



# From Frustration to Fiber: Town of Paris' Journey to High-Speed Internet

## Situation

The town of Paris in Kenosha County, Wisconsin, faced significant challenges in securing reliable internet access. With a population density of only 40.2 people per square mile, the town's sparse population made it an unattractive investment for internet service providers (ISPs). Despite efforts dating back to the 1990s, the town had no fixed landline internet service, relying instead on limited wireless options.

## Response

The breakthrough came when the town chair collaborated with the CIO of Kenosha County. The CIO's ability to translate technical jargon into plain language enabled productive discussions between town officials and the ISPs. An engineering study revealed that the cost per passing for internet infrastructure in the Town of Paris was \$6,000, far exceeding the typical \$1,200-\$1,700 range that ISPs were willing to invest.

To bridge this financial gap, the town decided to fund over 50% of the \$5 million project, partnering with Midwest Fiber Network. The project was divided into three phases, with the first phase set to go live in Spring 2024. The town also extended the benefits of their new internet backbone to neighboring communities, ensuring a broader impact.

The journey wasn't straightforward. Initially, the town spent a lot of time building a partnership with a small local ISP transitioning to fiber and able to meet the Town's infrastructure goals. However, when this provider failed to secure grant funding, the town had to pivot to find another partner who could meet the Town's infrastructure goals, Midwest Fiber Network. This experience underscored the importance of flexibility and persistence in long-term projects.

## Outcomes and Lessons Learned

As of Spring of 2024, the project is ahead of schedule, with phases two and three progressing faster than anticipated. Key lessons from this initiative include:

- **Community Involvement:** Engaging the right people and fostering strong partnerships were crucial. The town's success was attributed to bringing in experts and maintaining open communication with the ISP. Bringing the "right" people into the room was a key factor in their progress.
- **Understanding Costs:** The engineering study was pivotal in understanding the financial barriers and finding ways to address them. The town discovered that the high cost per passing was the primary reason ISPs were not investing in their area.
- **Consider the Visual Impact:** Through some initial conflicts, the town learned to anticipate and manage the visual impact of new infrastructure, such as unexpected risers in residents' yards. They realized the importance of having more control over specific details, like the placement of conduits and pedestals, to avoid conflicts with landowners.
- **Strong Partnerships:** The relationship with Midwest Fiber Network was vital. Regular communication and a shared vision ensured the project's success. The Town Chair maintained weekly contact with the CEO of Midwest Fiber Network, highlighting the importance of strong, ongoing public-private partnership relationships.
- **Adaptability and Perseverance:** The town's initial partnership with a small local ISP provided valuable experience, even though it ultimately fell through. This experience helped them navigate the complexities of the grant process and better understand the needs of their community.
- **Detailed Planning:** The town's focus on providing high-speed, reliable internet to every residence required meticulous planning. They aimed to deliver a complete service from the provider's cabinet to the door of each house, ensuring a high standard of connectivity.



## Extension

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### Learn More

This case study highlights the importance of community leadership, strategic partnerships, and thorough planning in overcoming the digital divide in rural areas. The journey of Paris, Kenosha County, serves as a testament to the power of perseverance and collaboration in achieving community development goals.

Case Study contact information to come!

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