



## Vote creates friction, fiber network

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After a summer of discussion, the residents of Monticello voted Sept. 18 overwhelmingly in favor of bringing a fiber optic network to the city.

Of the 1,409 residents who voted, 1,055 voted yes and 354 voted no.

Fiber optic networks provide residents with high speed Internet, cable television and telephone services.

"After all the negative misinformation that went out to the public, the public trusted the city and believed in our message," Mayor Clint Herbst said.

A Fiber Optics Task Force was formed in the summer of 2005 to look at the possibility of such a project. Through the efforts of this group, the public was invited to educational forums describing the details of the project last year as well as several communication campaigns sent out to homes. The task force also conducted telephone surveys and included paper surveys mailed with the city newsletter.

The debate of whether or not the city should proceed with such a project produced heated discussions since the idea was initiated.

The city says the service will be entirely financed with revenue bonds, not a tax levy. The bonds are paid back by sales generated by payers of the service. Most opponents were concerned that taxpayers would carry the brunt of the cost through levies, especially if residents and businesses failed to sign up for the service.

The cost for the entire project is estimated at \$20 to \$25 million.

This project includes covering the costs for infrastructure throughout the entire city limits so everyone will have the ability to connect to fiber if they so choose.

Proponents of the fiber optic network were intrigued with the benefits of the project, including a forecasted 15 percent decrease in what residents are already paying for cable, phone and Internet services and the ability of the system to provide the fastest technology available for information and resources.

Other benefits include HDTV with cable TV service along with the possibility of receiving several more local channels.

Those in favor also believe the network will provide the opportunity for Monticello to attract large companies, which in turn would bring in more high-paying jobs as well as an increased tax base. Better jobs found locally also means less commuting for area residents.

In order to begin the project, the City had to secure approval from residents to authorize the purchase of and to acquire a telephone exchange inside the City limits. Although the City was able to operate Internet and cable television services over a city-wide fiber optic network without referendum approval, the only way for City residents to hold ownership in a telephone service, by Minnesota State Statute, was for residents to vote on and approve a referendum by 65 percent or more.

It is estimated the project will take around 18 months to complete.

In mid-November, the city council authorized a contract with Michels Communications for the installation of the co-locate fiber system and conduit, which will include a connection to the co-locate equipment at city hall. City officials and interested residents showed up for a groundbreaking ceremony at Seventh and Minnesota Streets on Nov. 27 to kick off the project.

A building within the city limits will house both operations and staff for the project. About eight staff will be employed to provide technical assistance and customer service.

"It's a great opportunity for current and future Monticello industries to provide this technology and to create some very good jobs," Mayor Herbst said.

After the referendum passed, the city held a contest which asked residents to submit business name ideas for the project, with the Monticello City Fiber Optics Committee determining the final name as **FiberNet Monticello**.

The first customers of the fiber optic network could receive service by the summer of 2009.