold a pair of meetings to get everyone up to speed. The topics: what Longmont has available for broadband, how it can be used and what folks want to see it used for.

Before last year, that would have been a moot question. But in November, local voters passed ballot question 2A, freeing the city to provide services on the fiber loop, either alone or with a partner. In about two months, LPC will be getting the equipment needed to "light up" the loop, the next step toward making it available beyond the city's own offices and the small number of existing users that could lease individual strands -- mostly public agencies and a few large institutions such as Longmont United Hospital.

In May, LPC began using the loop to provide wireless service to some of the city's parks as a "thank you" for the 2A vote. The businesses near the loop could eventually be a next step, Jordan said -- if city officials say "go" and Longmont says that's what it wants.

"Technically speaking ... to provide services to the businesses I talked about could be done by the end of the year," Jordan said, speaking of the time needed to set up the infrastructure.

The first of the fiber meetings will be for Longmont residents, from 5:30 to 7 p.m. July 16. The second will be for the city's businesses, from 3:30 to 5 p.m. July 20. Both will be at the City Council chambers, 350 Kimbark St.

Those interested in keeping up with developments about the system and telecom services can also register for email updates through LPC's website at ci.longmont.co.us/lpc/TC/index.htm.

Jordan said the utility would soon be putting out a 10-question survey to get an idea of what people want for the system. For example, he said, should the city offer a specific bundle of services or just make the "big pipe" available and let the customers pick what they want? Will a user name and password be enough for security, or should the city actively "filter" certain kinds of content?

"Personally, I don't think that's a business the city should or would get into," Jordan said of the latter. "But I want to hear from the citizens."