



From Overlooked to Online: How Superior is Bridging the Digital Divide

Situation

The City of Superior, Wisconsin—often overshadowed by its larger, wealthier neighbor Duluth—faced a persistent challenge: outdated broadband infrastructure and limited digital connectivity. Despite being a vibrant community, Superior struggled with underinvestment in utilities and services, particularly in broadband access. This digital divide became increasingly problematic as essential services, including healthcare and education, moved online. The issue came to a head when a newly elected city councilor with an IT background recognized the severity of the gap between the city's current infrastructure and modern connectivity needs.

Response

In response, the City Council and Mayor initiated a multi-year, community-driven process to address broadband deficiencies. This included:

- Conduct extensive research and community surveys.
- Engaging consultants to assess infrastructure needs and develop strategic plans.
- Forming a dedicated initiative—Connect Superior—to lead the charge toward broadband equity.

Stephanie Becken, appointed Broadband Manager, stepped into the role just two months before this case study, continuing the momentum built over four years of groundwork.

Outcomes

- **Infrastructure Investment:** Fiber installation is now underway, marking a tangible step toward improved connectivity.
- **Community Awareness:** Residents are increasingly aware of the importance of broadband access for healthcare, education, and economic opportunities.
- **Policy and Leadership:** The city has demonstrated how local leadership, informed by technical expertise and community input, can drive systemic change.
- **Market Competition:** The initiative supports increased competition among Internet Service Providers (ISPs), aiming to improve service quality and affordability.

Lessons Learned

- **Persistent Advocacy Pays Off:** Years of research, community engagement, and political will were essential to moving the project forward.
- **Digital Opportunity is a Health and Social Justice Issue:** Inadequate broadband access directly impacts residents' ability to access mental health services and other critical resources.
- **Expectations Evolve:** While the demand for high-speed internet remains constant, the specific needs and challenges shift over time. Flexibility and responsiveness are key.
- **Local Leadership Matters:** The involvement of a tech-savvy councilor was a turning point, highlighting the value of diverse expertise in local governance.

Learn More

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