



**SAN RAFAEL CITY COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT**

**Department: Digital Service & Open Government**

**Prepared by: Rebecca Woodbury, Director**

**City Manager Approval:** \_\_\_\_\_

**TOPIC: CANAL WI-FI NETWORK**

**SUBJECT: UPDATE ABOUT THE CANAL WI-FI NETWORK PROJECT**

**RECOMMENDATION:** Accept informational report.

**BACKGROUND:** Access to the internet is necessary for so many facets of a community including getting news and information, participating in civic life, applying for jobs or unemployment, access to education, and more. Residents in San Rafael do not have equal access to the internet and computers at home. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated digital equity issues as the shelter-in-place orders have led to remote learning, high levels of unemployment, and a reliance on digital civic engagement methods.

When schools moved to an online learning model, an immediate need arose to better connect students to the internet and provide them with laptops. The City started working with the County of Marin, San Rafael City Schools, and Canal Alliance on a multi-pronged approach to the problem. This included providing families with personal hotspots, promoting low-cost/free home internet programs, and providing Chromebooks to students.

Thanks to several community volunteers and this collaborative effort, we started working to create a public Wi-Fi network in the Canal neighborhood, where we determined there was the greatest, concentrated need. [On May 4, 2020](#), City staff presented an informational report to the City Council on this project, as well as, the other efforts underway.

**DISCUSSION:** Since the last update to the City Council in May, the project has raised \$335,000 from the following sources:

- County of Marin: \$75,000
- Marin Community Foundation: \$125,000
- Pincus Family Foundation: \$125,000
- Private donation: \$10,000 (Leighton Hills)

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**FOR CITY CLERK ONLY**

**File No.:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Council Meeting:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Disposition:** \_\_\_\_\_

In addition to these monetary donations, DC Electric Group, Inc. is providing equipment installation services pro bono. Community volunteers from MarinIT and Cisco are providing network design services pro bono as well. The County of Marin was able to secure a grant that provided additional equipment, allowing further enhancement of the network.

Equipment installation has begun; however, there have been some delays in getting circuits ordered and installed. By August 20 (the first day of school for San Rafael City Schools), the first phase of equipment installation is expected to be complete. The technical team will continue to enable new locations as fast as the carriers can provide service.

We created a website where people accessing the network will land once they agree to the network terms and conditions: [www.canal-wifi.com](http://www.canal-wifi.com). We are also working with San Rafael City Schools to configure all the Chromebooks they are providing so the devices will automatically connect to the network. To prioritize online learning, students using the network will get increased bandwidth, while other users will experience toggled speed.

Over the next couple of weeks, we will be working on promotional videos and other outreach materials to get the word out about the Wi-Fi network. We will also continue to work closely with community partners on other efforts to address digital equity issues in our community, including:

- Additional distribution of hotspots and laptops
- Further information about and assistance with signing up for low-cost internet programs, such as Comcast Internet Essentials
- Digital literacy and cultural competency training for educators

**COMMUNITY OUTREACH:** We have been working with several community-based organizations and volunteers on this project. In June, the City worked with Canal Alliance and San Rafael City Schools to conduct a survey about internet access needs. The survey received over 1500 responses, with 849 of respondents reporting living in the Canal neighborhood (see attachment). Our major findings include:

- 42% of survey respondents in the Canal said their internet was not fast enough to watch a video without it buffering or load a website in 10 seconds
- 57% of survey respondents in the Canal said they do not own a computer at home
- 44% of survey respondents in the Canal said it was difficult to connect to the internet
- 61% of survey respondents in the Canal reported having a wired internet connection in their home

In the coming weeks, we will be working closely with Canal Alliance and other project partners to promote this project in the neighborhood through videos, social media, text messages, and signage.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** There is no fiscal impact to the City at this time.

**OPTIONS:** The City Council has the following options to consider on this matter:

1. Accept report.
2. Direct staff to return with more information.
3. Take no action.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Accept report.

**ATTACHMENT:** Internet Access Survey Data

# ADDRESSING DIGITAL EQUITY IN SAN RAFAEL

## CANAL NEIGHBORHOOD INTERNET ACCESS

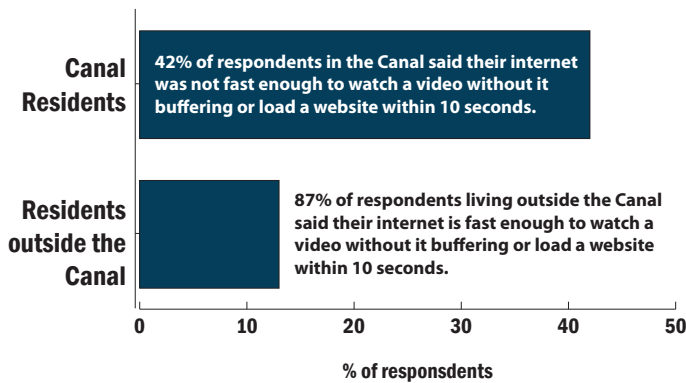
COVID-19 and Shelter-in-Place orders have exacerbated digital equity issues in San Rafael's Canal neighborhood. Thousands of students are now participating in remote learning and many have limited access to the internet and computers.

Since the Shelter-in-Place order went into effect, the County of Marin, City of San Rafael, Canal Alliance, and San Rafael City Schools have been working together to address digital equity

issues through the distribution of Chromebook laptops and personal WiFi hotspots, promoting awareness of commercial low-cost internet access, and building a WiFi network.

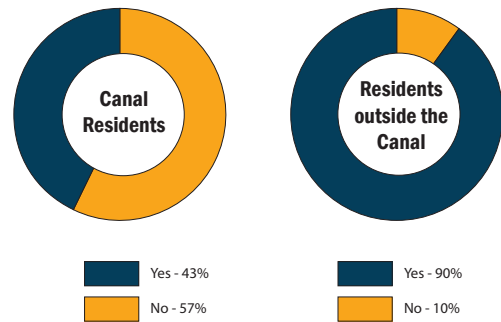
In tandem to these efforts, we conducted a survey about internet access in the Canal neighborhood to better inform our priorities and allocation of resources going forward. Here's what we learned.

### How fast is your internet connection?



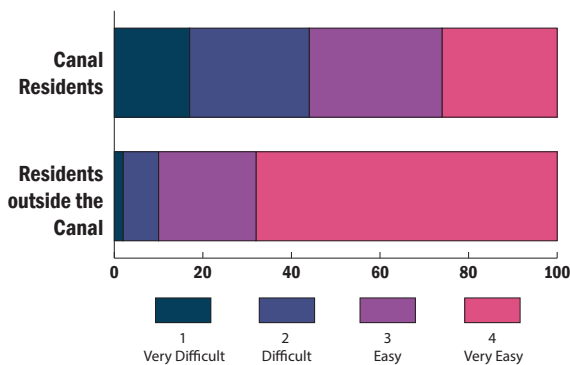
### Do you have a computer at home that you own?

57% of respondents in the Canal said they do not own a computer at home compared to 10% of residents outside the Canal.

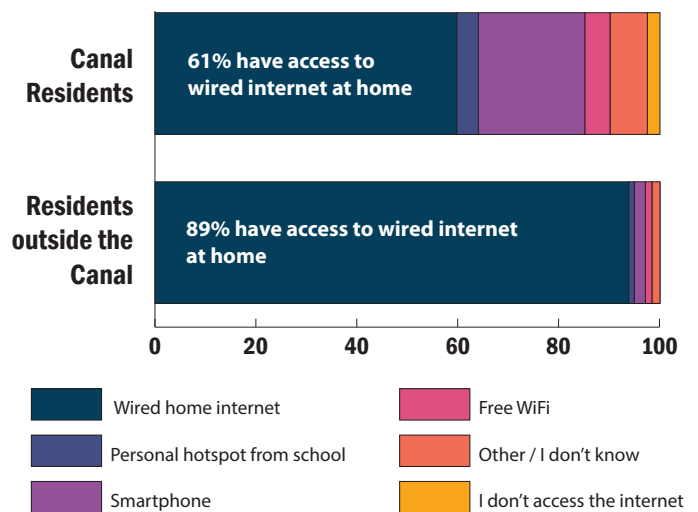


### How easy is it to connect to the internet?

44% of residents in the Canal report that it's difficult to connect to the internet compared to only 10% of those living outside the Canal who find it difficult to connect.



### How do you connect to the internet?



#### Methodology:

We collected survey responses from June 1 to June 23, 2020. Responses were collected in-person at food distribution events in the Canal neighborhood, in addition to online via text, social media, and emails. We received a total of 1502 responses. 849 of those said they lived in the Canal neighborhood, 589 said they lived outside of the Canal but within San Rafael, 60 said they lived outside of San Rafael, and 4 did not answer. 943 took the survey in Spanish and this includes all the in-person surveys.

### Help us do more to address digital equity issues in the Canal.

**DONATE TO THE CANAL DIGITAL ACCESS EQUITY FUND**

