

From Bruce Vogen, [REDACTED] San Anselmo, CA 94960  
To Lindsay Lara, City Clerk, San Rafael  
Subject: Public Comments  
San Rafael City Council meeting, August 3, 2020  
Agenda Item: 5b Canal Wifi Network

1. The Canal mesh network is an inspiring project that, in scope, is consistent with digital inclusion efforts taking place in many towns and cities in America. It is encouraging to see government, private companies, non-profits, and knowledgeable members of the community bring connectivity to the doorsteps of an estimated 1,500 San Rafael students. They have lived without affordable home internet service for decades (Digital Divide) even though their homework assignments required an internet connection (Homework Gap).
2. Of Marin County's estimated 33,000 K-12 students, 30% receive free or discounted school lunches through the National School Lunch Program (NLPS). MCOE Superintendent Mary Jane Burke told the Marin IJ on March 30, 2020, " that a family of four in Marin is considered socioeconomically disadvantaged if they earn no more than \$644 per week. After paying rent, water, PG&E, and food, "of course there isn't any money left over for internet access," she said. "This is the biggest equity issue of our current situation." The "silver lining" is we now know where these students live and their current level of access to the internet at home. **But the data hasn't been compiled, and the public, therefore, remains unaware of the actual magnitude of the problem. This project or a related project must make that a deliverable.**
3. Comcast is the single largest cable tv and internet service provider in urban Marin. They are required under their cable agreement with the CPUC to provide network access to every home and apartment building in their Marin footprint. Comcast offers a \$9.95 per month internet service subscription to low-income families they call Internet Essentials; a typical Comcast connection costs \$60 to \$70 a month. Technically, all 10,000 students enrolled in the NSLP program qualify for the service. Internet Essentials is promoted as a universal solution that earns Comcast significant political capital with the FCC and our elected officials. The Canal population is the perfect test case. What happened? Why is a new mesh network needed when superior wireline infrastructure with adjusted pricing already exists? **Asking and answering this question needs to be part of the project, or a related project, with findings and recommendations reported to the public.**
4. Marin countywide taxpayers are contributing \$75,000 to the mesh network and will inevitably pay for any public sector broadband network or carrier-based mobile hotspot solution over the long haul. Some cities are entering into "bulk purchasing" programs with Comcast rather than building new infrastructure. This isn't a one size fits all situation. **The public needs to see a countywide Digital Inclusion Plan with both short and long term objectives and potential solutions.**
5. We don't want perfect to be the enemy of the good. "Student Only" networks should be seen as necessary but incomplete solutions. Students with full access to internet content will have an advantage over those who only have access to their lesson plans and a limited set of URLs. **The goal has to be digital equity for every student at almost any cost.**
6. There should be an emphasis on providing the public with detailed information as this project progresses (success and failures), not just when it is complete.