

City Commission reviews goals for community-wide network

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The Chanute City Commission held a work session Monday to discuss details of the community-wide network and review cost analysis for the project.

The commission reviewed a statement of goals, objectives and ideas to clarify what is and what will be taking place in the community concerning the network and make suggestions for improvement.

The commission went over each of the four goals, but only spent time discussing one, which states that the city should proceed with work in progress to meet the expanding needs of business, government and education. The goal currently states that the proper role of the city is to serve the community as an aggregator to enable citizens to meet and surpass service standards that could not be achieved as individuals.

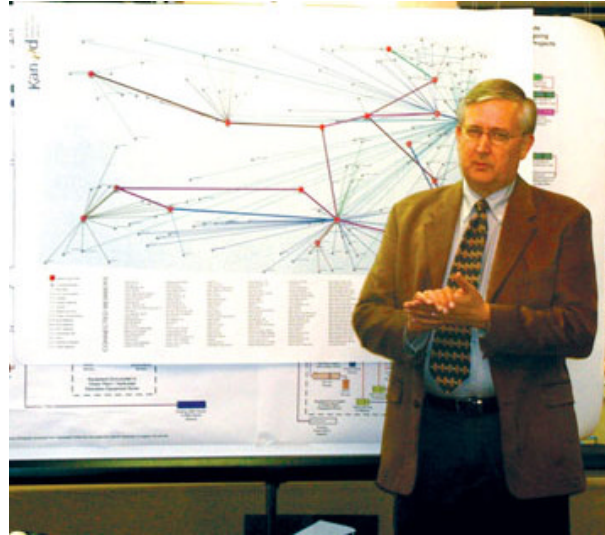
Also, communications pipelines and connection points to the world that are not available, or economically feasible, to individual entities should be made available.

Doug Klaassen, mayor, told the commission that he felt local Internet Service Providers were most concerned with this goal. While this goal mainly speaks to the city buying aggregated T1 lines at a wholesale, discount price and selling them cheaper to businesses and individuals in Chanute, Klaassen was looking ahead to the possibility of the city offering Internet service to entities other than tax-based.

"If we cherry pick and don't leave them top customers, it could drive them out of business and only leave SBC and the city for home residents," he said about local ISPs.

Ed Cox, vice-mayor, felt it was the city's responsibility as a municipality to offer another option for entities to purchase T1 lines, especially if it can offer lines at a cheaper rate. He noted that other providers could also offer lines at a discounted rate, offering even more options.

Cox stated he would not be in favor of moving in on local ISPs. Rather than setting a policy to follow for everyone, he suggested the commission work along with each case.



The city commission heard a presentation from representatives from KanEd and KanRen at a work session Monday. Eldon Rightmeier, KanEd network planning, presented a map of KanEd connectivity across the state of Kansas. He stated that KanEd is excited to work with Chanute because it is striving to overcome the last mile, connecting local schools and entities into one network, that can then utilize KanEd resources at one point of contact.

Rick Frommie, city commissioner, agreed. He wanted the issue to be more "touch and go."

Klaassen invited Josh White, manager/partner of Midwest Connections, to the table to hear the point of view of a local ISP on the city selling aggregated T1 lines. White said that Midwest is now able to offer the same service to the public. He was concerned that the city was portraying it could sell the lines at a discount price, which he claimed is not true, as the lines are tariffed.

White also expressed concerns about Midwest as a private company competing against the city and a network built on taxpayer's dollars. Randy Riggs, city manager, explained that tax money has never been, nor will ever be used to pay for the city-wide network.

The costs of the network so far have been paid for from the city's Utility Fund, mainly from the electric fund. Klaassen explained that the city charges a high enough rate for utilities so the city can expand the network's infrastructure. As a result, network service costs will decrease for all public tax-based entities.

He gave the example that when Neosho County Community College and USD 413 do not have to spend as much money for services, taxes required from the public to pay for existing connectivity for those institutions will be reduced, easing the taxpayer's burden. Also, services will be charged back to utility offices.

Klaassen requested a breakdown of total money spent on the project at a previous city commission meeting. Those figures have still not been made available.

Klaassen said he would like to see that particular goal reworded with language that says if the city were to take a next step into providing service for additional entities, there would be discussion and a vote by the commission.

Cox encouraged each commissioner to draft ideas for the goal to be given to city staff.

The other three goals passed by the commission with little discussion.

The city is proceeding with linking USD 413, NCCC, the public library and city offices and co-locating resources at Power Plant #1, and acknowledges that there may be other taxing entities, educational organizations and quasi-government operations that the city should be, and will be, working with and connecting to in the future.

The city is also proceeding to upgrade municipal communications equipment, as the current equipment is significantly outdated. The city is working towards linking municipal facilities that are currently disconnected from the municipal network, as well as connecting Chanute offices to the 911 communication department in Erie.

A revised draft of the four goals will be presented to and voted on by the commission at the next regularly scheduled meeting on Monday, Feb. 14.

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