



LIBRARY COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION 20241118-004

Date: 11/18/2024

Subject: Increase the spending total allowed by Austin Public Library on the existing City of Austin wireless contract.

Motion By: Commissioner Davis

Seconded By: vice Chair Mehta

Recommendation

Grant additional authority to increase the spending total allowed by Austin Public Library on the existing City of Austin wireless contract.

Description of Recommendation to Council

The Austin Library Commission recommends that Austin City Council supports the request for council approval from Austin Public Library and grants additional authority to increase the spending total allowed on the existing City of Austin wireless contract.

Rationale:

The Austin Library Commission strongly recommends that the Austin City Council approve the request from Austin Public Library (APL) to increase the spending total on the existing wireless contract. This approval would allow APL to order 500 brand-new 5G Wi-Fi hotspots and gain access to an online management portal, enhancing the Library's ability to serve the community's digital needs. These new devices would replace the current hotspots, which are reaching the end of their useful life and are no longer able to meet the high demand from Austin residents. APL would cover the monthly service fees for these devices through its existing budget.

The demand for Wi-Fi hotspots is significant, with a current waitlist of 234 people for just 29 available devices. Originally, APL had a larger pool of hotspots, but many have been lost, damaged, or are no longer functioning. By increasing the number of available devices, APL will be better positioned to meet the needs of underserved communities, providing equitable access to digital resources for those who may otherwise have limited or no internet access. Their goal is to add at least 300 new devices into circulation by January 2025, if not sooner, and assign additional devices to library branches for outreach services that help serve the community more broadly.

This initiative supports Austin's broader digital equity goals, which were recently recognized by the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA) when the City of Austin was named a 2023 Digital Inclusion Trailblazer. Austin earned this designation for its ongoing efforts to close the

digital divide and provide residents with affordable internet access, devices, and digital literacy programs. The City's commitment to digital inclusion is evident in its support of various programs, such as the Technology Opportunities Program, the Community PC Program, and digital literacy training initiatives through partners like Austin Free-Net. This recognition underscores Austin's leadership in creating digitally inclusive communities, and the Library Commission believes that expanding access to Wi-Fi hotspots through this request is a key step in furthering those efforts.

By approving this request, the City Council will help Austin Public Library continue its vital role in providing digital resources to the community, especially those facing barriers to connectivity. The increased number of Wi-Fi hotspots will enable more individuals to access essential services such as online education, job applications, telehealth, and civic engagement opportunities. This is an investment in both digital equity and the City's future, as it ensures all residents have the tools necessary to thrive in an increasingly digital world.

References:

Austin named one of Nation's Digital Inclusion Trailblazers.

AustinTexas.gov. <https://www.austintexas.gov/news/austin-named-one-nations-digital-inclusion-trailblazers>

Record of the Vote: 9-0-0-0

For: Chair Infante Huerta, Vice Chair Mehta, Commissioners Davis, DeRosa, Herrera Moreno, Hasdorff, Frayjo, Masters, Smith

Against: None

Abstain: None

Absent: None

Attest: 
Laura Polio, Library Commission Staff Liaison