

## **Christopher Mitchell's Interview on Future Tense September 17, 2007**

*Future Tense* is a short, daily radio program played on more than 100 public radio stations across the United States.

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### **Transcript of the Interview:**

**Jon Gordon:** Burlington, Vermont shows the way with broadband. This is Future Tense from American Public Media. I'm Jon Gordon.

For the past few years, American cities have been keen on building wireless networks. But as municipal wi-fi falters in several major cities, Burlington, Vermont is heading down a very different path.

By the middle of next year, all citizens will be able to connect to a new city owned and operated fiber-optic network that delivers internet, television and telephone services. All city departments use the network already as do 1,800 subscribers from the southern part of Burlington. Burlington provides a good example for other cities considering how to improve access to broadband, according to Christopher Mitchell with the Institute for Local Self-Reliance.

**Christopher Mitchell:** In Burlington, the city decided that they wanted to build their own fiber to the home network. They were unsatisfied with the offerings of their broadband already there, and so they started a plan that they called, "Build the Barn You Can Afford." What that meant for them is that they first built a network, it was all fiber connecting, all their city locations. And then when they showed that that was financially viable, they expanded it first to a number of large businesses that were nearby and could use a lot of bandwidth and they're in the final stage now which is expanding that network to every household that wants this in Burlington.

**JG:** Some people who don't admire this kind of model will just say it's another example of Burlington socialism. Why do you think this model might be one that should be emulated?

**CM:** Burlington does have a certain reputation, but they're certainly not the only city doing this. There are two other larger cities of over 100,000 people that are heading in this direction. One is Lafayette, Louisiana and the other is Clarksville, Tennessee, and I don't think either one of them has that reputation. But I think a lot of cities that are looking to remain competitive need to look at fiber. That's because fiber is the only thing that can offer the speeds that we're seeing in a lot of other developed countries, in Asia and in areas of Europe. Cable and DSL just aren't going to get us there. And the cities are the only ones thus far that have shown interest in actually expanding these networks to

every corner of the city rather than just to a few areas in which there's a lot of density or high-income people that are likely to subscribe.

**JG:** Municipal wi-fi efforts are foundering at the moment. The projects in places like San Francisco and Chicago and maybe Houston have sort of imploded at the moment. Do you think these cities should be considering fiber instead of wi-fi?

**CM:** What would be the best for a number of different cities would be to go with a fiber solution to everyone. That solves the bandwidth problem and encourages economic development, and then it's really not that expensive to add wireless on top of it. When you have fiber everywhere, you've taken up a lot of the cost of putting up wireless. And so you really can have both.

**JG:** That's Christopher Mitchell with the Institute for Local Self-Reliance in Minneapolis. He's the author of a **[new report on Burlington, Vermont's fiber-optic network](#)**.

This is Future Tense, I'm Jon Gordon.

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