

San Bernardino

## Going wireless

Josh Dulaney, Staff Writer

Posted: 07/25/2011 03:44:44 PM PDT

Updated: 07/25/2011 10:30:22 PM PDT

SAN BERNARDINO - Admittedly playing a game of catch-up to similarly sized cities that already enjoy wireless technology in public spaces, officials are moving to get the city connected, including the debut of free high-speed wireless access in the Council Chambers and other public areas in City Hall.

They hope the work will pay off as the city seeks to modernize as a whole and revitalize downtown.

"I'm excited we're coming into the 21st century with this technology," said 1st Ward Councilwoman Virginia Marquez.

City officials have announced a partnership with the California Emerging Technology Fund - formed as a requirement by the California Public Utilities Commission as it approved the 2005 mergers of SBC-AT&T

and Verizon-MCI - to offer public educational workshops on the benefits of Internet connection.

As a condition of approving the mergers, the PUC required the companies to contribute a total of \$60 million to help fund emerging broadband technologies.

The California Emerging Technology Fund was then established as an independent nonprofit that builds broadband networks in areas with limited access to high-speed Internet service.

It is estimated that 66 percent of Inland Empire adults have access to high-speed Internet at home, compared with 72 percent statewide.

Officials are looking to get the state to 80 percent by 2015.

In San Bernardino, about \$2,600 in work has been done to get some spots at City Hall connected. It

could take less than \$5,000 to connect the entire building.

Lea Deesing, director of information technology for the city, said that not only will wireless technology make things easier for City Hall visitors, but with a plethora of online services, residents can take care of a lot of issues without the hassle of driving downtown.

"We're trying to get more people to embrace the Internet to save money and time," she said.

The city's website offers access to numerous public records, and residents can make service requests through SB Access online.

Residents also can renew business licenses online, pay parking citations and water bills, and register for a variety of classes - all among several ways to make life a little easier in the age of advancing technology.

San Bernardino is looking to expand high-speed Internet access throughout the city as money becomes available, and the Economic Development Agency is working to form a regional group to bring in grant funding for the effort.

That includes, said Lori Tillery, economic development manager for the EDA, efforts in the downtown area that will coincide with putting in conduit for high-speed broadband along the SBX rapid-transit bus line from the E Street Corridor between the Cal State San Bernardino and Loma Linda University areas.

advertisement

Construction on SBX is expected to begin this year, with operation anticipated in early 2014.

As the city works to transform downtown into a destination spot, Tillery said access to high-speed Internet will be part of the draw for businesses and visitors.

"We could provide that as an economic development tool," she said.

Deesing said it's a long-term project to get San Bernardino connected, but such work has been proven fruitful in other I.E. cities.

"Riverside has done a great job of getting everything connected," she said. "They're sort of our model."

advertisement