



City of Arts & Innovation

# News Release

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## Riverside to Pursue Better Internet Service In Fewer Locations

*Test of first “hot spot” will reflect changes in online behavior since birth of Wi-Fi network in 2007*

RIVERSIDE, Calif. – Riverside will begin winding down its large, expensive and aging Wi-Fi network and instead begin testing the effectiveness of localized “hot spots” that could provide much faster and more reliable Internet service in fewer places around the city.

The Riverside City Council voted unanimously Tuesday (5/6) evening to begin removing the Wi-Fi equipment in July and bring back to the Council an agreement to implement the first of what could be several “hot spots” around the city.

Riverside has had a Wi-Fi network since 2007, but it was built before the development of much of today’s technology. For example, the ubiquitous iPhone became available for purchase a few weeks after the city’s Wi-Fi system went live.

Riverside officials believe they can offer better service for less money, albeit without blanketing as much of the city. A pilot project at a community center could serve as many as 500 people at a time with faster speeds than are currently available from the existing Wi-Fi network. A “hot spot” could cost as much as \$50,000 to set up, with about \$10,000 in ongoing costs.

Conversely, the existing Wi-Fi system, which covers about two-third of Riverside with service that has been criticized as spotty, costs more than \$700,000 per year. If the city tried to keep the system, updating the system’s hardware would cost about \$6.5 million, not counting ongoing software and maintenance costs, which city staff described as cost prohibitive.

The move to “hot spots” reflects changes in the fast-moving telecommunications industry. Riverside, like other cities around the country, has slowly seen its Wi-Fi system surpassed by the consumers’ shift to smartphones, tablets and other forms of mobile connectivity, and the growth in broadband access.

A survey of Riverside schools found that only 2 percent to 4 percent of students utilize the existing system. More than half the people who try to use the system only log on only once and 75 percent log on between one and three times.

At the same time, people are flocking to the Internet in unprecedented numbers. Many are using much faster broadband Internet service in their homes and offices to do everything from surf the Internet for information to watching movies, television and other streaming content.

When the City began planning the Wi-Fi system, 65 percent to 70 percent of American adults used the Internet, and only 30 percent to 35 percent had broadband Internet in their homes. Today, more than 86 percent of Americans use the Internet and 70 percent of homes have broadband access.

Mobile connectivity through cellular phones, smartphones and tablet computers also has enabled a vast majority of Americans to enjoy continuous access to the Internet.