Nebraska Broadband Bridge Program

Digital Inclusion Plan on behalf of Joint Applicant

Hartman Telephone Exchanges, Inc./BW Telcom Long Distance, Inc. (BWTelcom)

Village of Lebanon Project

**GOAL STATEMENT OR VISION STATEMENT**

Hartman Telephone Exchanges, Inc. (D.B.A. BWTelcom) is a rural broadband service provider in Southwest Nebraska. BWTelcom has been owned by the Raile Family since 2004, along with the Benkelman Telephone Co., Inc. and the Wauneta Telephone Company. Our footprint across Southwest Nebraska covers 1,366 square miles.

BWTelcom prides itself on its dedication to our communities and neighbors. Our goal is to provide the same services to our communities that they might see in larger cities or towns. We have set out to deliver fiber fed broadband to each of our customers. We want to make sure no child is left behind because of a digital divide. Also, with many people now able to work from home, we are hopeful to bring new business/work opportunities to the area via the broadband services we can provide.

**BROADBAND AVAILABILITY**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **COMPUTER AND INTERNET USE** | **RED WILLOW COUNTY, NEBRASKA** | **NEBRASKA** |
| Households with a computer, percent, 2016-2020 | 91.0% | 91.5% |
| Households with a broadband internet subscription, percent, 2016-2020 | 80.8% | 85.6% |

**source: https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/redwillowcountynebraska**

As you can see above, Red Willow County, Nebraska falls behind the State average as far as number of households with a broadband internet subscription. This is partially due to a slightly higher poverty level in the County (see chart below), as well as insufficient availability. In the Hartman exchange territory, all customers have access to fiber fed service, excepting the Village of Lebanon. The 54 customers that live there are fed by old copper lines via VDSL technology. They do receive 25/3 service, but are not capable of reaching 100/20 speeds. In our fiber fed areas, we offer speeds from 25/3 to 1 Gig. We feel we need to bring fiber to these customers, not only for possible new opportunities, but to make sure any student will not fall behind because of a digital divide. We will be offering these customers the same choices that we offer all other fiber fed BWTelcom customers.

**BROADBAND AFFORDABILITY**

Broadband access in Nebraska is generally affordable where available. Customers can expect to pay around $600 per year for a service that will meet most of their needs. As you can see below, the Village of Lebanon, located in Red Willow County, Nebraska, has a slightly higher rate of poverty than the State’s average.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **INCOME & POVERTY** | **RED WILLOW COUNTY, NEBRASKA** | **NEBRASKA** |
| Median household income (in 2020 dollars), 2016-2020 | 48,140 | 63,015 |
| Per Capita income in past 12 months (in 2020 dollars), 2016-2020 | 28,395 | 33,205 |
| Persons in poverty, percent | 9.5% | 9.2% |

**source: https://census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/redwillowcountynebraska**

Looking at the estimated percentage of homes at poverty level in Lebanon, roughly 5 homes would struggle with the added cost of paying for broadband services. There are assistance programs available now to assist those customers that need broadband services. BWTelcom will assist any customer to apply for ACP discounts and/or Lifeline discounts to assure that they can get a service that fits their needs, as well as their budget.