



**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA LETTER**

Agenda Number:

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

Submitted on:
(COB Stamp)

Department Name: Information Technology,
Fire
Department No.: 067, 031
Agenda Date: July 7, 2026
Placement: Administrative Agenda
Estimated Time: N/A
Continued Item: No
If Yes, date from: N/A
Vote Required: 4/5

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Department Directors: Chris Chirgwin, Chief Information Officer (CIO),
Garret Huff, Fire Chief
Contact: Kyle Slattery, Deputy CIO

Signed by:

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SUBJECT: Reallocation of Public and Educational Capital Endowment Funds for Community
Broadband and Emergency Communications

County Counsel Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Other Concurrence: CEO Budget

As to form: Yes

Auditor-Controller Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Recommended Actions:

That the Board of Supervisors:

- a) Find that the originally planned fiber-optic project to be completed by Cox Communications ("Cox") along the State Route 154 corridor is not feasible within the funding provided from the Public and Educational Capital Endowment ("PE Endowment"), and that redirecting those funds to a community broadband access initiative providing public Wi-Fi at designated County parks, facilities, and public areas is consistent with the settlement agreement's intent to expand communications access and support government and emergency communications.
- b) Approve and authorize the Chair to execute an Agreement with Cox for the procurement, installation, and initial operation of public Wi-Fi access points at designated locations for a period of 24 months following full system activation, utilizing \$250,000 of funds previously disbursed by the County to Cox from the PE Endowment pursuant to a court order;
- c) Find that the originally planned fiber connection project to be completed by Cox to County facilities at La Cumbre Peak is not feasible within the funding provided from the PE Endowment, and that redirecting those funds to pay for enhanced internet connectivity and service to support the Regional Fire Communications Center is consistent with settlement agreement's intent to enhance government and emergency communications infrastructure.

- d) Approve and authorize Budget Revision Request No. 0011150 increasing appropriations of \$75,000 in General County Programs General Fund for other financing uses funded by a decrease in restricted fund balance, and increasing appropriations of \$75,000 in the Fire Protection District Fund for services and supplies funded by other financing sources; and
- e) Determine that the above recommended actions do not constitute a project subject to environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15378(b)(2)&(5), finding that the actions consist of continuing administrative or maintenance activities, such as purchases for supplies and general policy and procedure making and organizational or administrative activities of governments that will not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment.

Summary Text:

The Information Technology Department (“ITD”) requests that the Board find that two communications infrastructure projects planned with \$500,000 of funding directed from the PE Endowment settlement agreement are not feasible, and that redirecting those funds to alternative projects that expand community broadband access and enhance government and emergency communications is consistent with the intent of the settlement agreement.

ITD requests that the Board redirect half of the funding toward a public Wi-Fi initiative and approve an Agreement with Cox for the procurement, installation, and initial operation of 48 public Wi-Fi Access Points across 10 County locations for 24 months following full system activation, utilizing \$250,000 previously disbursed to Cox from the PE Endowment pursuant to court order. No new County funding would be required to implement the Agreement with Cox. However, future costs, estimated at \$6,000 annually, may be incurred if the County elects to continue operation of the public Wi-Fi Access Points beyond the initial 24-month service period. The Community Services Department will fund service for two additional years then reevaluate further commitments.

County Fire requests that the Board redirect the remaining half of the funding toward Regional Fire Communication Center internet connectivity and service costs and approve a Budget Revision Request to reimburse County Fire for actual costs incurred through FY 2026-27. The remaining portion of the \$250,000 allocated for internet connectivity for the Regional Fire Communications Center will be used to reimburse eligible service costs in future years until those funds are exhausted.

Discussion:

Community Broadband Access

The Agreement provides for the installation of 48 Wi-Fi Access Points (“APs”) across 10 County areas within Cox’s South County service area, as summarized below:

| Areas For AP Installation | Strand APs | Pedestal APs |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Arroyo Burro Beach | 1 | 1 |
| Bates Beach | 1 | 0 |
| Ben Page | 3 | 0 |
| Court House | 0 | 3 |
| Goleta Beach | 2 | 0 |
| Isla Vista | 19 | 6 |
| Lookout Park | 0 | 2 |
| Manning Park | 1 | 2 |
| Rocky Nook Park | 2 | 0 |
| Tuckers Grove | 3 | 2 |
| Total | 32 | 16 |

“Strand APs” are carrier-grade outdoor wireless access points mounted to existing aerial fiber infrastructure between utility poles. These installations are relatively fast, cost-effective, and minimally intrusive. “Pedestal APs” are above-ground units that require additional site preparation but are suitable in locations where Strand AP deployment is not feasible.

The proposed network will expand public access to reliable internet connectivity in high-use parks, beaches, and community spaces. This investment supports several public benefits, including:

- Improved access to digital resources for residents and visitors, particularly in outdoor areas
- Enhanced public safety through improved connectivity for emergency notifications
- Support for County operations and programs that rely on connectivity in the field
- Increases accessibility and usability of public spaces for work, education, and engagement

The mix of Strand and Pedestal APs allows for a cost-effective and flexible deployment approach tailored to site-specific conditions, maximizing coverage while minimizing installation impacts.

Regional Fire Communications Center

In fiscal year 2024-25, new ethernet services were established with Cox at the following locations to support interagency communications for the Regional Fire Communications Center:

- Montecito Fire Protection District headquarters at 595 San Ysidro Road
- Santa Maria Police Department headquarters at 1111 Betteravia Road
- Lompoc Police Department headquarters at 107 Civic Center Plaza
- Santa Barbara County Sheriff headquarters at 4436 Calle Real
- Santa Barbara downtown parking at 1221 Anacapa Street

ITD paid for the initial connections and services, received reimbursement from County Fire for all FY 2024-25 costs (\$15K) and transferred administration of the accounts to County Fire. County Fire incurred \$25K for these accounts in FY 2025-26 and has budgeted a similar amount in FY 2026-27. An additional \$10K is included in the budget revision as buffer if actual costs are higher. The attached budget revision allows County Fire to be reimbursed for these cumulative costs from the \$250,000 of PE Endowment fund monies held in the General Fund. It is proposed that reimbursement to County Fire from these restricted funds will continue in future years until the funds are fully exhausted.

Background:

In January 2002, pursuant to the County’s Franchise Agreement with Cox, the County received \$1 million to establish the Public and Educational Capital Endowment (“PE Endowment”). Interest earnings from the PE Endowment were historically used to support the South Coast Community Media Access Center (dba TV Santa Barbara) for community media operations and equipment. Over time, interest earnings declined and contributions to TV Santa Barbara ultimately ceased, leaving approximately \$65,000 in accumulated interest on top of the \$1 million of principal as of May 2021.

When the Franchise Agreement expired in 2017, Cox and the County disagreed on who should receive the PE Endowment. In 2019, the County filed a petition to resolve the matter, and a settlement was reached between Cox and the County. In 2020, the court ordered the distribution of the \$1 million in accordance with the settlement agreement and directed accrued interest be distributed to the County, \$35,000 of which was provided to TV Santa Barbara in exchange for waiving its right to appeal against the decision, with the remaining interest retained by the County for the CSBTV program.

Under the settlement agreement with Cox, \$500,000 was retained by the County for projects supporting government and emergency communications. Specifically, \$100,000 went towards the purchase of a Solar Mobile Nanogrid Emergency Response Trailer for the County Office of Emergency

Management to provide essential services around the County after a disaster. The remaining \$400,000 went towards the Santa Barbara Board Hearing Room Audio-Visual Upgrade Project.

For the remaining \$500,000 of the endowment, \$250,000 was paid to Cox in November 2020 to construct fiber-optic infrastructure serving unincorporated and underserved areas along the State Route 154 corridor. An additional \$250,000 was retained by the County to pay Cox for building a fiber connection to County facilities at La Cumbre Peak. Neither of these projects have moved forward.

Following the Court's order, Cox conducted engineering and design work for the two projects, however, by 2023, the projects were determined to be infeasible due to significantly increased construction costs, more stringent fire and safety requirements, and the inability to secure access to existing conduit infrastructure, which would have required extensive new trenching in challenging terrain. Even if feasible, estimates from Cox of additional costs were almost another \$2 million before more detailed engineering, pole loading, and safety analysis had even been conducted.

In response, County and Cox staff collaborated to identify alternative uses of the previously allocated funds that would remain consistent with the intent of the original agreement, namely, expanding communications access in underserved areas and enhancing government and emergency communications. These discussions resulted in a proposed reallocation of the \$250,000 previously provided to Cox for the State Route 154 corridor toward a community broadband access initiative.

The proposed agreement reflects this revised approach, under which Cox will procure, install, and provide initial service to Wi-Fi access points at designated County parks, facilities, and public areas within its service area, providing public internet access and supporting community connectivity.

Regarding the other \$250,000 from the endowment that was retained by the County, County and Cox staff determined that the five new internet connections installed and serviced by Cox at various locations to support the Regional Fire Communications Center are consistent with the intending use of those monies for enhancing services to County emergency and public safety facilities to improve emergency and public safety communications. The funds are held in General County Programs Department 990 General Fund in a restricted fund balance and will be used to reimburse Fire for all costs incurred associated with installation and servicing those locations until the funds are exhausted.

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

There is no additional County funding required for the proposed Agreement, as the procurement, installation, and initial service costs for the 48 Wi-Fi APs will be covered by the \$250,000 previously disbursed to Cox Communications.

Upon expiration of the term of the Agreement, the County may incur ongoing service costs if it elects to continue Wi-Fi service at any of the installed locations. While future costs are difficult to estimate and will depend on service levels and market conditions at that time, the current estimated value of service for all of the 48 APs is approximately \$6,000 annually. The Community Services Department will cover the cost of the service through the Parks and Open Spaces budget in the General Fund for two additional years then reevaluate further commitments.

Ownership of the APs will remain with Cox, which may also utilize the infrastructure to provide services to its fee-paying customers. The Agreement grants Cox the right to access, install, operate, and maintain the APs on County-owned properties during and beyond the term of the Agreement.

For the Fire Regional Communications Center internet services, the attached budget revision will reimburse County Fire for actual costs incurred since the services were connected through FY 2026-27. The remaining portion of the \$250,000 is expected to cover these costs for up to seven years at current service rates.

Special Instructions:

Please email the executed agreement and minute order to Kyle Slattery (knslattery@countyofsb.org) and Jason Womack (jwomack@countyofsb.org) with the Information Technology Department.

Attachments:

Attachment A – Agreement with Cox Communications for Community Broadband Access (Signature Required)

Attachment B – Budget Revision Request 0011150

Contact Information:

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Deputy Chief Information Officer
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