

Gainesville Eastside Public WiFi Project

At the request of County citizens and local organizations, Alachua County government was asked to research how we can help to improve the availability of internet access to the public on the East side of Gainesville. Internet availability is limited in this area and accessibility is costly. In an effort to offer a wider coverage area for free internet access for our citizens, Alachua County is partnering with the City of Gainesville to provide wireless Internet access in several Community Centers located on the east side of the City. The Alachua County Information and Telecommunication Services department has met with City staff to identify the Centers that would best serve the population in this specific area, and have the ability to access internet services from a local carrier.

Even though there is open WiFi access in the public libraries, the location of these sites is not easily accessible to all citizens on the east side of the city, causing a digital divide. A digital divide occurs when technology voids exist within a community, limiting the access to information via reasonable speed internet services. The goal is to try and expand the number of WiFi hotspots throughout the highest concentrated digital divide communities within the City of Gainesville in order to show that a need exists to improve free wireless internet access for the County's citizens, especially the students in this region.

Because of the extensive infrastructure and funding needed to deploy free WiFi over a significant area on the Eastside, ITS plans on establishing a one year pilot in specific community centers to determine how much actual use a free Internet service would be utilized. ITS met with local Internet services providers to develop a partnership for Internet service at no costs for one year. GRUCom committed to providing free service for the first year to the following community centers

- Eastside Community Center, 2841 E. University Avenue
- Thelma Bolton Senior Activity Center, 516 NE 2nd Avenue
- Martin Luther King, Jr. Center, 1028 NE 14th Street

Once the initial WiFi connections are established with the City community centers, the County will work with all the partners in determining a level of responsibility that each will assume to keep the services operational on a go forward basis. County ITS has offered to pick up the cost of the Wi-Fi routers and any wiring costs for the community centers. The goal is to keep the up-front costs under \$500 per location. Once the one year pilot is over and it's been determined that this type of service would thrive at these centers, several decisions will need to be made in regards to ongoing funding for Internet service and hardware support.

A Memorandum of Understanding between the County and City has been developed that outlines the operational agreement for these centers. We anticipate having the first center operational in May 2015.