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City of Duluth Communications Office

Mayor Emily Larson

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SUBJECT: City of Duluth moves forward in first steps of Duluth Fiber - Lincoln Park pilot project

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City of Duluth moves forward in first steps of Duluth Fiber - Lincoln Park pilot project

[Duluth, MN] The City of Duluth is taking the first steps with the Duluth Fiber - Lincoln Park pilot project. On Tuesday, City staff announced the opportunity for residents citywide to “sign-on” as interested in the project. In the first phase of Duluth Fiber, the pilot project will connect an estimated 1,900 customers, both residential and business, with high-speed internet in the Lincoln Park neighborhood. After a year of success, the City will look to deploy fiber citywide.

Said Mayor Emily Larson about the pilot project, “Especially after the pandemic shifted so much of our daily business online, it’s now crucial that all people who live, work, and play in Duluth have reliable, affordable access to high-speed internet connectivity that has the capacity to meet the needs of current and future technology. The City is so excited to be making measurable progress toward that end.”

City staff and Council have been working towards broadband solutions for the last year. Speed test data from two expert sources found the average speeds residents receive from current internet providers are 54.92 Mbps download and 7.03 Mbps upload, well within the “underserved category” by the state of Minnesota. A recent survey of over 1,700 residents, found the overwhelming majority of respondents believed the costs were unaffordable. When considering options for City investment, a massive 97 percent chose the option to support a City-sponsored broadband solution.

This optional City-owned open access fiber network will increase competition by allowing private internet service to serve customers through the high-speed network. Estimated monthly costs for Duluth Fiber customers will be \$20-\$30 less than current average internet plans, with opportunities for low-income residents to use federal internet assistance programs.

Residents can fill out a form now at DuluthFiber.Com to share they are interested in the

Lincoln Park Pilot Project, or citywide Duluth Fiber.

COVID-19 demonstrated the greater need for reliable and affordable internet access. Last year, the City of Duluth adopted a resolution and \$1M in funding with the goal of increasing the number of internet providers to close the gaps in service and affordability for residents. This summer, City Council approved the Broadband Master Plan, viewable at <https://duluthmn.gov/media/13755/04-08-22-digital-access-master-plan-final.pdf> and recommendations for the Duluth Fiber project.

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