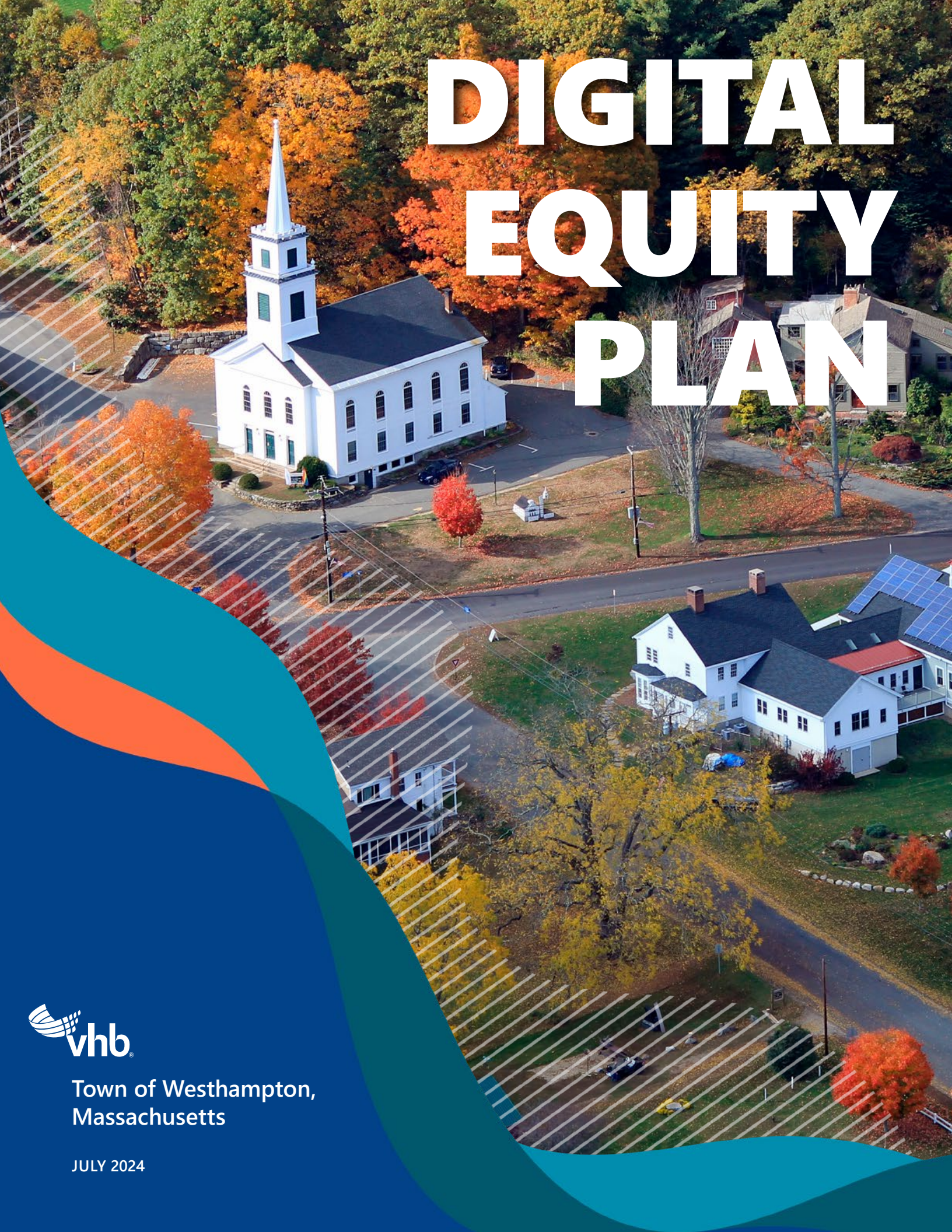
DIGITAL EQUITY PLAN



vhb

Town of Westhampton, Massachusetts

JULY 2024

PREPARED FOR

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VHB would like to express our gratitude to the members of the Digital Equity Steering Committee for their significant contributions in leading and guiding this process. Your commitment, expertise, and insight helped drive this project towards success.

The input from the Steering Committee and Stakeholders, along with feedback from residents through discussions and surveys, helped guide this exploratory process and refine the final Digital Equity Plan. We thank all participants for their time and willingness to participate in this project.

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Executive Summary

This Digital Equity Plan is intended to act as a roadmap for Westhampton to achieve its digital equity goals.

Based on publicly available data and public engagement, this Plan illuminates existing digital equity barriers and identifies potential solutions that could improve residents' and business owners' access to broadband, devices, and digital skills training.

Due in part to its rural nature, Westhampton is a non-competitive market where Comcast is the sole cable internet service provider (ISP). Approximately 20 households are unable to connect to Comcast's cable and must rely on one or more alternate broadband technologies like satellite, fixed wireless, or hotspots to access the internet. Even those households who subscribe to cable may experience unreliable or slow internet, inhibiting their ability to complete basic online tasks.

WESTHAMPTON'S CHALLENGES TO DIGITAL EQUITY

- Availability of affordable, reliable broadband services
- Lack of market competition between Internet Service Providers (ISPs)
- Public awareness of digital inclusion activities and services

WESTHAMPTON'S DIGITAL EQUITY GOALS

- Encourage/require installation of broadband to unserved locations
- Improve use of and access to digital devices
- Provide regular training and workshops to community members
- Enhance community outreach and information distribution
- Engage in local, regional, and statewide partnerships

WESTHAMPTON'S DIGITAL EQUITY VISION

Westhampton will be a community where every resident, business, and institution has access to affordable reliable broadband and the digital technology required for daily use and to fully participate in all aspects of social, economic, education, health, and civic life.

Westhampton Public Library has public devices, hotspots, and some digital skill trainings. IMAGE CREDIT: CHRISTINE KRESS

Westhampton's vulnerable populations, such as its aging adults, veterans, and lower-income households, are especially susceptible to challenges pertaining to digital access. This Plan takes care to address the specific needs of these populations in Westhampton and make recommendations that could support targeted financial support, outreach, and education.

The Town of Westhampton recognizes that establishing affordable and reliable broadband access for every household will require ongoing community input, public funding, and innovative projects. The Town is committed to implementing changes in an equitable manner that ensures all households and individuals benefit.

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Introduction

In our technology-driven society, it is essential to evaluate how technology impacts our education, work, social interactions, and personal lives. The digital divide restricts individuals' participation in society, democracy, and the economy. Amidst political, economic, and technological shifts, communities—especially marginalized groups—need equitable access to resources.

Digital equity is also key to improving social equity. Everyone, regardless of age, must have online access to navigate crucial aspects of life such as education, healthcare, employment, personal finances, and political engagement. The COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the importance of broadband and digital devices, demonstrating the adverse effects on individuals lacking full access and utilization.

Through this report, Westhampton's staff, digital equity partners, and community members can review current conditions and take action to close the digital equity gap through pursuing public funding, improving broadband infrastructure, forging new partnerships, and organizing digital training programs.

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What is Digital Equity?

The internet is crucial in today's world, making possible information sharing, access to government services, telehealth, social interaction, and involvement in education and employment. To ensure equitable access to societal and democratic activities, everyone should have fast and reliable broadband connectivity and the necessary devices and skills to use the internet. However, existing social inequalities have exacerbated access to technology contributing to what's known as the digital divide.

What is Digital Equity?

The National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA) defines the following terms in digital equity work.

Digital Divide—The Problem

The digital divide is the gap between those who have affordable access, skills, and support to effectively engage online and those who do not.

Digital Inclusion—The Work

Digital Inclusion refers to the activities necessary to ensure that all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

Digital Equity—The Goal

Digital equity is a condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy, and economy.

Digital Equity Indicators

The primary focus areas of digital equity assessment include access to broadband (synonymous with high-speed internet), digital devices, and digital literacy.

Broadband Access

Broadband access refers to the ability and use of high-speed internet services (defined by the FCC as 100/20 Mbps) through technologies like fiber, coaxial cable, fixed wireless, DSL, and satellite. Key aspects of broadband access include availability, affordability, and adoption through internet subscriptions.

Device Access

Device access refers to the ability of individuals to use electronic tools that process, store, and transmit digital data, including computers, tablets, smartphones, smartwatches, and other connected devices. Key aspects of device access include availability, affordability, and applicability.

Digital Literacy

Digital literacy refers to the set of skills required to navigate, evaluate, and create information using technology effectively and responsibly. These skills are crucial for using technology for education, employment, healthcare, civic activities, and social interaction.

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The Process

The Town of Westhampton collaborated with a third-party consultant, VHB, to write this Digital Equity Plan. The following steps guided data collection, analysis, and the development of a Vision and Goals.

Digital Equity Steering Committee

The Digital Equity Steering Committee (the Committee) worked closely with VHB to oversee the project's process, provide strategic support, and facilitate communication with selected stakeholder groups. The Committee included the Town Coordinator, a representative from the Master Plan Implementation Committee, and a member of the Selectboard.

Data Analysis

VHB and the Town of Westhampton collaborated to review publicly available data from the US Census, Federal Communications Commission (FCC), National Telecommunication and Information Administration (NTIA), MBI, and the Benton Institute for Broadband & Society. VHB also reviewed previous reports by local institutions, including Resilient Westhampton (the newest master plan, published in 2023), Westhampton Public Library's Strategic Plan, and the Northern Hilltowns Consortium of Councils on Aging report Aging and Technology in Seven Rural Hilltowns (see ***Appendix I***)

Goals from Resilient Westhampton (2023) relevant to Digital Equity Planning

Strategy H 2.1: Improve high-speed internet service in Town to ensure social, civic, and remote work connectivity

Strategy ED 3.2: Expand access/reliability of high-speed internet. Collect data on existing cable network availability and reliability to document problem areas. Work with Comcast, other providers, and MA Broadband Institution to complete reliable service throughout Town and for financial assistance

Strategy FS 3.4: Adopt hybrid meetings as a standard practice, expand technical capacity to deliver and offer education to residents who are unfamiliar with the use of Zoom

Strategy FS 2.2: Make sure all public and private entities have clear channels of communication. Ensure residents have a clear understanding of what services are available generally and in an emergency. Consider negotiating with Comcast for a cable community-access channel Westhampton; improving Town website with two-way communication options (text messaging, online feedback) and community pages for local organizations to post information

Public Engagement

Community involvement is a key aspect of planning for Digital Equity. To grasp the disparities in broadband access, device access, and digital literacy, the Committee and VHB coordinated several community and stakeholder interactions. Feedback from these events significantly contributed to identifying the community's needs and shaped the recommendations made in this Plan.

Stakeholder Interviews

Though Westhampton may be small in population, there are some big voices in town focused on digital equity. The stakeholder interview process allowed those most passionate about closing the digital divide in Westhampton to speak to the town's challenges and strengths. VHB interviewed the following individuals and groups to discuss digital equity in Westhampton:

- Westhampton Public Library
- Veteran's Agent, Town of Westhampton
- Comcast
- Town of Westhampton Council on Aging (COA)
- Tech Connect, Northern Hilltowns Consortium of COAs
- Maitri Learning
- Suzor IT/Hampshire Regional School District

See notes from these meetings in ***Appendix II***.

Public Meetings

VHB and the Committee facilitated two in-person public meetings at strategic points throughout the planning process to disseminate information on ongoing planning efforts and solicit public feedback. The public meetings were interactive, starting with a brief presentation from the Team followed by group discussions.

The first public interaction was a presentation to the Selectboard on May 6, 2024. VHB staff presented a brief PowerPoint describing the purpose of a Digital Equity Plan, the progress of the report so far, and actions residents could take to improve the quality of the final plan. The presentation highlighted the importance of the Digital Equity Survey and provided a QR code for people to scan. See presentation and notes from this meeting in ***Appendix III.***

VHB presenting at the second public meeting. IMAGE CREDIT: VHB

The second public interaction was an open meeting at Town Hall on June 27, 2024. VHB staff presented a PowerPoint presentation on the project status to date and asked for feedback on the Plan's draft goals and actions. Feedback was largely positive; attendees provided VHB staff with specific examples of internet issues. One example is reliability issues in the area around the high school, which experiences different speeds between school hours and non-school hours. See presentation and notes from this meeting in ***Appendix IV***.

Public Surveys

Between April and May 2024, VHB and the Town of Westhampton collected 71 responses through a local Digital Equity Survey. This survey provided qualitative data necessary to contextualize quantitative data collected through the Census and FCC. See ***Appendix V*** for a copy of this survey and results.

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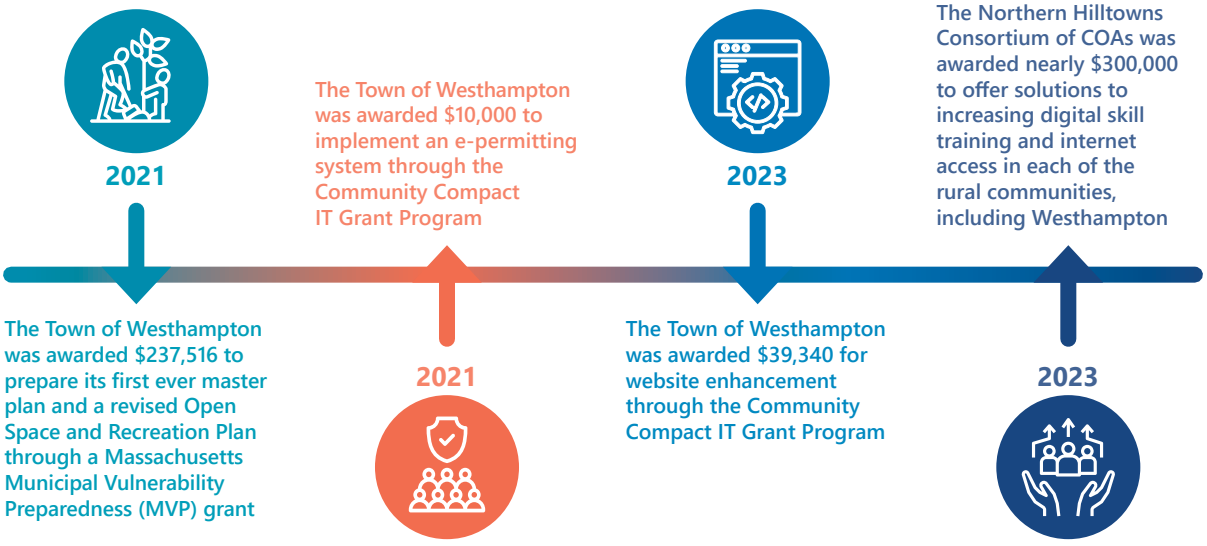
Community Assessment

Residents enjoy a high quality of life, with access to excellent schools, an active public library, a Council on Aging, outdoor recreational opportunities, and community events. Neighboring communities include Huntington, Chesterfield, Williamsburg, Southampton, Easthampton, and Northampton. Regional institutions and organizations such as the Five College Consortium ensure Westhampton residents have access to a broad array of amenities and cultural activities.

Westhampton's Digital Equity Work to Date

To bring the town up to speed in a continuously changing digital landscape, municipal departments and public organizations are working to expand broadband connectivity, device access, and digital skills training among residents, businesses, and institutions.



These activities have helped Westhampton residents and staff adapt to and overcome challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, which necessitated the use of virtual platforms for education, work, healthcare, social events, and more. However, Westhampton continues to grapple with the effects of the digital divide. Discussions with stakeholders and an examination of local and regional programs have shed light on the needs of Westhampton's vulnerable populations and have allowed the Town and Steering Committee to brainstorm possible remedies.

This chapter describes the populations most susceptible to the digital divide due to these hurdles and identifies possible strategies to improve internet adoption and digital engagement while keeping in mind strategies identified by previous planning efforts.

Broadband Internet Availability, Affordability, and Adoption

The Massachusetts Statewide Digital Equity Plan assessed broadband availability, affordability, and adoption across the Commonwealth:

AVAILABILITY refers to an individual's ability to get high-quality, high-speed internet available for them to use, regardless of their ability to pay for this service

AFFORDABILITY refers to an individual's ability to pay for high-speed internet, regardless of the availability of high-speed internet

ADOPTION was calculated by MBI as the combined outcome of both availability and affordability, whether residents subscribe to high-speed internet plans

This section assesses the availability, affordability, and adoption of internet services in Westhampton based on publicly available data and insight from the Steering Committee, stakeholders, and residents.

Availability

In this assessment, the following key terms are necessary for understanding broadband availability:

» **Broadband:** A transmission system granting users access to the internet. Broadband refers to a high-capacity transmission technique using phone lines, coaxial cable ("coax"), or fiber optic cable, enabling a large amount of information to be communicated simultaneously

» **Broadband Serviceable Location (BSL):** A broadband serviceable location is a specific place or address where broadband internet services can be provided. The term generally encompasses residential properties, businesses, offices, schools, institutions, and healthcare facilities

» **Internet Service Providers (ISPs):** Companies that provide subscribers with services for accessing and using digital tools, entertainment, and services

» **High-Speed Internet:** The FCC defines high-speed broadband as internet service at speeds that exceed 100/20 Mbps. This standard, adopted March 2024, replaced the previous standard of 25/3 Mbps

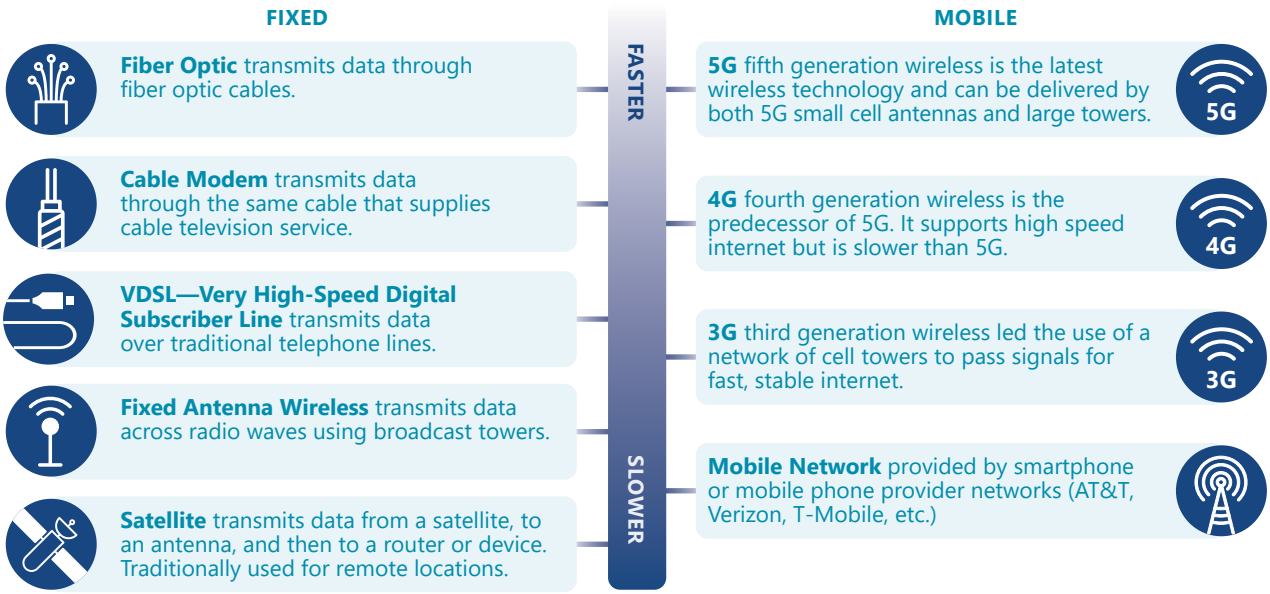
» **Unserved:** Defined by the NTIA as BSLs that cannot access internet services with speeds of at least 25/3 Mbps

» **Underserved:** Defined by the NTIA as BSLs that can access internet services with speeds of at least 25/3 Mbps but not exceeding 100/20 Mbps

» **Served:** Defined by the NTIA as BSLs that can access internet services with speeds of at least 100/20 Mbps

» **Last Mile Infrastructure:** Last mile infrastructure refers to the final segment of the network that delivers internet connectivity from the service provider's network to the end-user's premises

Westhampton residents have multiple options to connect to the internet: through wired connections like DSL, coaxial cable, or through wireless options like satellite or fixed wireless (sent through antennas). A fiber network (referred to as the MassBroadband 123 network, operated by Local Linx) is an alternative broadband technology available for Community Anchor Institutions (CAI's) like the Library, Town Hall, and public schools.



When evaluating broadband availability, the **Federal Communications Commission** (FCC) assesses broadband availability and speeds at **Broadband Serviceable Locations** (BSLs), defined as "a business or residential location in the United States at which mass-market fixed broadband Internet access service is, or can be, installed." Examples of BSLs include single-family homes, townhouses, apartment buildings, restaurants, retail shops, and schools. Structures that are *not* BSLs include barns, sheds, accessory dwelling units (ADUs), or standalone garages.

According to the FCC's latest data upload (June 2023):

20 BSLs in Westhampton are unserved, meaning these locations do not have internet at speeds of at least 25 megabits per second (Mbps) download and 3 Mbps upload (written 25/3 Mbps).

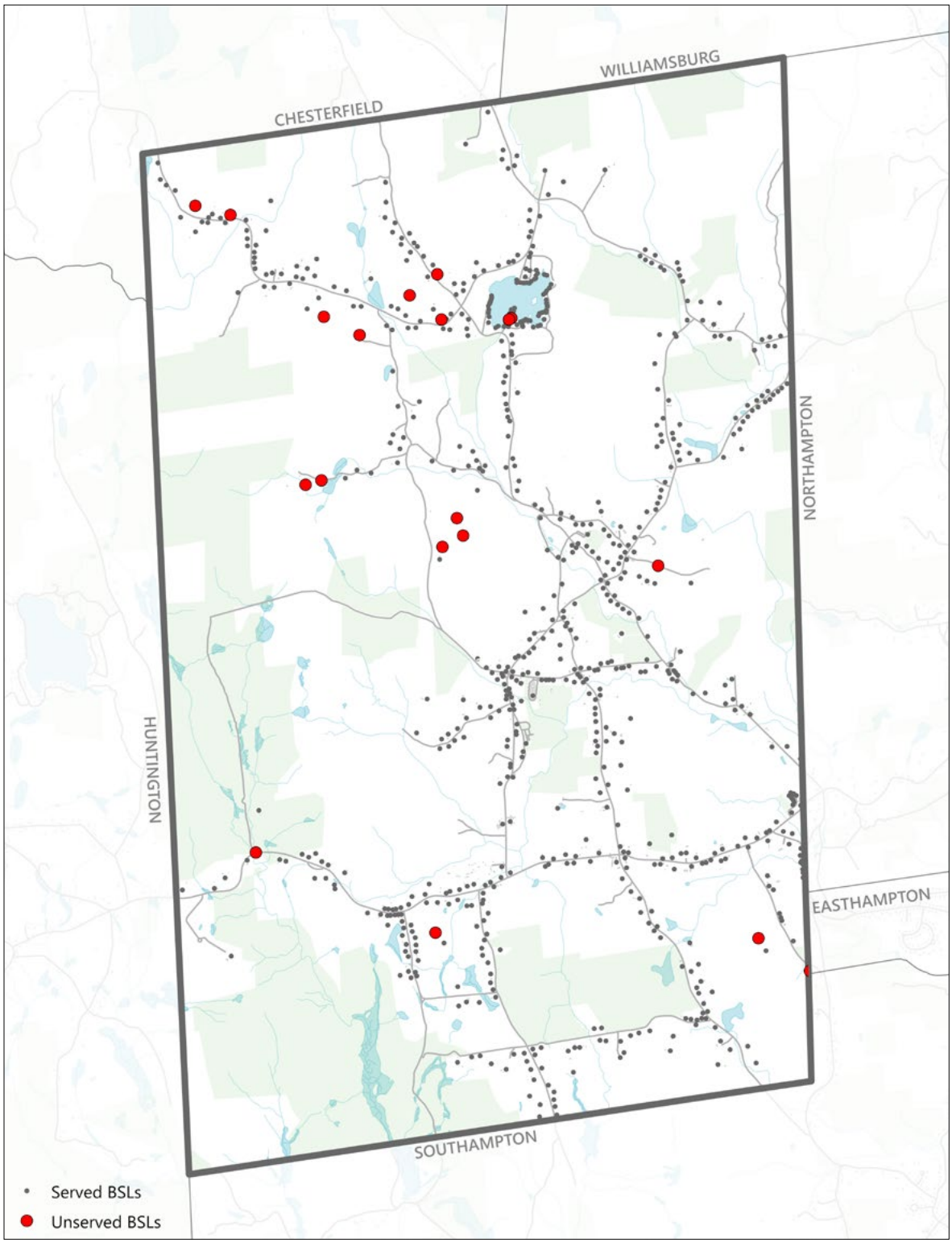
2 BSLs in Westhampton are underserved, meaning these locations do not have internet at speeds of at least 100/20 Mbps.

773 BSLs are served, meaning these buildings receive broadband service at speeds exceeding 100/20 Mbps.[1]

In the summer of 2024, the FCC will expand broadband service using more than $42 billion in funding through the Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program. The funding will go to ISPs to expand last-mile infrastructure. **Last-mile infrastructure** refers to the final leg of telecommunications networks that deliver broadband services to end-users or customers. Through the BEAD Program, municipal entities, ISPs, nonprofits, and tribal governments can submit challenges to the FCC National Broadband Map on behalf of residents, businesses, and other BSLs to ensure every location can receive internet service at speeds of at least 100/20 Mbps.

Figure 1 indicates the location of these unserved BSLs, as shown on the FCC's Broadband Availability Map and confirmed by the Town. The primary areas without internet access include Tob Hill Road (3 unserved BSLs) and Northwest Road (5 unserved BSLs). Additional BSLs not listed on the FCC's map have been identified by the Town as unserved or underserved; those locations will be uploaded as challenges to the FCC map through the BEAD Challenge Process.

Figure 1: Location of Unserved BSLs in Westhampton



Credits: VHB; Esri; USGS; FCC (June 2023)

Westhampton residents can access the internet through a variety of technologies and service providers. ***Table 1*** provides an overview of internet service providers and connection types available in Westhampton as of June 2023. **Fiber**, the fastest and most reliable internet connection, is not available for mass-market residential use in town. The next best option is **coaxial cable**, provided by Comcast Communications (Xfinity), which serves 750 BSLs (nearly 100% of Westhampton's total BSLs). Charter Communications provides minimal coaxial service in town, and Verizon's **copper** technology is also available but offers far slower speeds than cable and fiber.

In addition to wired connections, Westhampton's residents and businesses can also access the internet via wireless connection types, including **satellite** (with ISPs Hughestnet, Viasat, and Starlink) and licensed **fixed wireless** (with ISPs T-Mobile and Verizon). Wireless connection types are typically less reliable than wired connections and can be affected by the weather.

Table 1: Available ISPs in Westhampton and Connection Type

	Internet Service Provider (ISP)	Connection Type
Wired	Westfield Gas & Electric (Whip City Fiber)	Fiber
	Charter (Spectrum)	Cable
	Comcast (Xfinity)	Cable
	Verizon	Copper
Wireless	HughesNet	GSO Satellite
	Viasat	GSO Satellite
	SpaceX (Starlink)	NGSO Satellite
	T-Mobile	Licensed Fixed Wireless
	Verizon	Licensed Fixed Wireless

Source: BDC, FCC (June 2023)

Table 2 reflects the maximum speeds reported by ISPs. This may skew the perception of internet service in certain places like Westhampton, where less provider competition and the rural nature of the town may reveal slower and less reliable connectivity. This data also does not reflect speeds at peak usage times (for example, more individuals are likely accessing the internet at 2 PM than at 4 AM), which can dramatically decrease internet speed.

Table 2: ISP Reported Broadband Speeds in Westhampton (MBI)

	Internet Service Provider (ISP)	Connection Type	Advertised Maximum Speeds (Download/ Upload Mbps)	BSLs Serviceable	BSLs Serviceable as % of Total
Wired	Westfield Gas & Electric (Whip City Fiber)	Fiber	1000/1000	1	0.13%
	Comcast (Xfinity)	Cable	1200/35	750	100.00%
	Charter (Spectrum)	Cable	1000/35	1	0.13%
Wireless	T-Mobile	Fixed Wireless	100/20	145	19.33%
	T-Mobile	Fixed Wireless	25/3	106	14.13%

Source: BDC, FCC (June 2022)

Broadband availability is only the first element of broadband analysis. The following sections on affordability and adoption illustrate additional considerations when municipalities determine households' and individuals' need and desire for internet services.

Affordability

The second pillar of broadband access is affordability. Even if a household has the ability to connect to the internet, the cost of a monthly internet subscription may be prohibitive.

According to BroadbandUSA's 2021 Community Reports, residents of Hampshire County paid an average minimum monthly subscription price of $42.55, compared to $29.99 in Hampden County, and $43.59 in Franklin County.[2] In contrast, the average minimum monthly costs for eastern Massachusetts were lower (with Middlesex County reporting minimum monthly costs of $33.52; Suffolk County reporting $33.80; and Plymouth County reporting $37.38).

The Digital Equity Steering Committee confirmed cost hinders internet adoption in Westhampton. Due to a lack of market competition between ISPs, existing cable providers in Westhampton may charge more than if there were multiple providers competing for customers.

Table 3 reflects local survey respondents' monthly payment for internet services. Most survey respondents bundle their internet with their cable and/or phone services and pay more than $150 per month for these services. Of the respondents who pay for internet separately, most pay between $75 and $100 per month.

Table 3: Count of approximately how much households pay for internet service each month based on if they bundle their services or not

Total Monthly Payment	Non-Bundled	Bundled
I don't know	N/A	1
$0-50	2	0
$50-75	7	1
$75-100	12	5
$100-150	6	5
$150-200	1	12
More than $200	1	17

Source: Local Digital Equity Survey

An additional challenge to affordability is the rollback of the FCC's **Affordable Connectivity Program** (ACP). Funded through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (also known as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act) in 2021, ACP provided a $30 per month internet subsidy to eligible households. Households enrolled in ACP could also receive a one-time discount of up to $100 to purchase a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet from participating providers. As of February 2024, 17% of households in zip code 01027 (shared by the Town of Westhampton and City of Easthampton) were enrolled in ACP.[3]

In January 2024, the FCC announced ACP enrollment would be halted as funding runs out. To address the impending gap between ACP enrollees and affordable internet, the Town must promote alternative internet subsidy options to residents, including ISP-specific discount programs like Comcast Internet Essentials or government subsidy programs like FCC's Lifeline.

Households enrolled in Comcast Internet Essentials can get speeds up to **50 Mbps** for only **$9.95/month**

(Xfinity)

Lifeline provides up to a **$9.25 monthly discount** on service for eligible low-income subscribers and up to **$34.25 per month** for eligible subscribers on Tribal lands

(FCC)

Long-term, improving market competition stands as the most effective solution to decrease internet costs and increase internet adoption in Westhampton. MBI discovered that 52% of municipalities in the Pioneer Valley face little to no competition in the broadband market, especially for ISPs providing service via cable and fiber technologies. By encouraging additional providers to enter the area or by exploring a locally-owned and -operated network, Westhampton can help reduce internet costs and high-quality internet connectivity for residents and businesses.

Adoption

The third pillar of internet access is **broadband adoption**, or the process by which an individual obtains daily access to internet services through subscribing to an ISP. According to 2022 ACS data, an estimated 86% of Westhampton's households subscribed to internet services in 2022, slightly lower than estimates of Hampshire County (93%) and the State (90%).[4] ***Table 4*** breaks down internet adoption through connection type.

In 2022, 86.8% of Westhampton's households had broadband internet. Of those, 80.4% used a wired connection such as cable, fiber, or DSL; 4.5% used only a cellular data plan; and 1.7% used satellite. 13.2% (or 85) households were not subscribed to internet service of any kind.

Table 4: Internet Subscriptions in Westhampton Households by Connection Type

Type of Internet Subscription	Estimated Number of Households	Estimated Percent of Total Households
With an Internet subscription:	**558**	**86.8%**
Dial-up with no other type of Internet subscription	0	0.0%
Broadband of any type	558	86.8%
Cellular data plan	513	79.8%
Cellular data plan with no other type of Internet subscription	29	4.5%
Broadband such as cable, fiber optic or DSL	517	80.4%
Satellite Internet service	11	1.7%
Without an Internet subscription	**85**	**13.2%**
Total Households	**643**	**100%**

Source: American Community Survey (2022)

The local Digital Equity Survey provided additional insight into internet subscription in Westhampton. Of the 71 respondents to the local Digital Equity Survey, 65 reported using Comcast (Xfinity; cable) as their ISP, two use T-Mobile (fixed wireless), one respondent uses Space Exploration Technologies (Starlink; satellite), one respondent uses Verizon Communications (DSL), and one respondent uses Verizon MiFi jetpack.

Only one respondent—located on Tob Hill Road—did not subscribe to internet due to there being no service available at their address. Three of the five respondents who did not subscribe to cable said that cable was not available at their address; these respondents subscribed to internet services through fixed wireless or satellite technology types.

One factor contributing to internet adoption is quality of service. An individual or household may choose one technology type over another (for example cable over satellite) if they believe one will provide more reliable service. When asked about their quality of service, most respondents to the local Digital Equity Survey indicated satisfaction with their current subscriptions: 36 (51%) reported that their service was very reliable; 32 (45%) reported their service was mostly reliable; only two believed their service was not reliable. Reported satisfaction with service is supported by the speed test data collected by the survey (***Table 5***) which shows average internet speeds exceed the FCC's 100/20 Mbps baseline criteria for high-speed broadband. Those BSLs with speeds below the 100/20 Mbps baseline could be assessed as candidates for the BEAD challenge process in summer 2024.

Table 5: Speed test data from Westhampton's Digital Equity Survey

	Download Speed	Upload Speed	Latency
Average	**188**	**24**	**20**
Median	111	23	18
Minimum	9	7	12
Maximum	776	100	78

Source: Local Digital Equity Survey

Some factors that contribute to broadband unreliability and slow speeds include service provider, time of day, and poor weather conditions. Internet reliability can be improved through network infrastructure improvements and network redundancy. **Network redundancy** refers to the process of adding extra, duplicate hardware, software, or network devices to a network infrastructure to serve as a backup or fail-safe system in case the primary network components fail. By collaborating with neighboring municipalities and working with ISPs to create redundant networks, Westhampton can eliminate downtime resulting from a single point of failure.

A second factor contributing to internet adoption is awareness and education about internet services. Individuals who do not understand the benefits of internet or who do not know how to use digital devices may choose to forgo an internet subscription. These factors tend to impact aging individuals, individuals with a language barrier, and low-income households. Public awareness of internet benefits does not seem to be a key issue in Westhampton.

A third factor contributing to internet adoption is perceived need and trust in/safety of the internet. In some communities, especially older generations, there might be a lack of understanding or perceived need for the internet. Concerns about online privacy and safety can also deter some individuals from adopting broadband. From speaking with Westhampton's Council on Aging and Northern Hilltowns Consortium of COAs, it is evident that some older individuals may hesitate to adopt modern broadband solutions and devices. Targeted outreach and education can help to address these fears in key populations.

By addressing each of these factors, Westhampton can improve adoption of internet services in the town and provide residents and business owners with the proper means to understand and select the subscription type most suitable for their needs.

Device Access

The second digital equity indicator is **device access**, referring to the availability and usability of digital devices such as computers, tablets, and smartphones, which are essential for fully participating in the digital world. 2022 ACS data, shown in ***Table 6***, indicates 94% of Westhampton's households have a computer, slightly lower than that of the County (95%) and roughly equal to that of the State (94%).[5] Most households in Westhampton access the internet either via a desktop or laptop (86.6%) or a smartphone (87%). 68.% of households have a tablet or another wireless computer. However, roughly 9% of households (58) reported having only one computing device and 6.2% of households (40) reported having no computer.

Table 6: Types of Computers used in Westhampton Households

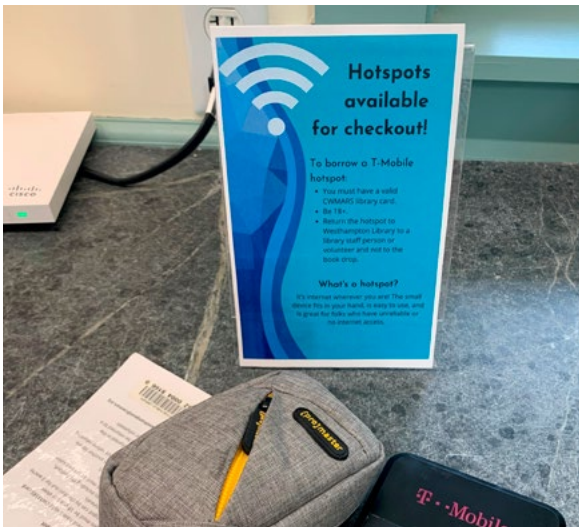
Type of Computer	Estimated Number of Households	Estimated Percent of Total Households
Has one or more types of computing devices:	**603**	**93.8%**
Desktop or laptop	557	86.6%
Desktop or laptop with no other type of computing device	27	4.2%
Smartphone	564	87.7%
Smartphone with no other type of computing device	24	3.7%
Tablet or other portable wireless computer	441	68.6%
Tablet or other portable wireless computer with no other type of computing device	7	1.1%
Other computer	12	1.9%
Other computer with no other type of computing device	0	0.0%
No computer	**40**	**6.2%**

Source: American Community Survey (2022)

The local Digital Equity Survey supported these trends. When asked about personal devices, 86% of respondents had a smartphone, 63% had a tablet, 46% had a desktop computer, 83% had laptop, and write-in responses listing other devices included smart TVs and streaming boxes, gaming consoles, Bluetooth devices, and e-readers. Only four respondents said that not everyone living in their household had access to the devices they needed.

Even for households that have a computer, one device might not be enough to support residents' needs. For example, different members of the household may have different needs for computer use such as work, school, entertainment, or personal projects. Shared usage can be inconvenient and not possible if individuals need to use a device at the same time. Sharing devices can also be a risk to privacy, because one computer holds access to browsing history, files, and potentially sensitive information. Having multiple devices allows for increased privacy for each user.

Solutions for individuals without home device access can look to Community Anchor Institutions. Locally, the Westhampton Public Library has three computers for patron use. Some organizations like the Tech Foundry's Tech Hub (based in Springfield) offer learn-to-earn programs through which visitors who take digital skills courses can receive a free Chromebook. Another option is to purchase a **refurbished device** through programs like the Northern Hilltowns Consortium's Tech Connect or local computer stores.



TOP: Two public computers are available for patrons at the Westhampton Public Library **BOTTOM LEFT:** A Mac computer available in the Teen Room of Westhampton Public Library **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Three hotspots are available for patrons to rent from Westhampton Public Library. IMAGE CREDIT: MEAGHAN SCHWELM

Digital Literacy

The third digital equity indicator is **digital literacy**, or the ability of technology users to access the internet safely and comfortably. Providing opportunities for both in-person and virtual training can accommodate different learning styles, accessibility needs, and personal preferences, ensuring maximum participation and success.

Virtual formats like online training and webinars provide easy, flexible learning options benefitting those with mobility issues or remote living situations. A few free resources include Microsoft's Digital Literacy Curriculum, Khan Academy, DigitalLearn.org, EdX, and Northstar Digital Literacy.

In-person classes can be preferable to those looking for hands-on learning experiences, personalized oversight, or immediate feedback. In-person options that supply devices for training are also important as it ensures that those without digital devices at home can still have access to digital literacy classes. The Westhampton Public Library and the Northern Hilltowns Consortium's Tech Connect program provide such in-person tech support for basic computer tasks like email, password management, and telemedicine portal access. Other regional resources for in-person training or real-time tech support include the Tech Foundry's Tech Hub (Springfield), the Center for New Americans (Northampton), and Tech Goes Home (statewide).

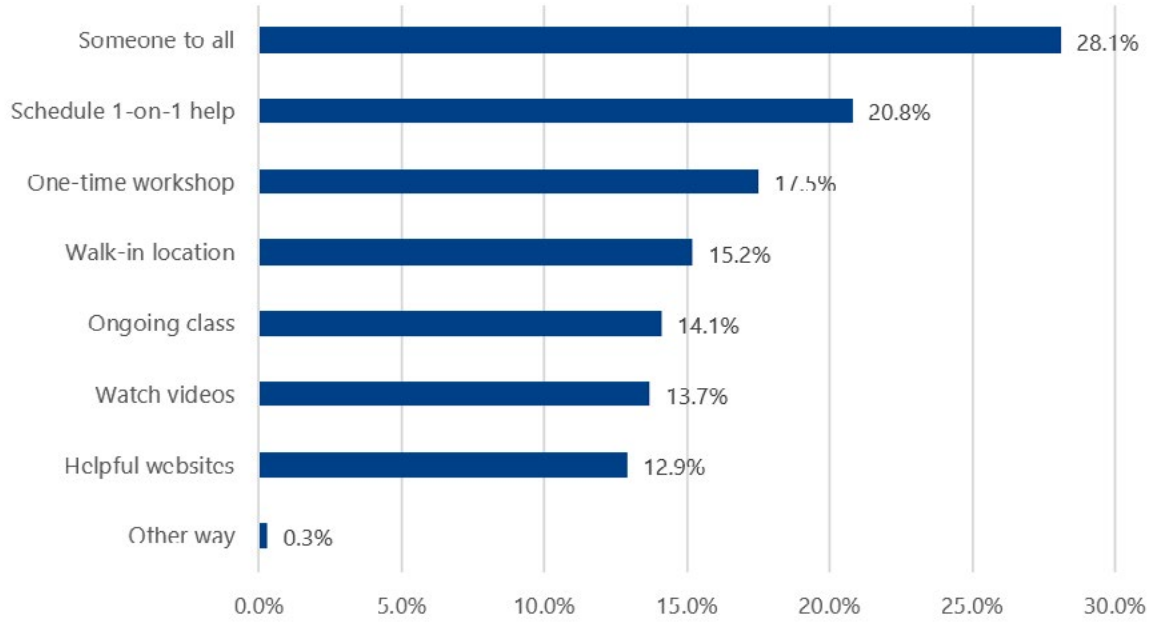
Both the local Digital Equity Survey and the Northern Hilltowns Consortium's Aging and Technology Survey (2023) received input about desirable digital skills training. From the local survey, six respondents (all over the age of 60) reported desired some kind of technical training. Slightly more than a third (37%) of respondents from the Aging and Technology Survey (specifically from Westhampton) reported wanting to learn more about technology, and the devices folks were most interested in learning about included smartphones, desktop/laptops, and smart TVs. The most desired digital literacy topics include:

- Advanced phone use
- Understanding the cloud
- Basic device training
- Program training for Apple, Google, and Microsoft products
- Streaming video
- Finding internet subscription subsidies or discounts
- Surfing the web
- Accessing online health services
- Applying for public benefits

While local and regional organizations work to expand training opportunities, Westhampton's Community Anchor Institutions (CAI's) should enhance outreach of these offerings by using digital and physical marketing methods, including through email/text alerts, the town website, local TV station, mailouts, and community radio.

Figure 2, from the Aging and Technology Survey, shows respondents desired education models, of which the most desirable was standard one-to-all classes, 1-on-1 appointments, and one-time workshops.

Figure 2: Ways People Want to Learn More about Technology



Source: Northern Hilltowns Consortium of COAs

Vulnerable Populations

The Digital Equity Act of 2021 identified eight "**covered populations**" that are historically vulnerable to digital inequity. These eight categories are:

- Individuals who live in covered households (household income no more than 150 percent of federal poverty threshold)
- Aging individuals (60 years and older)
- Incarcerated individuals, other than individuals who are incarcerated in a federal correction facility
- Veterans
- Individuals with disabilities
- Individuals with a language barrier, including individuals who are English learners and have low levels of literacy
- Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group
- Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area

A lack of funding and planning are partially to blame for digital access disparities between the eight covered populations. It is important that goals for relief, education, or inclusion related to this plan consider the impact on all demographic groups, but special attention to be paid to these covered populations.

This section identifies covered populations in Westhampton and potential risks / solutions to address the digital divide for these specific population groups.

Westhampton's Covered Populations

After the adoption of the Digital Equity Act in 2021, the **National Telecommunications and Information Administration's** (NTIA) created the Digital Equity Act Population Viewer, which allows users to visualize the location and proportion of "covered populations" at the national, state, county, and tract level using 2019 census data.[6] ***Table 7*** highlights the characteristics of Westhampton's covered populations as identified by NTIA in 2021.

Table 7: Covered Populations in Westhampton, Hampshire County, and State of Massachusetts

Key Markers	Westhampton Census Tract 8226.03	Hampshire County	State of Massachusetts
Total population[1]	**1,530**	160,830	6,981,974
Total covered population[1]	**1,530**	111,141	5,041,000
Covered population[1]	**100%**	69.1%	72.2%
In covered households[2]	**8.6%**	18.3%	15.8%
Aged 60 or over[2]	**26.7%**	23.2%	24.9%
Incarcerated[2]	**0%**	0.2%	0.2%
Veteran[2]	**7.6%**	5.1%	3.5%
With a disability[2]	**10%**	11.2%	13.1%
With language barrier[3]	**14.3%**	13.1%	19.5%
Racial or ethnic minority[2]	**2.8%**	16.3%	33.0%
Rural[2]	**100%**	30.2%	15.0%
Population in households lacking fixed broadband availability[5]	**N/A**	12.7%	1.3%
Population in households lacking computer or broadband subscription[2]	**9.9%**	8.6%	5.4%
Population not using the internet[6]	**N/A**	N/A	19.5%
Population not using a PC or tablet computer[6]	**N/A**	N/A	30.5%

Source: NTIA 2021 Digital Equity Act Population Viewer

1. U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 Modeled Total Covered Population Estimates
2. U.S. Census Bureau, 2015–2019 5-Year American Community Survey (ACS) Estimates
3. U.S. Census Bureau, 2015–2019 5-Year American Community Survey (ACS) Estimates; National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2017 Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)
4. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2017 Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)
5. Federal Communications Commission (FCC), Fourteenth Broadband Deployment Report, released January 19, 2021
6. National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), 2021 NTIA Internet Use Survey

NTIA defines rural areas as ones other than: a city or town that has a population of greater than 50,000 inhabitants; any urbanized area contiguous and adjacent to a city or town that has a population of greater than 50,000 inhabitants; and in the case of a grant or direct loan, a city, town, or incorporated area that has a population of greater than 20,000 inhabitants.

By NTIA's definition, Westhampton is a rural community. Therefore, 100% of the population is "covered," or vulnerable to digital inequity.

The Massachusetts State Digital Equity Plan—greatly informed by the MBI's statewide survey—highlighted a common barrier to digital equity in rural areas was that many people do not pay for subscriptions to internet services because service is simply unavailable. Survey data from residents as well as conversations with stakeholders and Town staff confirmed internet availability to be a primary barrier to subscription in Westhampton.

Aside from the barriers that result from Westhampton being a rural community, other covered populations will require specialized assistance to ensure that they benefit from the goals of this plan. These impacted population groups include:

» **8.6% of households have an average income of no more than 150% of the federal poverty threshold.** In 2024 a family of four would have to make $31,200 or less to be considered below the 150% poverty threshold

» **26.7% of the population is over the age of sixty,** and more likely than other demographics to be on a fixed income

» **10% of the population has a disability.** Some individuals with disabilities require special accommodations for digital access and training, such as assistive technology

Of the 71 local Digital Equity Survey respondents, 41 were over 60. A total of 24 respondents indicated that their annual household income was less than $60,000. Almost a quarter of the 71 respondents identified as either a racial or ethnic minority group (4), a veteran (7), or an individual with a disability (7). It's important to note that of the five respondents that did not have cable, three self-identified as at least one of these vulnerable populations.

As highlighted in the ***Affordability*** section of this Plan, there are many barriers to affordable high-speed internet such as the termination of the ACP and low competition amongst service providers. Westhampton's vulnerable populations, and specifically those that are reliant on fixed incomes will require special attention to ensure affordability.

Additionally, those with a disability or those with a language barrier may need special accommodations to be able to have the same level of access to digital resources compared to uncovered populations. It is imperative to the success of this plan, as outlined in its vision, that implementation prioritizes the needs of Westhampton's covered populations.

06

Local Assets for Digital Equity

In assessing digital equity in Westhampton, the Steering Committee and stakeholders identified **Community Anchor Institutions** (CAIs), or local institutions whose work is critical to addressing the digital divide.

The following Westhampton institutions are important resources that provide Westhampton residents, business owners, and visitors with access to broadband internet, digital devices, and technical training.

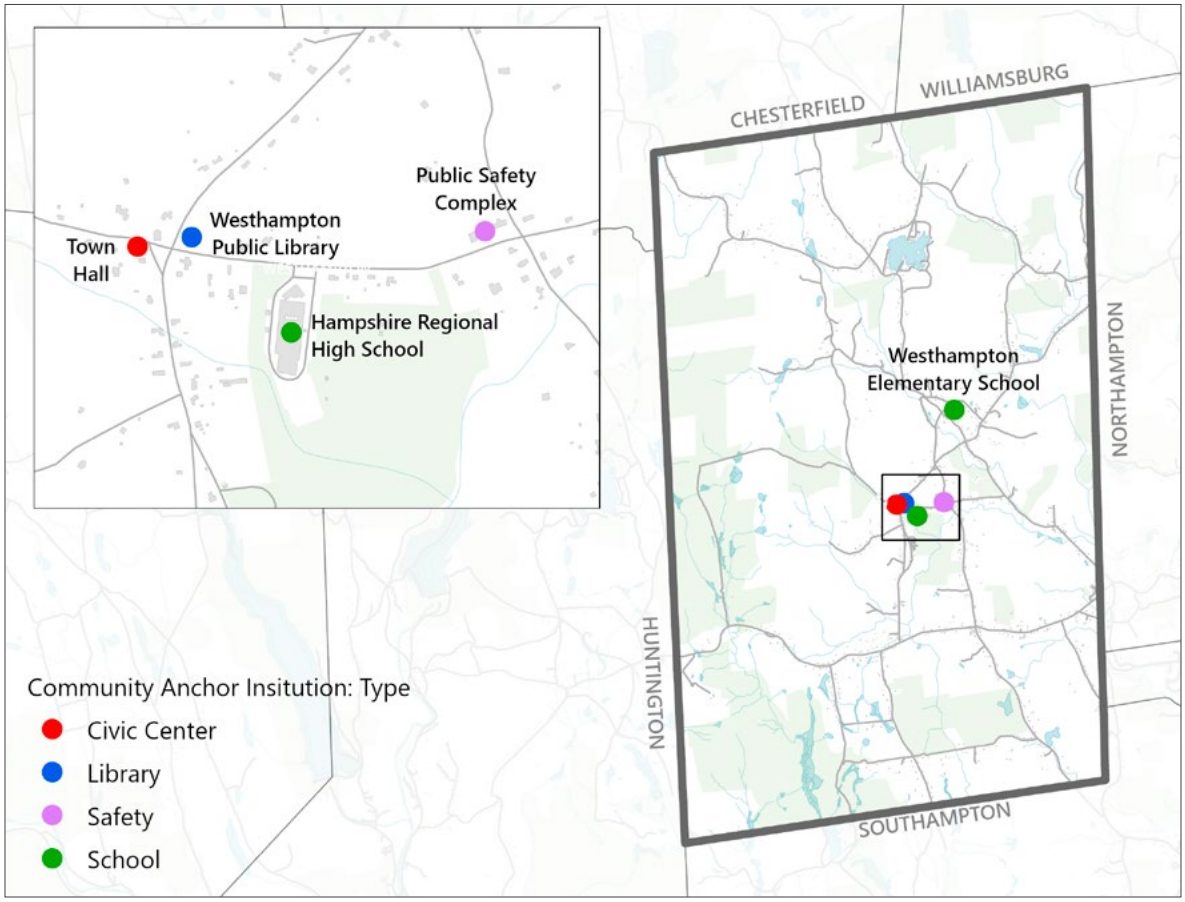
» Westhampton Public Library

» Council on Aging

» Hampshire Regional High School

» Westhampton Elementary School

Figure 3: Community Anchor Institutions in Westhampton



Credits: FCC, Esri, USGS

Westhampton Public Library. IMAGE CREDIT: CHRISTINE KRESS

Westhampton Public Library

The Westhampton Public Library is a bustling hub popular among residents and visitors. Library patrons are provided access to resources via the C/W Mars (Central/Western Massachusetts Automated Resource Sharing) network, the Commonwealth Catalog, and the Massachusetts Library System.

The Library workforce includes a director, youth services librarian, library assistant, and custodian, supplemented by volunteers. These volunteers assist in various aspects of the Library's operation—from shelving materials and running the circulation desk to maintaining the garden.

Two meeting spaces—the Community Room and Judd Room—are available for public programs and local non-profit use. The Community Room hosts monthly exhibitions from local artists and is equipped with presentation amenities, including a sound system and projector for use in presentations and film screenings.

Address: 1 North Road

Hours of Operation:
Monday 2–8
Tuesday 9–12 & 1–5
Wednesday 9–12 & 1–5
Thursday 2–8
Saturday 10–1

Services:
Book rental (paper, e-book)
Trybrary (library of things)
Public computers
Hot spots
2 meeting rooms
Tech support

Resources for Digital Equity

Wi-Fi | 3 Computers | 2 Hotspots | Entertainment Devices (DVD Player, Nintendo Switch) | Tech Support

Wi-Fi, provided by Crocker Communications through the C/W Mars consortium, is accessible throughout the building and even in the parking lot. The Library Director credits Crocker Communications for the reliability and speed of the internet in the building and reinforced the importance of this resource because some residents do not have reliable internet service at home.

Westhampton Public Library has three public-use computers—two of which have been replaced recently—that are regularly used. The Library also has two T-Mobile hotspots that may be borrowed to patrons 18+ for three weeks at a time. The Library Director says the hot spots are not a well-known resource, and predicts if more people know about them, they could become used more often. Additional devices are available through the Trybrary, including a DVD player, paper shredder, and laminator. The Library is interested in expanding the Trybrary to include more technology for public lending. The Friends of Westhampton Public Library are responsible for most of the technology purchases, with the latest addition being a Nintendo Switch.

The Library has informal and formal tech support for patrons. The Library Director or part-time employees can help visitors check email, print documents, or search the web. For more complex tasks, the Library hosts two help sessions per month, organized and facilitated by a volunteer. The volunteer can also perform house calls in cases where a patron's issue can't be resolved by bringing in their device. Assisting with setting up a new printer is a common reason people ask for house calls. The option to have direct service also supports patrons with mobility limitations.

Challenges to Digital Equity

Funding | Public Engagement | Public Buy-In

As with any institution that purchases devices for public or internal use, the primary concern is funding for device replacement. This funding can be inconsistent, though Westhampton Public Library benefits form financial support from the Friends of the Library and upstanding community members (a local Eagle Scout's recent donation allowed the Library to purchase two computers).

Another challenge noted by the Library Director is public buy-in and adoption of services. In small towns, it can be difficult to inform or excite residents about new device purchases or services, such as digital literacy classes. In the Library's 2023 Strategic Plan, a primary goal was to "Expand the Library's recognition in town for its services and resources" by (1) attending community events to promote programs and (2) actively collaborating with the schools, COA, and other community groups to share event details with key populations.[7]

The Library could enhance their services by engaging with local and regional organizations. For example, NHCOA's Tech Connect, Tech Foundry (based in Springfield), and the Western Massachusetts Alliance for Digital Equity can support with device acquisition and digital literacy training. Additionally, the Library could hire a part-time staff member dedicated to digital inclusion. MBI currently has a partnership with the Lead for America American Connection Corps program, which engages fellows to support digital inclusion activities.

Key Populations Served

All residents.

Hampshire Regional High School. IMAGE CREDIT: HAMPSHIRE REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Westhampton Elementary and Hampshire Regional High School

Westhampton is served by the Hampshire Regional School District (HRSD). Two schools in this district are located in Westhampton. To understand digital inclusion programs and resources in the schools, VHB spoke with Suzor IT, a full-service IT provider for schools and municipalities, and Westhampton Elementary's Technology Specialist.

Address:
High School: 19 Stage Road
Elementary: 37 Kings Highway

Programs:
1-to-1 device program
Technology support & classes

Resources for Digital Equity

Wi-Fi | 1-to-1 Computer Program for Students, Faculty | Computer Classes

Suzor IT recently upgraded internet network equipment and devices across the district using E-Rate funding. The Director estimates Westhampton Elementary receives between 150-200 Mbps download. Suzor IT looks to fiber as the future of internet connectivity and hopes that a connection with MassBroadband 123 could help all district schools receive faster service.

HRSD is a one-to-one computer district, meaning every student receives a computer for academic use. Students in grades 3-12 get MacBook Airs and students pre-kindergarten through grade 2 receive iPads. Faculty use MacBook Airs. These computers have proven vital for the transition to a more digital world in which students and faculty rely on educational software for communication, resource sharing, and grade submission.

Most schools in the district are furnished with contemporary digital devices, including interactive projectors, Apple TVs, printers, and 3D printers. These cutting-edge resources not only facilitate dynamic interactions between students and teachers but also immerse students in the latest technological advancements, enhancing their overall learning experience.

At Westhampton Elementary, one Technology Specialist assists both faculty and students with general technology needs. Additionally, this Specialist dedicates one day each week to teaching technology classes, incorporating hands-on projects like Lego robotics and coding activities.

Challenges to Digital Equity

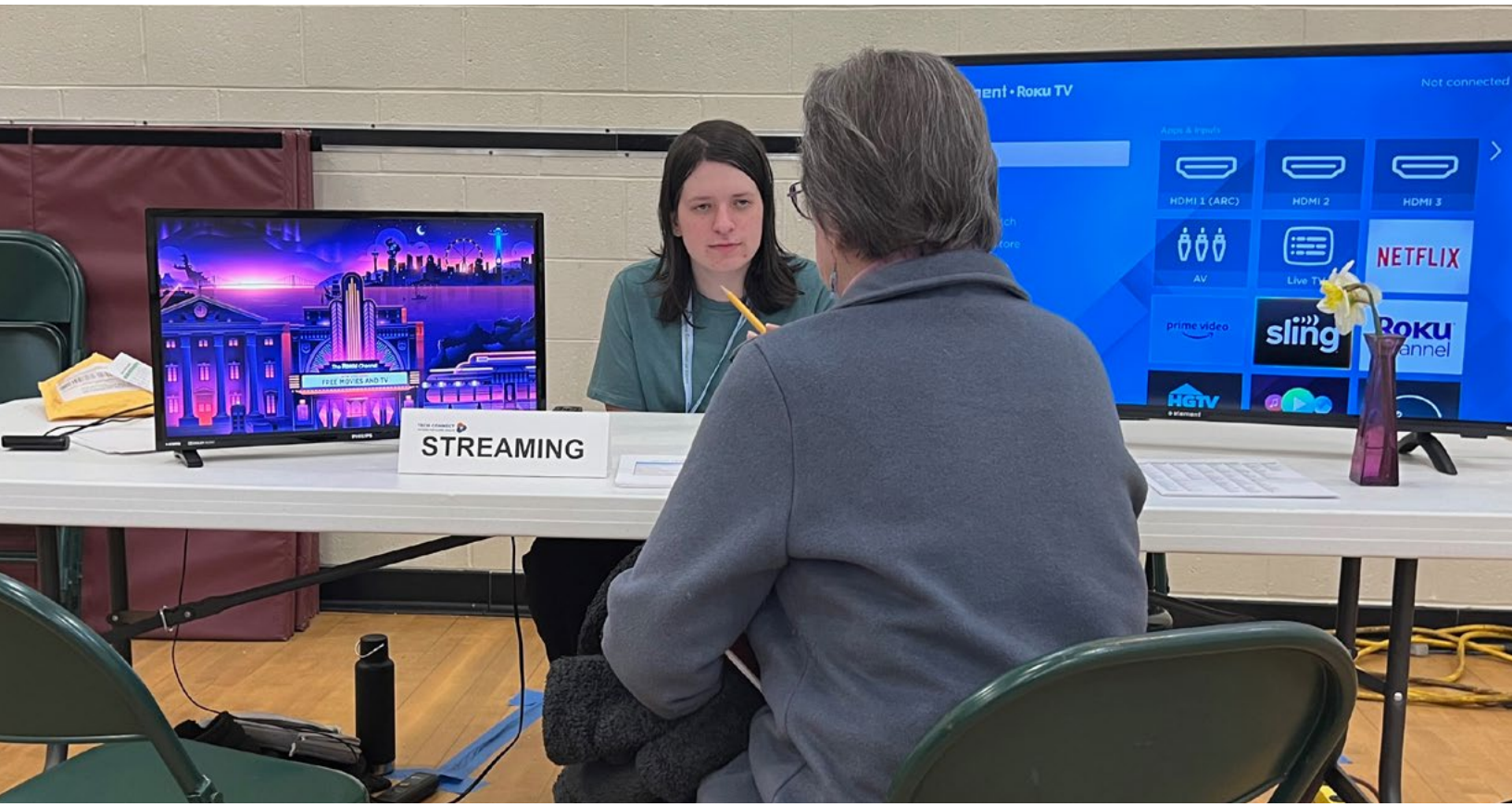
Device Purchasing & Replacement | Personnel

Device purchasing and replacement remains a top concern and priority for HRSD because students get new computers at grades 3, 7, and 10. Suzor IT retains the old computers and rotates usable ones back into the schools as necessary. However, as COVID-19 relief funding wanes, there are concerns about where money will come from to maintain the one-to-one device program. Funding sources that could support the district's future technology needs include federal and state funding such as the E-Rate Program, Title I grants, and the Student Support and Academic Enrichment (Title IV Part A) program and municipal funding through the school district budget.

Additionally, the district could benefit from additional computer classes—like those currently provided by the Technology Specialist—which would require additional staff.

Key Populations Served

Youth.



Tech Connect's Tech Fair in 2024. IMAGE CREDIT: NORTHERN HILLTOWNS CONSORTIUM OF COUNCILS ON AGING

Westhampton Council on Aging, Northern Hilltowns COAs

The Westhampton Council on Aging provides support for residents ages 60 and over. The Westhampton COA is partnered with Chesterfield, Cummington, Goshen, Plainfield, Williamsburg, and Worthington to make up the Northern Hilltowns Consortium of Councils on Aging. The Consortium offers a range of services including transportation, resources for a healthy lifestyle, and technology support.

Resources for Digital Equity

Wi-Fi | Tech Support | Computer Classes | Free or Reduced Cost Devices | Cost Assistance for Utilities

With a recent grant award from the Executive Office of Elder Affairs, the Consortium created Tech Connect, a program aimed at lowering barriers

Westhampton COA:
3 South Road

Hours of Operation:
Flexible

Services:
Monthly programs
Yoga classes
Computer classes
Transportation

Northern Hilltowns Consortium:
Chesterfield

Services:
Tech Connect (classes, web resources, drop-in tech support, equipment procurement)

to digital access. Program activities include arranging for discounted internet service for eligible households, distributing digital devices, offering virtual and in-person technology training, and providing technical support. Additionally, the Northern Consortium recently received a grant from the Executive Office of Elder Affairs that they have used to work with ISPs to install broadband infrastructure for households without service. Tech Connect recently held their first Tech Fair introducing 120 seniors to a variety of new technology like artificial intelligence (AI) and virtual reality. The Westhampton COA relies on Peg Whalen and Bob Miller to provide house call services for seniors with basic technology questions. Some projects on the horizon for the Consortium is using grant money to do outreach and training around telehealth along with offering Wi-Fi in the community room in Westhampton Woods, the town's only age-restricted affordable housing.

Challenges to Digital Equity

Physical Space | Public Awareness of Services

One major limitation to services is that Westhampton lacks a senior center. More staff and a dedicated physical space—for example, a room at Town Hall or the library—would allow the Westhampton COA (and its partner organizations) to offer more services like device loaning and computer classes.

The cost of internet subscriptions is another distinct digital equity issue for seniors, many of whom have fixed incomes. The termination of ACP made subscription prices jump from $55 to $85 for some seniors, which is unaffordable to many. Westhampton COA should work with the Consortium and Westhampton Public Library to distribute information about low-cost internet alternatives (NDIA has an ongoing list of Free & Low-Cost Internet Plans).

Key Populations Served

Residents aged 60 and over.

Westhampton Town Hall: Veterans Agent

The Veterans Agent, also known as a Veterans Service Officer, provides professional support to veterans and their dependents in compliance with state law. By staying current with programs specific to addressing veterans' technology needs, Westhampton's Veterans Agent can best support the town's veterans by being knowledgeable about programs and advertising them on the town's website.

Resources for Digital Equity

Veterans Agent Tab on Town Website

For instance, there are ways veterans can get internet and devices through lending programs to support them with VA telehealth. Another perk is that VA Video connect can be used without data charges if set up properly. There can also be internet and phone service discounts for qualifying veterans. People might be missing these services because of lack of awareness.

Challenges to Digital Equity

Public Awareness of Services

It is crucial that residents remain aware of the Veterans Agent and their options for support. The Town can improve web access (and enhance public awareness) by making a dedicated webpage to digital inclusion resources.

Key Populations Served

Veterans.

07

Vision and Goals

Having a long-term vision for a Digital Equity Plan provides a clear direction, unifies the community in shared objectives, and serves as a foundation for decision-making towards closing the digital divide.

Vision Statement

Westhampton will be a community where every resident, business, and institution has access to affordable reliable broadband and the digital technology required for daily use and to fully participate in all aspects of social, economic, education, health, and civic life.

Westhampton's Goals for Digital Equity

High speed internet for all

Ensure all households and businesses in Westhampton have access to reliable, high-speed internet at speeds consistent with federal and state minimum standards (currently 100/20 Mbps).

Access to devices

Enhance use and access of digital devices such as computers, tablets, or smartphones.

Digital literacy training

Enhance use and access of digital devices such as computers, tablets, or smartphones.

Information sharing

Consistently review and improve community engagement and information sharing.

Regional collaboration

Create and maintain connections with local and regional digital equity champions to support digital equity implementation.

08

Implementing the Plan

The following Implementation Matrix provides a blueprint for the Town of Westhampton to work towards achieving their digital equity goals. These actionable strategies, shaped in conjunction with the community, stakeholders, and Steering Committee members, are essential for accomplishing the Town's long-term vision. Certain actions were influenced by previous or ongoing plans (such as the Town's most recent Master Plan), while others are based on new community feedback, existing best practices, and evolving technology trends.

The Implementation Matrix includes anticipated requirements for each strategy, addressing the following:

Responsible Entities	The Town department or board/committee that holds responsibility for implementation
Cost	An approximation of the financial cost (capital or operational), defined as • "$" - $0 to $5,000 • "$$" - $5,000 to $25,000 • "$$$" - more than $25,000
Funding Opportunities	Potential funding agents or partners that could provide financial support—through grants, loans, or direct investment—to implement a certain strategy; a full breakdown of available funding sources is contained in ***Appendix VI***
Timeframe	The anticipated length of time for completion of a given strategy, defined as • "Short-term" - less than 1 years • "Medium-term" - 2 to 3 years • "Long-term" - more than 3 years • "Ongoing" - start any time, continued focus area

Goal 1. Ensure all households and businesses in Westhampton have access to reliable, high-speed internet at speeds consistent with federal and state minimum standards (currently 100/20 Mbps).

Index	Action	Champion	Cost	Available Funding	Time Frame
1.1	Follow up on the BEAD Challenge Process (summer 2024) by working with Comcast to explore connectivity solutions for unserved and underserved BSLs.	Town Coordinator, CoA Director, Library Director, Digital Equity Committee	$	BEAD Program; GAP Networks Grant Program	Short-term
1.2	Collaborate with Hampshire Regional School District, internet service providers (ISPs), and the community to investigate service inconsistencies near schools.	Town Coordinator, Digital Equity Committee, HRSD	$	BEAD Program	Medium-term
1.3	Collaborate with WhipCity Fiber (Westfield Gas & Electric) to investigate the Municipal Light Plant model.	Town Coordinator, Digital Equity Committee, Select Board	$	-	Medium-term
1.4	Expand and promote equitable broadband access in public areas. Continue to publicize the public Wi-Fi spot in the Westhampton Public Library and others as they become available.	Library Director, Digital Equity Committee	$	MBI Implementation Program; BEAD Program; Community Compact Cabinet E&R Grant or IT Grant Programs	Ongoing
1.5	In collaboration with neighboring municipalities and non-profit organizations, seek options and funding for trusted affordable in-home technology trouble shooting to ensure residents have reliable internet. An example resource may be the Northern Hilltowns Consortium of COAs.	Town Coordinator, Digital Equity Committee	$		Ongoing

Goal 2. Enhance use and access of digital devices such as computers, tablets, or smartphones.

Index	Action	Champion	Cost	Available Funding	Time Frame
2.1	Support the acquisition of improved devices for check-out and use at the Westhampton Public Library. Expanding the Trybrary to include more technology for public lending.	Library Director, Digital Equity Committee	$$	Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS); Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC)	Short-term
2.2	Establish more community space for seniors and youth at municipal buildings and other anchor institutions in Westhampton, such as the Town Hall or Church.	Town Coordinator, Digital Equity Committee, CoA Director, Northern Hilltowns Consortium of COAs	$$$	Community Facilities Direct Loan & Grant Program; AARP Community Challenge; MBI Implementation Program	Medium-term
2.3	Work with regional partners to ensure a stream of refurbished devices are available and distributed to residents in need of internet-enabled devices.	Digital Equity Committee in partnership with Digital Equity Alliance, TEK Collaborative, Tech Foundry's Tech Hub, Northern Hilltowns Consortium's Tech Connect, Tech Goes Home or other partners	$$	MBI Implementation Program	Medium-term

Goal 3. Provide regular training and workshops to help individuals understand and use digital technology efficiently.

Index	Action	Champion	Cost	Available Funding	Time Frame
3.1	Collaborate with Tech Foundry and Northern Hilltown Consortium's TechConnect to organize digital skills training at local Community Anchor Institutions such as the Library and Town Hall.	Library Director, Digital Equity Committee, Town Coordinator, CoA Director, Lead for America Fellow	$	MBI Implementation Program	Short-term

Goal 4. Consistently review and improve community engagement and information sharing.

Index	Action	Champion	Cost	Available Funding	Time Frame
4.1	Make a webpage dedicated to digital equity resources for residents including but not limited to information on low-cost internet programs, affordable home tech support, public Wi-Fi spots, where to purchase refurbished devices, and local training opportunities. Be sure to add link to page from other existing webpages, including Veteran's Services and Library.	Digital Equity Committee, Town Coordinator	$	MBI Implementation Program	Short-term
4.2	Develop an outreach strategy specifically focusing on vulnerable populations like aging adults and individuals with disabilities. Include line items like digital marketing and physical materials (i.e. flyers, pamphlets).	Digital Equity Committee, Town Coordinator	$	BEAD Program; MBI Implementation Program	Short-term
4.3	Evaluate websites and communications materials published by the Town and Community Anchor Institutions to ensure that they are universally accessible and are usable on all internet-enabled devices including cell phones and tablets.*	Digital Equity Committee, Town Coordinator	$	-	Short-term

*Refer to the U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division's guidance on web accessibility and compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Goal 5. Create and maintain connections with local and regional digital equity champions to support digital equity implementation.

Index	Action	Champion	Cost	Available Funding	Time Frame
5.1	Form a Digital Equity Committee (DEC) (with representatives from the Town, Library, and CoA) to delegate tasks related to improving digital equity in Westhampton.	Town Coordinator, Select Board	$	-	Short-term
5.2	Jointly with the Northern Hilltowns Consortium of COA's, apply to be a host site for a Lead for America Fellow to support with digital skills trainings.	Digital Equity Committee, Northern Hilltowns Consortium of COA's, Town Coordinator, CoA Director	$$$	MBI Implementation Program	Short-term
5.3	Keep channels of communication open with Tech Foundry's Tech Hub, Northern Hilltowns Consortium's Tech Connect, Tech Goes Home, the Alliance for Digital Equity, and other relevant organizations as identified to ensure regional efforts are not being duplicated and maximize the efficiency of any digital equity implementation.	Digital Equity Committee	$	-	Ongoing

Glossary

Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP): ACP is a federal program that helps low-income households afford a broadband internet connection by providing a monthly discount of $30 for internet service, and a one-time discount of up to $100 for a laptop, desktop, or tablet purchased through a participating provider.

Broadband Adoption: Broadband adoption has traditionally been defined as residential subscribership to high-speed internet access. But for those in the field working to increase the digital capacity of communities, broadband adoption is daily access to the internet:

» At speeds, quality and capacity necessary to accomplish common tasks,

» With the digital skills necessary to participate online, and

» On a personal device and secure, convenient network. (NDIA)

Broadband Equity: Broadband equity is achieved when all people and communities are able to access and use affordable, high-speed, reliable internet that meets their long-term needs. (NDIA)

Broadband: A transmission system granting users access to the internet. Broadband refers to a high-capacity transmission technique using phone lines, coaxial cable ("coax"), or fiber optic cable, enabling a large amount of information to be communicated simultaneously.

Broadband Serviceable Location (BSL): A BSL is a business or residential location in the United States at which mass-market fixed broadband internet access service is, or can be, installed. (FCC)

Coaxial Cable: Coaxial cable (or simply coax) is a type of electrical cable that is used as a transmission line for radio frequency signals. Coax networks operate at faster speeds and higher reliability than DSL but is slower than fiber.

Community Anchor Institution (CAI): NTIA defines "Community Anchor Institution" as an entity such as a school, library, health clinic, health center, hospital or other medical provider, public safety entity, institution of higher education, public housing organization, or community support organization that facilitates greater use of broadband service by vulnerable populations, including, but not limited to, low-income individuals, unemployed individuals, children, the incarcerated, and aged individuals.

Copper: Copper broadband infrastructure refers to telecommunications networks that primarily use copper cables for the transmission of internet, television, and phone services. It uses electrical signals sent over copper lines to provide broadband services. It often provides slower speeds than fiber-optic networks.

Covered Population: Individuals who live in covered households; aging individuals; incarcerated individuals, other than individuals who are incarcerated in a Federal correctional facility; veterans; individuals with disabilities; individuals with a language barrier (i.e., those who are English learners and have low levels of literacy); individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group; and individuals who primarily reside in a rural area. (Digital Equity Act of 2021)

Covered Household: A household, the income of which for the most recently completed year is not more than 150% of an amount equal to the poverty level, as determined by using criteria of poverty established by the Bureau of the Census. (Digital Equity Act of 2021)

Digital Divide: The gap that exists between those who have access to information and communication technologies and those who do not.

Digital Equity: The condition in which individuals and communities have the information technology capacity that is needed for full participation in the society and economy of the United States. (Digital Equity Act of 2021)

Digital Inclusion: The activities that are necessary to ensure that all individuals in the United States have access to, and the use of, affordable information and communication technologies, such as reliable fixed and wireless broadband internet service; internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user; and applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation, and collaboration." Further, it "includes obtaining access to digital literacy training; the provision of quality technical support; and obtaining basic awareness of measures to ensure online privacy and cybersecurity." (Digital Equity Act of 2021)

Digital Equity Act of 2021: Included in the Infrastructure Investment in Jobs Act, the Digital Equity Act asserts that a broadband connection and digital literacy are progressively more essential for individuals to engage in societal, economic, and civic institutions, access healthcare and vital services, receive education, and develop their careers. The Act established two grant programs to be administered by the NITA: the State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program and the State Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program.

Digital Inclusion: Digital Inclusion refers to the activities necessary to ensure all individuals have access to and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). The five elements of Digital Inclusion include:

1. Affordable, robust broadband internet service;
2. Internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user;
3. Access to digital literacy training;
4. Quality technical support; and
5. Applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation and collaboration. (NDIA)

Digital Literacy: Digital Literacy is the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills. (American Library Association)

Digital Navigators: Digital navigators are trusted guides who assist community members in internet adoption and the use of computing devices. Digital navigation services include ongoing assistance with affordable internet access, device acquisition, technical skills, and application support. (NDIA)

Digital Subscriber Line (DSL): DSL is a type of internet connection that transmits digital data over the wires of a local telephone network. DSL offers a faster connection than dial-up but is slower and less reliable than cable or fiber.

Federal Communications Commission (FCC): The FCC, established by the Communications Act of 1934, is an independent agency of the U.S. government that regulates all non-federal government use of the radio spectrum and both interstate and international communications by radio, television, wire, satellite, and cable.

Fiber: Fiber optic cable is a type of high-speed cable that transmits data as pulses of light. Fiber is referred to as the "gold standard" for telecommunications networks because of its speed, reliability, and resiliency.

High-Speed Internet: The FCC defines high-speed broadband as internet service at speeds that exceed 100/20 Mbps. This standard, adopted March 2024, replaced the previous standard of 25/3 Mbps.

Homework Gap: The homework gap refers to the disparity between students who have reliable, high-speed internet access at home and those who do not. This gap can hinder students from completing homework assignments, conducting research, and accessing educational resources online and disproportionately affects low-income, rural, and minority students. The gap became increasingly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic as schools moved to remote learning platforms.

Internet: A communications network transmitted to users by broadband. The internet refers to a global computer network providing information n and communication facilities consisting of interconnected networks using standardized communication protocols.

Internet Service Providers (ISPs): Companies that provide subscribers with services for accessing and using digital tools, entertainment, and services.

"Last-Mile" Infrastructure: Last-mile internet connections refer to the final leg of telecommunications networks that deliver broadband services to end-users or customers. These connections link the broader, high-capacity middle- and first-mile backbone networks with smaller, local networks that directly serve households or businesses.

Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI): MBI, at the MassTech Collaborative, was established in 2008 with a mission "to make affordable high-speed internet available to all homes, businesses, schools, libraries, medical facilities, government offices, and other public places across the Commonwealth." MBI facilitated the funding of this plan.

"Middle-Mile" Infrastructure: Middle-mile internet connections refers to the segment of a telecommunications network that connects first- and last-mile networks. Typically, this infrastructure includes high-capacity, long-haul fiber optic cables that transmit data over large distances.

National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA): NDIA is a national non-profit organization that brings together 600 non-profit organizations, policymakers, and academics with a mission to "advance digital equity by supporting community programs and equipping policymakers to act."

National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA): NTIA is the federal agency responsible for the State Digital Equity Planning Grant Program which funded the creation of this plan.

Network Redundancy: Network redundancy refers to the process of adding extra, duplicate hardware, software, or network devices to a network infrastructure to serve as a backup or fail-safe system in case the primary network components fail. Network redundancy between towns or ISP's ensure there is no single point of failure and enhances overall reliability and performance of the network.

Refurbished device: A refurbished device is a device, such as a smartphone, computer or television, that has been returned to the manufacturer or a professional refurbisher for a variety of reasons. The device is repaired, tested and cleaned to be in good working condition, before it is sold (typically at a lower cost compared to a brand new model). These devices should operate as new, but they may have minor cosmetic flaws and their packaging could be non-standard.

Satellite: Satellite internet involves a dish installed at a user's location to communicate with a satellite in space. Satellite internet is prevalent in rural areas where cable, DSL, or fiber may not be available. Satellite connections are generally slower than cable and fiber options and its reliability can be affected by weather conditions.

Wi-Fi: Wireless fidelity, or Wi-Fi, refers to a wireless network connection between devices and broadband networks.

Appendices

Appendix I: Relevant Reports

In beginning the assessment of digital equity in Westhampton, VHB reviewed the following reports from the town and local and regional community organizations.

Resilient Westhampton Master Plan (2023)

In the latest municipal master plan, Westhampton identified several strategies to tackle the digital divide include providing technology assistance for local businesses, getting residents access to high-speed reliable internet, and strengthening public and private channels of communication. The following strategies are related to digital equity work:

Strategy H 2.1: Improve high-speed internet service in Town to ensure social, civic, and remote work connectivity.

Strategy ED 3.2: Expand access/reliability of high-speed internet. Collect data on existing cable network availability and reliability to document problem areas. Work with Comcast, other providers, and MA Broadband Institution to complete reliable service throughout Town and for financial assistance.

Strategy FS 3.4: Adopt hybrid meetings as a standard practice, expand technical capacity to deliver and offer education to residents who are unfamiliar with the use of Zoom.

Strategy FS 2.2: Make sure all public and private entities have clear channels of communication . Ensure residents have a clear understanding of what services are available generally and in an emergency. Consider negotiate with Comcast for a cable community-access channel Westhampton; improving Town website with two-way communication options (text messaging, online feedback) and community pages for local organization to post information.

Report on Aging and Technology in Seven Rural Hilltowns (2024)

The Northern Hilltowns Consortium of Councils on Aging studied technology usage through demographic analysis and survey results from 1,200 older adults from the seven Hilltowns: Chesterfield, Cummington, Goshen, Plainfield, Westhampton, Williamsburg, and Worthington.

The survey revealed seniors access the internet to order groceries and prescriptions, join online meetings, and access telehealth portals. The most common types of digital devices used by this population include computers and printers, and many respondents expressed interest in expanding their tech skills, particularly in smartphones and laptops for leisure activities like TV streaming and photo sharing. Over half of the respondents would like to receive tech support via a call while 41% prefer scheduling one-on-one sessions for help.

Since the completion of the survey, the Northern Hilltowns Consortium has been awarded nearly $300,000 in grant funding for broadband equity work. These funds will help seniors purchase devices, subscribe to internet services, and access digital skills training.

Westhampton Public Library Strategic Plan 2023-2028 (2023)

"Westhampton Public Library will be a center for community gathering and lifelong learning. We will create opportunities for learning and enjoyment for all library users."
–Westhampton Public Library Mission Statement

The Westhampton Public Library released a Strategic Plan for 2023-2028 to identify the Library's strengths and opportunities for improvement. Informed by public engagement, the report identified the following strengths of the Library: three computers available for patron use; public Wi-Fi available throughout the building and in the parking lot; Kanopy streaming service; and the hotspot lending program. Although computer use was not a primary reason for respondents to visit the Library, participants still appreciated that these services are available.

Appendix II: Stakeholder Meetings

Between February and May 2024, VHB contacted various stakeholder groups to learn how Westhampton's digital divide affects specific population groups, including kids, older adults, and individuals living in low-income households. The notes in this appendix describe the conversations with representatives from the following Community Anchor Institutions:

1. Westhampton Public Library
2. Bob Miller (Library)
3. Businesses
4. Veterans Officer
5. Council on Aging
6. Suzor IT (Schools)
7. Westhampton Elementary School
8. Comcast

Dialogue with these representatives helped inform the goals and action items in the Westhampton Digital Equity Plan.

Date: Wednesday, March 13, 2024 Notes Taken By: Jennifer Nelson

Place: Virtual - Microsoft Teams Re: Westhampton Digital Equity Plan

ATTENDEES:
Jennifer Nelson, VHB
Meaghan Schwelm – Library Director

Stakeholder Session: Westhampton Public Library

Staffing

- Meaghan is only full time employee
- 2 part time staff

Broadband Internet

- ISP is Crocker Communications (through CWMars; WPL pays membership fee every year to be part of this group, portion of this covers internet).
- Quality of internet is good. Expanded the Wi-Fi during the pandemic using hotspots on either side of the building to allow for outdoor usage (in parking lot and in the yard around the library -- this got used a lot during the pandemic) .

Devices

- 3 computers (recently replaced 2): 2 in adult section (1 is new Desktop PC), 1 in teen room (desktop Mac). Upgraded 2 of the computers in the past year (given donation by local Eagle scout with excess money). Plan to replace other adult section computer with a laptop instead of a desktop in the future.
    - Not as many people using computers since the pandemic -- people have either gotten devices themselves or are using family members' devices.
- Have 2 new hotspots, underutilized because of lack of community awareness of them
    - Originally received these through Mass Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC). Meaghan tried 5 for a year, and only 1 or 2 were being checked out max. But after the grant program they went out a lot less… perhaps because of COVID slowdown?
    - Have handful of people who check them out regularly; allows double check outs when necessary
    - Thinks it's worth waiting to see if/how they will be used (check back in a year or so)

Digital Literacy

- Informally--- Provision of basic tech support through Meaghan or another employee
- Formally--- Bob Miller (80), former teacher, is a tech savvy senior and does tech help 2x per month for seniors (volunteer). Also does house calls!!

Other services

- Trybrary (Library of things) -- Interested in building this up!!
    - DVD player
    - Laminator
    - Paper shredder
- The Friends of the Library just agreed to buy Nintendo Switch for the library (Switch Program?)

Community Needs

- There does seem to be a need for reliable internet service in the community
- No need for translation services at this time
    - Don't offer anything and haven't seen a need
    - Has never served a patron who is not fluent in English
    - Also hasn't communicated with anyone who uses ASL

WPL Opportunities / Strategies

- WPL has put a focus on local communication between institutions (with CoA and Library)
- Did a strategic plan about a year and a half ago -- WPL Strategic Plan 2023 - 2028 (westhampton-ma.com)

Primary Challenges

- Always concerned about costs and longevity of devices (usually the Friends support purchases)
- Community buy-in or adoption of services and tech

Date: Friday, April 12, 2024 Notes Taken By: Jennifer Nelson

Place: Virtual - Microsoft Teams Re: Westhampton Digital Equity Plan

ATTENDEES:
Jennifer Nelson, VHB
Julia Volkman, Maitri Learning
Teri Anderson, Master Plan Implementation Committee

Stakeholder Session: Bob Miller as Tech Support for the Library

What are the most common questions or topics that come up at your tech support sessions? The Northern Hilltown Consortium's Aging and Technology Survey showed seniors were most interested in learning about digital photo management and streaming services. I'm curious if that comes up in your sessions.

- This really depends on the individuals that come to class. Each person comes with his/her own particular questions and problems. For one person, it is how to deal with pictures; transferring them from an iPhone to a USB drive or from the computer to a USB drive. For another person it is how to format a document and change font or color. For a few it is a problem that was created by inadvertently hitting some key that totally altered what they were working on. Someone else wants to know how to send an attachment. Participants bring their individual questions, and we try to solve their problems.

What demographic most frequently reaches out for tech support? Seniors, parents of young children, students?

- Because these classes are sponsored by the Council on Aging, all of the participants most of the participants are seniors. I guess if I had to give an age range, I would say 55 and older.

Are most of your tech sessions virtual? Or is there an even mix of people coming in-person vs virtual.

- All classes are in-person.

Do you have the equipment/software necessary to support people with their tech questions?

- Participants bring their own computers, tablets, or smart phones or whatever they need help with. I am very open to make house calls for those questions that cannot be answered in the class, such as learning how to use their printer or set up a new computer or printer, or configure their WiFi,

Are there any topics/trainings you're interested in to increase the services you offer?

- None that I can think of at the moment.

Do you think it would be beneficial for the library to host more formal computer courses?

- It is really difficult to know what types of offering people would be interested in. Maybe some sort of questionnaire would be helpful.

Are there any partnerships with other offices that you'd like to strengthen or create to better address digital equity in Westhampton? How is your relationship, if there is one, with the Council on Aging?

- Answered above.

Date: Thursday, May 9, 2024 Notes Taken By: Jennifer Nelson

Place: Phone Re: Westhampton Digital Equity Plan

ATTENDEES:
Jennifer Nelson, VHB
Eileen Leahy, Comcast Senior Manager, Government and Regulatory Affairs

Stakeholder Session: Businesses

About your business:

- Maitri Learning – digital downloads (got a grant 1.5 years ago)

Availability of devices and internet <u>at home / business:</u>

- It's not only businesses but it's also everyone working from home
- Major challenges being on Tob Hill Road:
    - **No cable on Tob Hill Road. Comcast estimates $36,000 to install cable to Julia's house. No cable on the Road, ends at Kings Highway. 127 Tob Hill Road on FCC is wrong. Needs to submit the challenge. Teri to talk to Donna (daughter of resident)**
    - **Sometimes, there are physical challenges to getting to a location where internet is available (snow, ice, etc.). This weather also impacts satellite reliability and speed**
    - Cable connection is especially important in areas that frequently experience severe weather.
    - I have to pay for unlimited data because we have to use them as a hotspot -- $$$!
- Kim Garvey – another business owner with challenges. She works from her house.

Availability of devices and internet using the Town's public institutions:

- Teaching remotely at Harvard and would have to go down to the Library so I could teach class, but it wasn't open every time I needed to use it for a meeting.
- We use the Library's public wifi and use their hotspots.

Other:

- Chesterfield Road Extension – possible gap to check on FCC maps.

Date: Friday, April 12, 2024 Notes Taken By: Teri Anderson

Place: Virtual – Phone Call Re: Westhampton Digital Equity Plan

ATTENDEES:
Teri Anderson, Digital Equity Steering Committee Member
Joseph Hennessy, Veterans Officer

Stakeholder Session: Veterans Officer

- Joe usually talks with people on the phone and corresponds with them via email.
- Joe has not really talked with Veterans about their digital access or skills.
- Joe thinks most of his clients use the internet and email except if they are older or disabled.
- Joe thinks most of his clients have internet, although his client base for Westhampton is very small.
- It helps in applying for benefits to have internet because he corresponds via email and to share documents.
- Joe doesn't have a sense of individual device needs or skill levels of Veterans. He has no access to a database of all veterans in Westhampton. He only engages with them if they contact him. He suggested a survey.
- Joe said Huntington uses the reverse calling system for the town to leave messages on people's phones about surveys or public meetings. I know we have this service in Westhampton, but not sure we can use it for non-emergency purposes, although this was recommended in the master plan to have a non-emergency reverse calling system.

Date:	Wednesday, April 17, 2024	Notes Taken By:	Jennifer Nelson
Place:	Virtual - Microsoft Teams	Re:	Westhampton Digital Equity Plan

ATTENDEES:
Jennifer Nelson, VHB
Amy Landau, Coordinator, Council on Aging
Peg Whalen, Digital Development Coordinator, TechConnect at Northern Hilltown Consortium of COAs

Stakeholder Session: Council on Aging

What digital resources does your department or office provide to Westhampton residents? (public WiFi, computers, hotspots, courses, etc.)

- WESTHAMPTON COA
- Library has a person that does computer classes that they pay twice a month: Bob Miller

- NORTHERN HILLTOWNS CONSORTIUM OF COAS (established 1990's; Peg and Amy both affiliated)
- Tech Fair (10a – 3p) – recent event
    - Funded by the grant
    - @Chesterfield Elementary School
    - 2nd one to be organized in the fall
    - 7 exhibitors
    - 120 attendees – Peg will get us specific numbers from Westhampton (underrepresented)
    - Talked about AI and Virtual Reality!!

- Peg Whalen provided tech support in town last year
    - Performs house calls

- "Tech Connect"
    - Supports all 7 Hilltowns
    - Funded as part of the Consortium's $300,000 grant from the Executive Office of Elder Affairs
    - Goals are to provide
        - Access to broadband
        - Access to devices (replacement)
        - Training (digital literacy)
        - Tech support (1 on 1)
    - Tech Connect works with Libraries

    - Peg wants to start organizing tech support in each of the towns at least 1x per month

What steps have been taken so far to measure and promote digital equity among local residents?

- Rely a lot on the newsletter "Moving Forward" (monthly) and the Library to communicate with public
    - Can get it through print or email

- Public Housing
    - Peg submitted applications for funding to support digital equity in senior housing (Westhampton Woods) through the Alliance for Digital Equity: believe they have been approved to put public WiFi in the Community Room (Peg will confirm this)
        - Council on Aging board meetings are held in the Community Room.
        - Peg previously used her phone as a hotspot to access Wi-Fi.
        - And for events, it's good to be able to access the Wi-Fi for CORI checks.
- Westhampton COA got a small grant in 2020 from Highland Valley Elder Services; used part of the money to get tablets and gave them to 4-5 people. The COA didn't follow up with those people. They thought about doing a loan program but don't have the staff to support that, and they don't have a senior center. Peg might try to do some outreach to these people

Are there known barriers or gaps in digital access that directly affect elderly residents or health patients?

- CHALLENGE: INTERNET AFFORDABILITY
    - Being able to afford broadband
    - "When ACP ended, it became impossible to get affordable internet in 4 towns" (all MLP Towns); one subscription price $85 (with ACP it's still $55)
    - In Westhampton, Comcast allowed people to drop down to Internet Essentials ($9.99) or Internet Essentials Plus ($29.99)
    - Brad Pilazzo – can get internet-only package (no cable) for $68
    - Peg met a Westhampton resident who switched her internet service to T-Mobile and pays $40.

- CHALLENGE: ACCESS TO INFRASTRUCTURE
    - In Westhampton, Comcast only had to build out to 92% of the Town. So there are roads (Tob Hill Rd) with no cable
    - Westhampton Woods – what is quality of internet here?
    - Wi-Fi extenders??
    -
- OPPORTUNITIES/SOLUTIONS:
    - With the Consortium's grant money, the organization has the opportunity to share some dollars to help serve the unserved BSLs

How can digital equity be improved for elderly residents or health patients in accessing public programming or services?

- CHALLENGE: TELEHEALTH: Lack of interest, understanding / Privacy concerns
    - There is a presumption in the health care field and systems that people have the ability or can access to the help to do it
    - There is a lack of interest in using telehealth and learning to use telehealth; some use of medical portals – number of respondents (in Hilltowns Consortium survey) who reported using these regularly is "hideously low" (well below 50%)
    - We have the ability to use telehealth in their local systems, but many people are not interested in it

- OPPORTUNITIES/SOLUTIONS
    - Using last half of the grant, Hilltowns Consortium will prioritize outreach and training around telehealth
    - HCHC web (Hilltowns Health Center) – money out now for rural community health centers (RHhub)

- CHALLENGE: CYBERSECURITY
    - Peg has led mini-workshops on passwords, she'd be happy to do that in Westhampton

What is needed to address these gaps? (i.e. more funding, more staff or volunteers, more outreach)

- CHALLENGE FOR BOTH HILLTOWNS CONSORTIUM AND WESTHAMPTON COA: FUNDING
- for things like mailing or promotion to inform people
- If they're lacking digital access, trying to use digital marketing is ridiculous

- CHALLENGE FOR WESTHAMPTON COA -- OUTREACH:
- Don't have Senior Center – have to use other spaces; hard to get more visibility

- CHALLENGE FOR WESTHAMPTON COA – STAFFING:
    - Amy is the only paid employee of COA
    - We use Town and state funds to employ ride management for transportation services in Westhampton, also have grant from FRTA to reimburse volunteer drivers for gas costs

Are there community partnerships we can leverage to enhance digital equity?

- Northern Hilltowns Consortium of COAs
- Hilltown CDC: Westhampton Woods (age and income restricted)
- Library
- Church: "The Bell Tower" (monthly newsletter, extremely strong – Westhampton newspaper)
- Hampshire Regional School District – High School in Westhampton (MBI123)
- Tech Foundry + Tech Hub in Holyoke
- Hilltowns Consortium contracted with Tech Hub for people to come up and teach classes in the Hilltowns (in-person and virtual)

List any funding sources you may have used to procure devices or internet, or to organize digital training:

- EOEA Grant
- Public Wi-Fi Grant through Alliance (applied for through Berkshire Foundation)
- Additional funding through the Alliance and Public Health Institute of Western MA

Other people to contact:

- Contact info for 4 MLP managers in Hilltowns area: Hilltown CDC informed about what's happening in 7 communities in the region (4 have MLPs – some of them are writing digital equity plans: Chesterfield)
- Brad Pilazzo (Comcast Western New England Manager)
- Dave Christopolous (Director)
- Patrick Streck – TekCollaborative. Investigating a way to refurbish Chromebooks from schools to sell to people who need devices throughout the state
- Peg agreed that half of the devices she will give away are new, and half will be refurbished (from schools or other companies that turnover their electronics before the end of the equipment lives)
- When people need replacements, they will contact the Consortium to get a free replacement

Date: xxx Notes Taken By: Jennifer Nelson

Place: Email Re: Westhampton Digital Equity Plan

ATTENDEES:
Jennifer Nelson, VHB
Todd Schubach, IT Director, Hampshire Regional School District

Stakeholder Session: Suzor IT (Schools)

Informal Chat:

- Suzor IT doesn't manage Westhampton's ITs, but it manages all the districts in the Hampshire Regional School District including:

1. Anne T. Dunphy in Williamsburg
2. New Hingham in Chesterfield-Goshen
3. Westhampton Elementary
4. William E. Norris in Southampton
5. Hampshire Regional (Middle/ High School)

- Suzor IT recently updated internet service, network equipment, and devices across the district. Every year grades 3, 7, and 10 (MCAS year!) get new devices that then rotate out. Devices are traded out as needed.

- Suzor IT has a parcel contract (kind of hybrid at the moment) where they control the High School, but a district employee controls Westhampton's elementary school. Employees float around the other schools in the district as needed.

- Because of changes to MIAA insurance, schools had to move to new equipment. Move was fairly painless.

- This is the last year all schools have on their current internet provider agreement. Schools are using the E-rate program to help with bidding process.

- High School should be around 1G down, rest are around 150-200. New Hingham is around 100.

- MBI wants to lower rates, but the MBI network is just too expensive to connect to for schools.

- Westhampton is going out to bid this year for the 25-26 school year. They've had CherryRoad which offers both hybrid and cable options. Service has been good, but they think it's time to make the switch to fiber with MBI making the moves they have been.

- Todd would like to see Westhampton move to using OpenGov, much easier to navigate.

Formal Questions:

What digital resources and tools are currently available to students at the elementary and high school levels? Is HRSD a one-to-one district?

- High Schools have MacBook Airs. Elementary is combination of MacBooks and iPads.
  - Majority of schools seem to want Chromebooks because they're cheaper, easier for students to use, and easier for IT to control.

- The regionalized schools make decisions based off percentage (buy in?) Anne T. Dunphy in Haydenville controls the majority (something like 60%) of votes in the district. Anne T. Dunphy wants Apple products, so rest of the other schools have their hands tied and are forced into Apple products. These devices can range from 800-1000 dollars.

What challenges or barriers have you noticed regarding students' access to digital technology or broadband internet?

- There have been four Business Directors in the last year, it's difficult to keep track of priorities and funding agreements.

What initiatives are in place within the school to promote digital literacy among your students and faculty? What are the most successful programs or events?

- There are other companies that can better provide assistive technology support for students with disabilities. Better to let companies that specialize in those services help those students.

What funding sources has the district used to support purchase of technology or services?

- Funding from the E-rate program is a big one. It can be used for discounts for telecommunications, internet access, and internal connections to eligible schools and libraries.
  - Burned through all the E-rate program funds last year by upgrading access points, switches, and firewalls in all the locations Suzor IT serves as part of regionalized school district.
- Community Compact Grants have also been used. They can provide grant funding of up to $200,000 support the implementation of innovative IT projects by funding related one-time capital needs such as technology infrastructure or software. Incidental or one-time costs related to the capital purchase such as planning, design, installation, implementation, and initial training are eligible.

Has the district partnered with any digital support organizations in the region such as Tech Foundry or Tech Goes Home to provide students and parents with training opportunities or refurbished devices at a low cost?

- No.
  - Todd used to work in Munson. He pushed for a 1-1 program. They've never had the time to go with any of the companies. Suzor IT is worried about the schools themselves first. At this point they hope students know how to use the device they're given. There are no teachings available for parents or folks at home for how to use these digital devices.

Are there any other gaps that should be addressed in Westhampton's Digital Equity Plan?

- More tech at schools! Basic tech like scanners and copiers are all antiquated. When things get replaced, IT doesn't always know, and can't give their best recommendations. Doc cams, digital interactive smartboards, projectors are all new tech that would be welcomed. Intercom systems are aging out because of the age of buildings. Lots to be purchased.
- Printing software like Papercut would be helpful.
  - Saving paper and teaching staff/students to edit documents online without having to print, that can save a teacher's job.
- Educating people about benefits of regionalizing. Lots of new contracts doing location instead of district.

Funding to address the digital divide is being distributed from the state (up to $100,000 to each municipality who completes a digital equity plan). What is the top need for schools if Westhampton were to be awarded some of this money?

- Would really love to add more tech to the building. See previous question answer for desirable new technologies.

Date: Wednesday, May 22, 2024 Notes Taken By: Jennifer Nelson

Place: Virtual - Microsoft Teams Re: Westhampton Digital Equity Plan

ATTENDEES:
Jennifer Nelson, VHB
Brian Gilman, Technology Specialist, Westhampton Elementary

Stakeholder Session: Westhampton Elementary School

What is your role at Westhampton Elementary School?

- Technology Specialist, spend 1 day a week at Westhampton Elementary
- Time is evenly split between
    - Technology support
        - Supporting teachers and students when they have technology issues or questions with their personal device or with classroom devices (e.g., projectors)
    - Digital device planning
    - Student instruction
        - Hands on projects: Lego robotics
        - Coding (scratch or CodeSpark)
        - Science, Technology, Engineering standards

- Brian works with each classroom 11 weeks of the year, only 2-3 classrooms that he can work with at one time then he rotates
- Brian provides additional on-call support to teachers if they have additional needs (for example, he often helps the 4th grade teachers during the early part of the year, when students are transitioning from iPads to MacBooks)
- Class size averages approximately 11-13 students

What digital resources and tools are currently available to students at Westhampton Elementary?

- 1-to-1 District
    - Preschool through 3rd grade students have iPads
    - 4th-6th grade students have MacBook Airs
    - All teachers have MacBook Airs

  Classroom devices
    - Every classroom has interactive projector
    - All have Apple TVs connected so kids and teachers can airplay their screens
    - Have printers in all the classrooms

- Other devices
    - Library has 3D printer and cart of MacBooks
    - Speech Language Pathologist has interactive projector

- Network capacity
    - Networking and hardware in schools replaced last summer (summer 2023) – have more than enough capacity within the building to support students.

What challenges or barriers have you noticed regarding students' access to digital technology or broadband internet?

- Sometimes families rely on satellite or hotspots so that can impact students' ability to access the internet.

What funding sources has the district used to support purchase of technology or services?

- ESSR
- Annual budget
- Cart based and shared devices

Are there any other gaps that should be addressed in Westhampton's Digital Equity Plan?

- Not sure what's going to happen when the personal devices need replacement

Funding to address the digital divide is being distributed from the state (up to $100,000 to each municipality who completes a digital equity plan). What is the top need for schools if Westhampton were to be awarded some of this money?

- Digital devices/accessories
    - Magnetic cases with keyboard and trackpad turn iPads into mini laptops for younger students (pre-k through 3rd); at other school he works at (Ann T. Dunphy) uses this system and it works well (Principal might have some funding to pilot one fall class, unsure)

- App licenses

- Staffing
    - More technology instruction and support -- Kids have lots of interest in technology, love the Technology Class; floated idea to expand technology teaching to 2 days per week

Date: Thursday, April 25, 2024 Notes Taken By: Janelle Franklin

Place: Email Re: Westhampton Digital Equity Plan

ATTENDEES:
Janelle Franklin, VHB
Bob Miller, Westhampton Library

Stakeholder Session: Comcast

One of the primary unserved areas in Westhampton is Tob Hill Road. Can you speak about Comcast's efforts (in collaboration with the Town) to extend service to residents on that street? Specifically the Gap Networks Program.

- Tob Hill Road is one of the areas that Comcast will aim to cover through the Gap Networks Program. We're just waiting to hear that we received the grant. Which would be great for many towns in western MA.
- We make every effort to serve all areas of the Town. We make attempts to serve, but we also have to look at it from the perspective of construction costs – low residential density means it's more expensive for us to deploy cable to those areas.
- If we do not receive funding for Tob Hill Road through the Gap Networks Program or BEAD Program, there may be an option where Comcast and the Town works together to fund installation of cable on that road. It may result in a cost to the Town, but we want to help them get that area served. Tob Hill Road also came up when we started discussion of the renewal of the franchise agreement.
- Through Last Mile Program: Worked with 13 communities to help connect unserved and underserved areas. Includes Pelham, Chester, Huntington, Montague, Northfield; New builds (had no Comcast service originally) in Middlefield, Townland

BEAD Challenge Process?

- I'm not working on that, that's being handled by other individuals in Comcast. I can't speak to that. I can forward your number to the individual who could be more helpful on that.

Lift Zones

- Launched during pandemic as real way to help support youth and kids who were displaced from school buildings and needed to access public wifi and devices
- Connected public institutions to 1G of service (in MA, connected over 80 locations) (Greenfield, Springfield, Holyoke)
- The program was launched to serve immediate need

Future of Lift Zones

- Reframing Lift Zones for longer term. More to come on ability to connect new locations; we'd consider all opportunities
- If there is one community hub in Westhampton, we'd be happy to check the feasibility of adding it as a Lift Zone.

Project UP

- Project UP is our way to give back to a community. We do projects throughout the year. We look to our nonprofit partners and nonprofits in the communities we serve to give back.
- Brad would have more information about this program.

Internet Essentials

- Launched in 2011; committed to closing digital divide for over a decade

- Comcast's low-cost program
- Quality not impacted, only speeds (you get what you pay for; 50/10 should be more than enough for 1-2 person household)
- In May, as the federal government's funding for ACP winds down, Comcast's ACP customers will receive a $14 credit to help ease the transition.
- Every household that has been enrolled in the ACP – whether with Comcast or with any other provider – is eligible for Internet Essentials, offering 50 Mbps Internet service for $9.95 per month (equipment included, no credit check, no cancellation fee).
- ACP enrollees can choose to double their speed with Internet Essentials Plus, offering 100 Mbps service for $29.95 per month (equipment included, no credit check, no cancellation fee).
- Comcast will also offer all Internet Essentials and Internet Essentials Plus customers one line of Xfinity Mobile at no additional cost for up to 12 months.

- For new customers
    - Those who can prove they had access to ACP and want to switch to Comcast can enroll in Internet Essentials
    - New ACP winddown waiver: Those with debt can enroll in Internet Essentials (previously could not)
    - New ACP winddown waiver: Waiving 90 day enrollment period for those who disconnect their service and enroll for the first time in Internet Essentials

- Internet Essentials Partnerships Program
    - Used a lot during COVID: worked with Springfield, Holyoke, Grantville
    - Program where town entities can cover subscriptions to Internet Essentials customers for a year: entity gets code and distributes it to Town members (can be as little as 25 subscriptions for as little as six months, timeline starts when customer uses the code; entity only pays for codes that get used)

Mobile service under Xfinity Mobile program

- All internet essentials customers can get a free mobile line for a year, then $20-40 range per month

Brad Palazzo – Director of Community Impact

- Brad Palazzo covers community impact in VT, CT, western MA, slivers of NH and NY; other rep covers eastern MA (Becca)

Partnership with Tech Foundry

- Help people sign up for Internet Essentials on second Tuesday each month
- Can work with Westhampton to facilitate similar events

Community Impact – general notes

- Eileen and Brad work with nonprofit organizations throughout Pioneer Valley
- Has relationship with the Digital Equity Alliance – have given money to support work in western MA

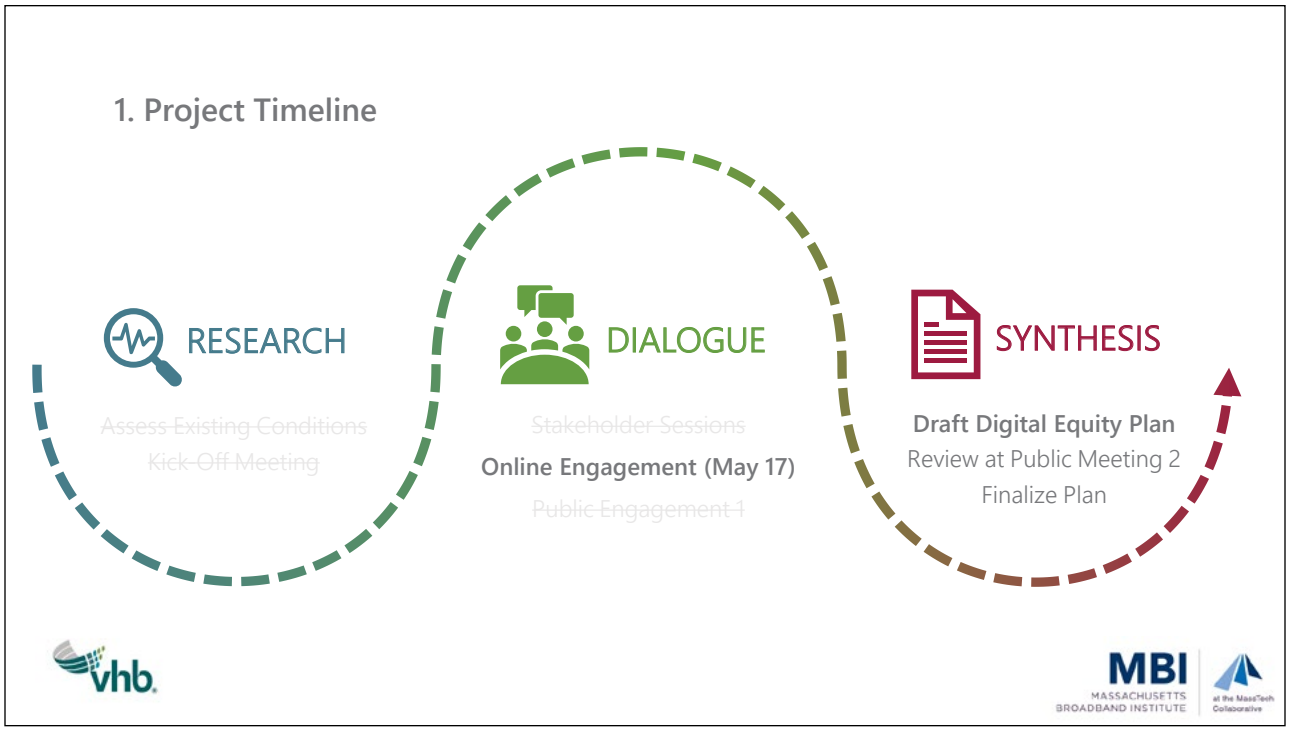
Appendix III: Public Meeting 1

VHB presented the following slide deck during Public Meeting 1. Attendees included the Selectboard and approximately two residents.

Contents

vhb

MBI MASSACHUSETTS BROADBAND INSTITUTE at the MassTech Collaborative


1. Project Timeline
RESEARCH
Assess Existing Conditions
Kick-Off Meeting
DIALOGUE
Stakeholder Sessions
Online Engagement (May 17)
Public Engagement 1
SYNTHESIS
Draft Digital Equity Plan
Review at Public Meeting 2
Finalize Plan
vhb
MBI
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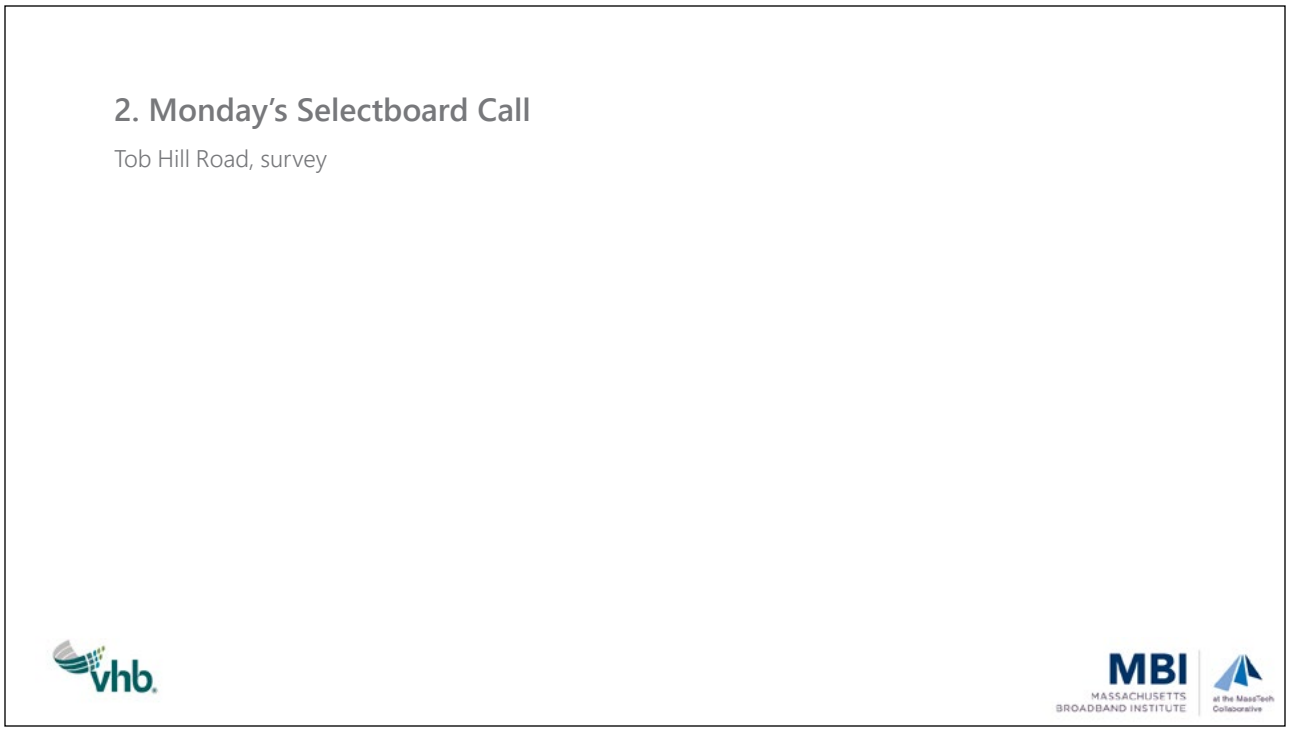

2. Monday's Selectboard Call
Tob Hill Road, survey
vhb
MBI
MASSACHUSETTS BROADBAND INSTITUTE

2. Monday's Selectboard Call

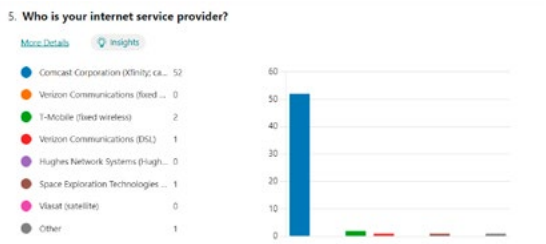
Tob Hill Road, survey

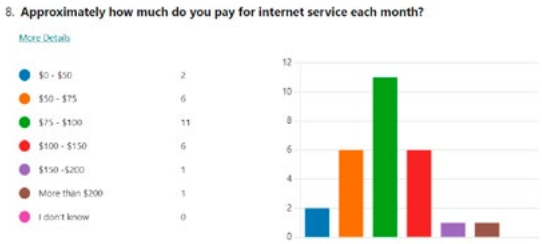
3. Survey Update

58 respondents as of 5/9

Averages

Download	Upload	Latency
213	35	20





2. Monday's Selectboard Call

Tob Hill Road, survey

3. Survey Update

58 respondents as of 5/9

4. Existing Conditions Analysis

PDF sent over – let's review

2. Monday's Selectboard Call

Tob Hill Road, survey

3. Survey Update

58 respondents as of 5/9

4. Existing Conditions Analysis

PDF sent over – let's review

5. Stakeholder Conversations

To date →

Council on Aging		
Amy Landau	Coordinator	Council on Aging
Peg Whalen	Digital Dvt Coordinator	TechConnect (NHC of COAs)
Library		
Meaghan Schwelm	Library Director	Westhampton Public Library
Bob Miller	Tech Support Volunteer	Westhampton Public Library
Veterans		
Joseph Henning	Veterans Agent	Town of Westhampton
Businesses		
Julia Volkman	Founder and President	Maitri Learning | Resident
Comcast		
Eileen Leahy	Sr Manager of Govt Affairs	Comcast
Brad Palazzo	Dir. of Community Impact	Comcast

Schools
TBD – have tried Suzor IT and calling Superintendent, emailed group of 7 people twice and received no response (Doug CC'd)

Other: Western MA Alliance for Digital Equity, Tech Foundry, TEK Collaborative

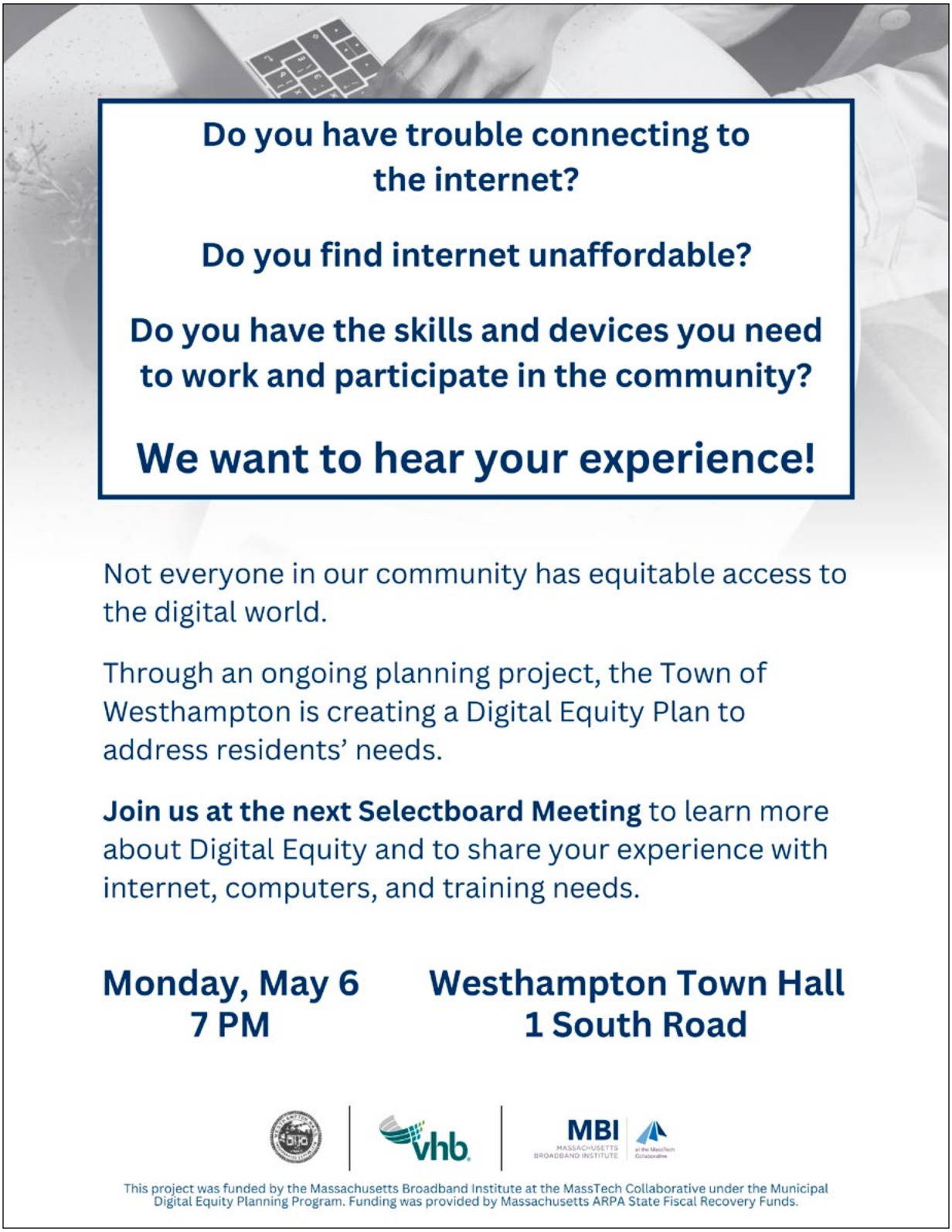
6. Next Steps: Vision, Goals, Implementation

DRAFT Vision –

- Westhampton is a community where every resident, business owner, and visitor—regardless of age, income, or skill level— is entitled to access and use digital technologies for employment, education, healthcare, public services, and social connectivity. The Town aims to continuously learn, collaborate, and invest in digital infrastructure and education to bridge the digital divide, and allow residents to lead healthy and informed lifestyles.

DRAFT Goals –

1. Ensure all households and businesses in Westhampton have access to reliable, high-speed internet (at speeds of at least 100/20 Mbps).
2. Create and maintain connections with local and regional digital equity champions to support digital equity implementation.
3. Enhance access to necessary devices such as computers, tablets, or smartphones.
4. Provide regular training and workshops to help individuals understand and use digital technology efficiently.
5. Consistently review and improve community engagement and information sharing.


Do you have trouble connecting to the internet?
Do you find internet unaffordable?
Do you have the skills and devices you need to work and participate in the community?
We want to hear your experience!
Not everyone in our community has equitable access to the digital world.
Through an ongoing planning project, the Town of Westhampton is creating a Digital Equity Plan to address residents' needs.
Join us at the next Selectboard Meeting to learn more about Digital Equity and to share your experience with internet, computers, and training needs.
Monday, May 6
7 PM
Westhampton Town Hall
1 South Road
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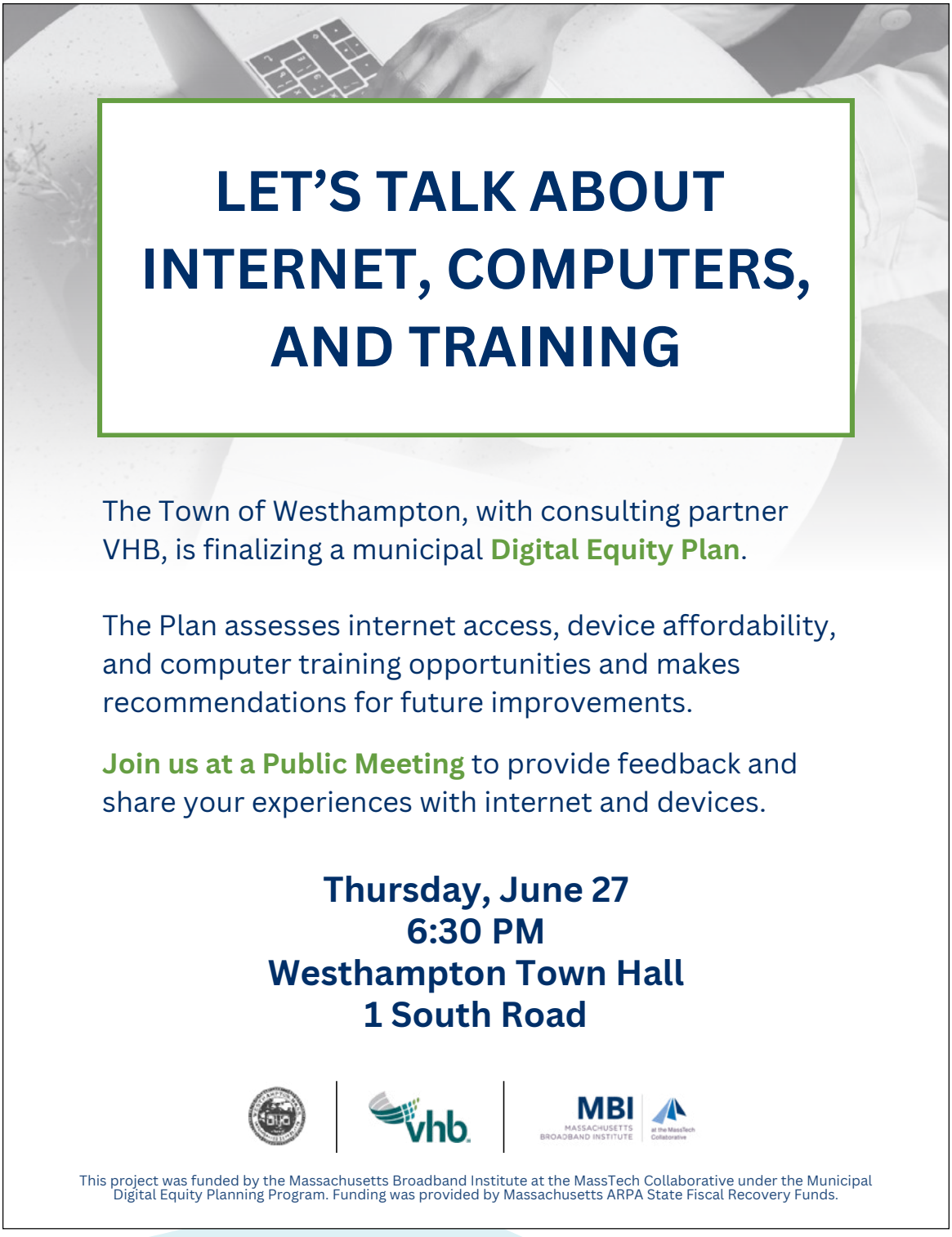
This project was funded by the Massachusetts Broadband Institute at the MassTech Collaborative under the Municipal Digital Equity Planning Program. Funding was provided by Massachusetts ARPA State Fiscal Recovery Funds.

Appendix IV: Public Meeting 2

VHB presented the following slide deck during Public Meeting 2. Attendees included the two members of the Steering Committee and approximately seven residents.

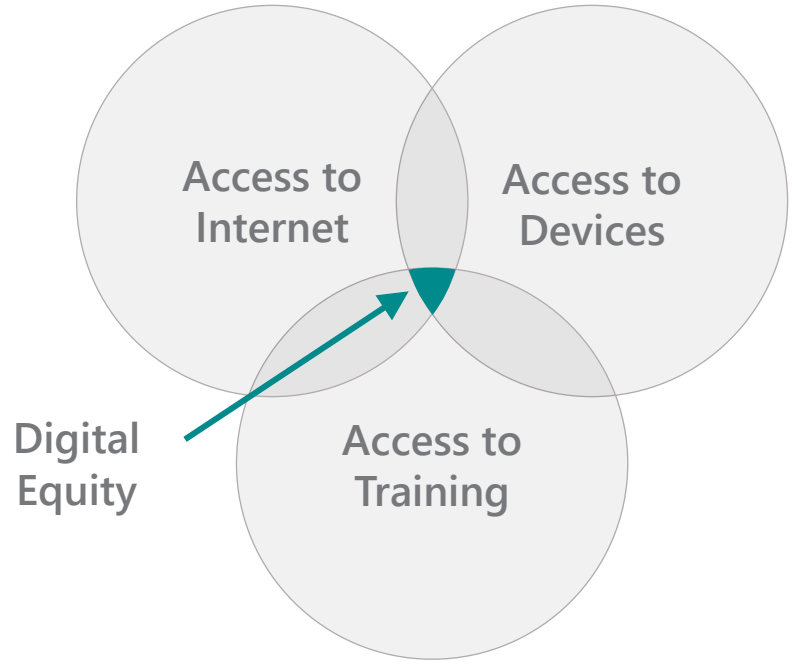


Contents

1. What is Digital Equity?

A condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy, and economy.

Digital divide is the issue.
Digital inclusion is the work.
Digital equity is the goal.



Why now?

The **COVID-19 pandemic** highlighted disparities in access to and knowledge of tools like video calling, healthcare portals, online shopping, public benefits, and other important online resources.

MBI's Digital Equity Planning Program was funded by Massachusetts ARPA State Fiscal Recovery Funds.

Alignment with Previous Planning Efforts

Resilient Westhampton Master Plan (2023)

Strategy H 2.1 -- Improve high-speed internet service in Town to ensure social, civic, and remote work connectivity.

Strategy ED 3.2 -- Expand access/reliability of high-speed internet. Collect data on existing cable network availability and reliability to document problem areas. Work with Comcast, other providers, and MA Broadband Institution to complete reliable service throughout Town and for financial assistance.

Strategy FS 3.4 -- Adopt hybrid meetings as a standard practice, expand technical capacity to deliver and offer education to residents who are unfamiliar with the use of Zoom.

Strategy FS 2.2 -- Make sure all public and private entities have clear channels of communication .Ensure residents have a clear understanding of what services are available generally and in an emergency. Consider negotiate with Comcast for a cable community-access channel Westhampton; improving Town website with two-way communication options (text messaging, online feedback) and community pages for local organization to post information.

Digital Equity Planning

Goals of the Digital Equity Plan:

1. **Assess the Town's baseline conditions** in terms of intern access, adoption, and usage.

2. **Prepare the Town to apply for funding** from state and federal programs.

The Plan will include:

- Baseline conditions analysis
- Public engagement
- Preparation of a Digital Equity Vision
- Identification of Goals and Action Items

Massachusetts Digital Equity Plan

Town of Randolph Digital Equity Plan

2. Project Timeline

RESEARCH

~~Assess Existing Conditions~~
~~Kick-Off Meeting~~

DIALOGUE

~~Stakeholder Sessions~~
~~Online Engagement (May 17)~~
~~Public Engagement 1~~

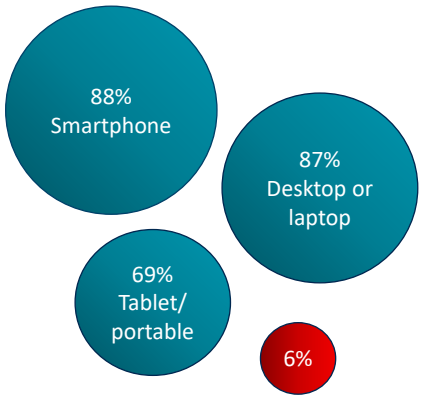
SYNTHESIS

Draft Digital Equity Plan
Review at Public Meeting 2
Finalize Plan

3. Community Research
Online Data, Public Surveys, Public Engagement

94% of households have one or more types of computing devices

From American Community Survey (2022)

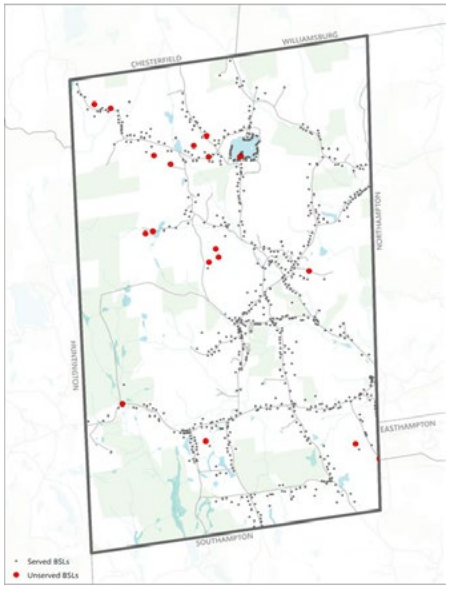


3. Community Research
Online Data, Public Surveys, Public Engagement

Identifying primary areas without internet access:

- 3 Unserved: Tob Hill Road
- 5 Unserved: Northwest Road
- More to be uploaded as challenges through BEAD

From the FCC's Broadband Availability Map



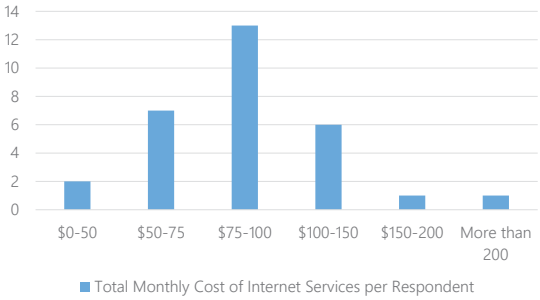
3. Community Research

Online Data, Public Surveys, Public Engagement

Local Digital Equity Survey:
71 responses collected

	Download Speed	Upload Speed	Latency
Average	188	24	20
Median	111	23	18
Minimum	9	7	12
Maximum	776	100	78

92% of internet service subscriptions through Comcast



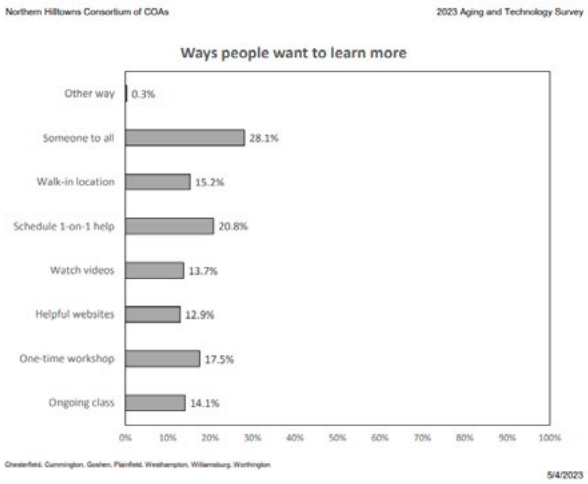
3. Community Research

Online Data, Public Surveys, Public Engagement

Topics with the most interest included:

- Advanced phone use*
- How to use the Cloud*
- Basic device training* inc. scanning/printing
- Program training for Apple, Google, and Microsoft products
- How to stream content*
- How to lower the cost of internet services
- How to surf the web
- Basics for medical portals*
- public services
- Zoom/video calls**
- Email help**

*from both Northern Hilltowns Consortium survey and Local Digital Equity survey
** from only Northern Hilltowns Consortium survey



3. Community Research

Online Data, Public Surveys, Public Engagement

Stakeholder Interviews

Council on Aging		
Amy Landau	Coordinator	Council on Aging
Peg Whalen	Digital Dvt Coordinator	TechConnect (NHC of COAs)
Library		
Meaghan Schwelm	Library Director	Westhampton Public Library
Bob Miller	Tech Support Volunteer	Westhampton Public Library
Veterans		
Joseph Henning	Veterans Agent	Town of Westhampton
Businesses		
Julia Volkman	Founder and President	Maitri Learning | Resident
Comcast		
Eileen Leahy	Sr Manager of Govt Affairs	Comcast
Brad Palazzo	Dir. of Community Impact	Comcast
Schools		
Brian Gilman	Technology Specialist	Westhampton Elementary
Todd Schubach	IT Director	Hampshire Regional School Dist.

Other: Western MA Alliance for Digital Equity, Tech Foundry, TEK Collaborative

3. Community Research

Online Data, Public Surveys, Public Engagement

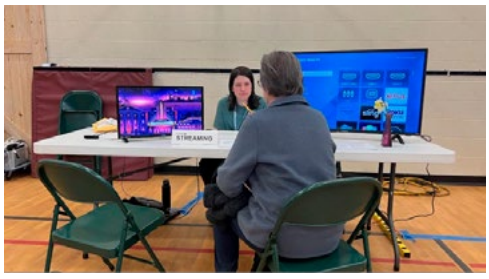
Reviewing Resources at Community Anchor Institutions (CAIs)

Westhampton Public Library

Address:
1 North Road

Hours of Operation:
Monday 2 - 8
Tuesday 9 - 12 & 1 - 5
Wednesday 9 - 12 & 1 - 5
Thursday 2 - 8
Saturday 10 – 1

Services:
Book rental (paper, e-book)
Trybrary (library of things)
Public computers
Hot spots
2 meeting rooms
Tech support



Westhampton COA:

Address:
3 South Road

Hours of Operation:
Flexible

Services:
Monthly programs
Yoga classes
Computer classes
Transportation

Northern Hilltowns Consortium:

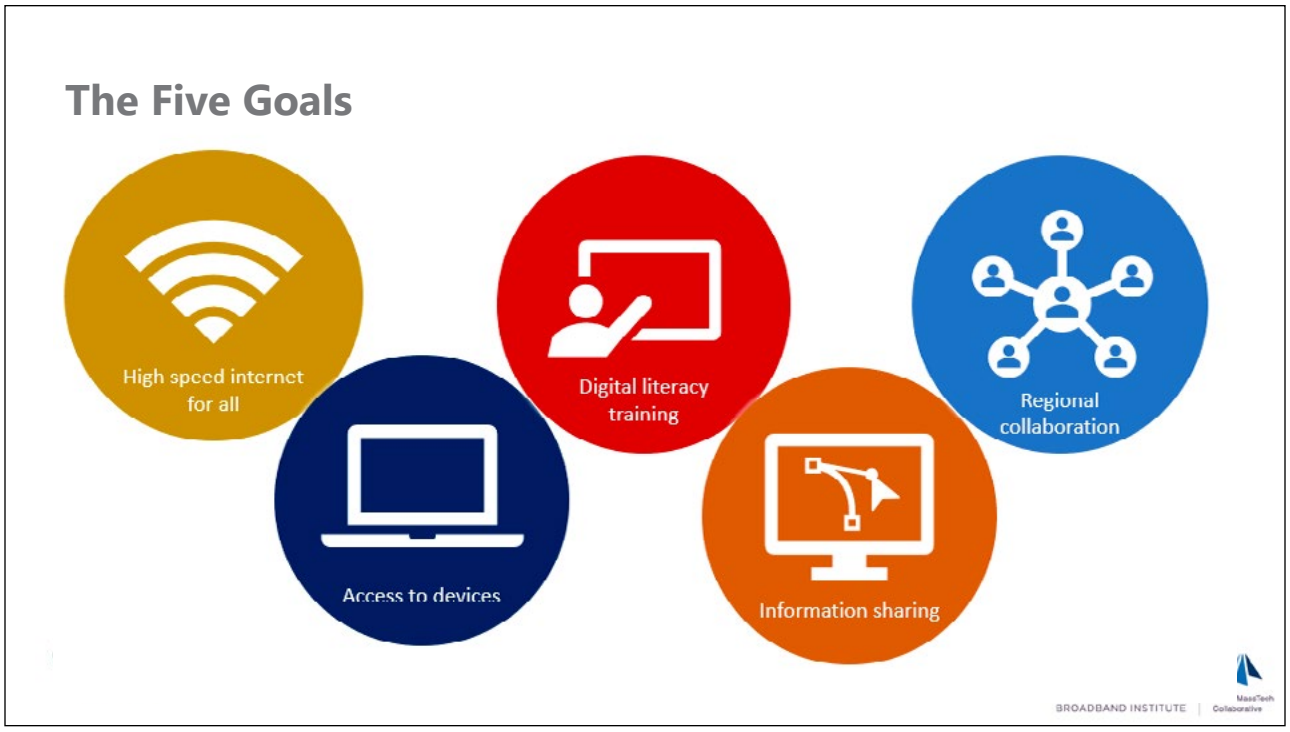
Address:
Chesterfield

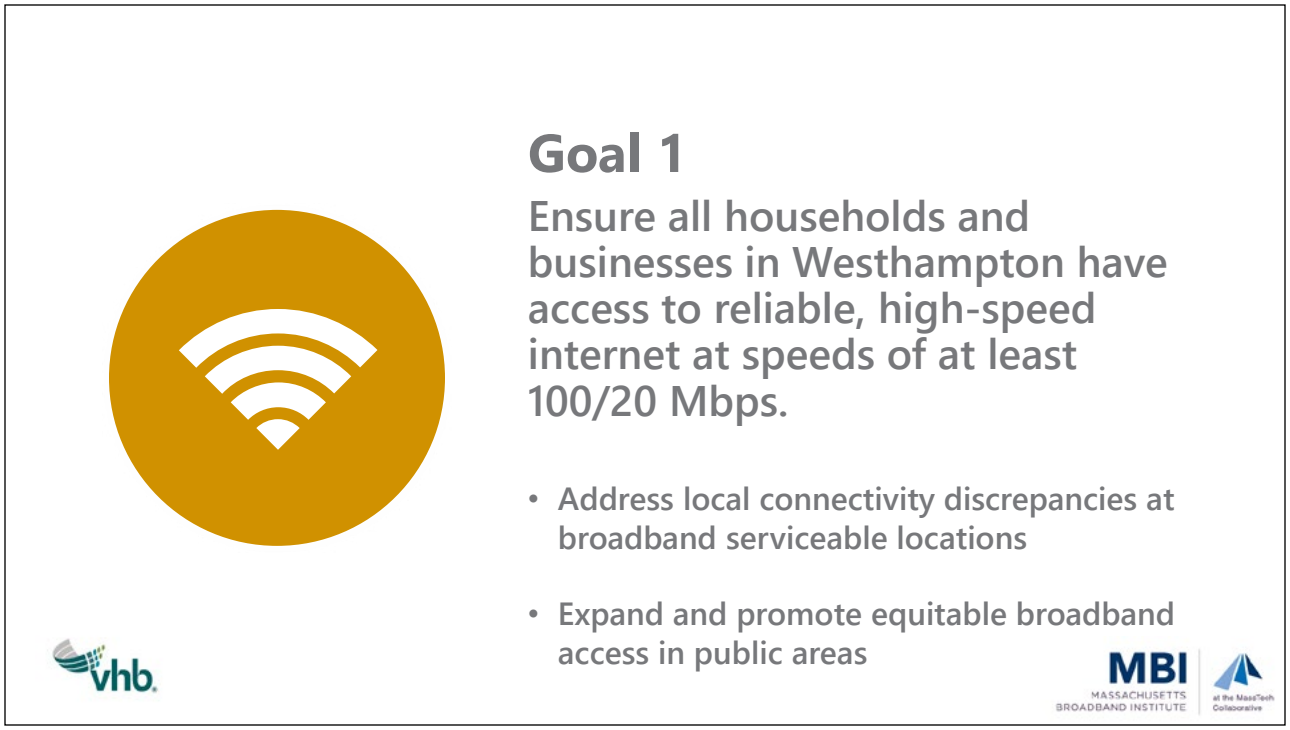
Services:
Tech Connect (classes, web resources, drop-in tech support, equipment procurement)

4. Call to Action: Reviewing Digital Equity Vision & Goals

Vision Statement

"Westhampton will be a community where every resident, business, and institution has access to affordable reliable broadband and the digital technology required for daily use and to fully participate in all aspects of social, economic, education, health, and civic life. The Town aims to continuously learn, collaborate, and invest in digital infrastructure and education to close the digital divide."


The Five Goals
High speed internet for all
Digital literacy training
Regional collaboration
Access to devices
Information sharing
BROADBAND INSTITUTE


Goal 1
Ensure all households and businesses in Westhampton have access to reliable, high-speed internet at speeds of at least 100/20 Mbps.
• Address local connectivity discrepancies at broadband serviceable locations
• Expand and promote equitable broadband access in public areas
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Goal 2

Enhance use and access of digital devices such as computers, tablets, or smartphones.

- Partner with local organizations to distribute refurbished devices
- Expand access and support for technology

Goal 3

Provide regular training and workshops to help individuals understand and use digital technology efficiently.

- Form partnerships that provide digital educational opportunities for all residents.
- Implement digital literacy incentive program

Goal 4

Consistently review and improve community engagement and information sharing.

- Update town website with digital literacy resources
- Assess community engagement strategies and identify areas for improvement, specifically for vulnerable population groups

Goal 5

Create and maintain connections with local and regional digital equity champions to support digital equity implementation.

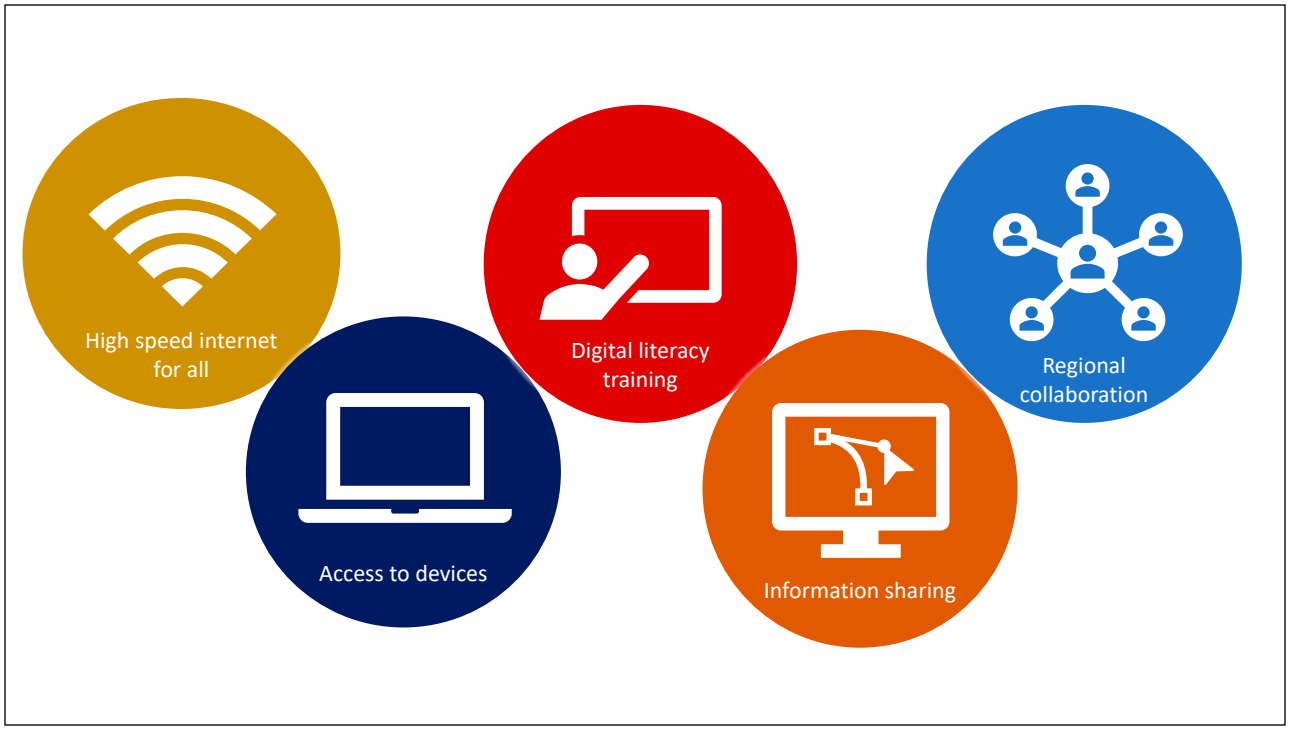
- Secure support for implementation projects
- Coordinate regional digital equity efforts

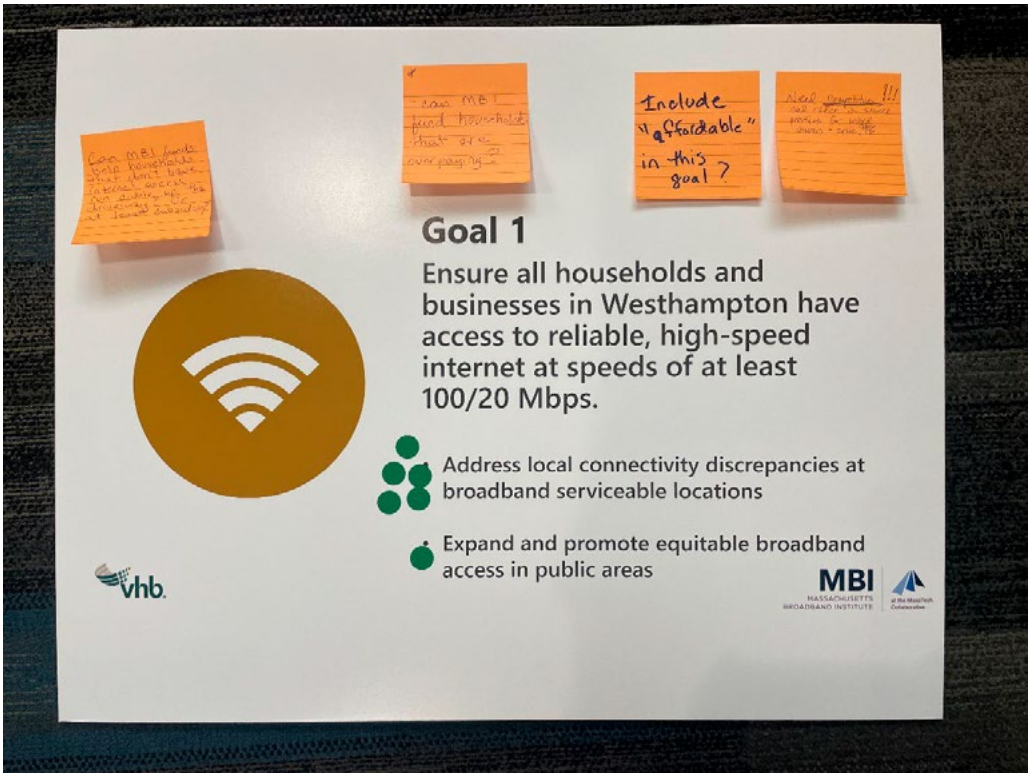
Feedback Tables

1. Use dots to identify top three action items from the five goals
2. What do your top action items look like for Westhampton? Develop a vision within your group.
3. Any missing goals?

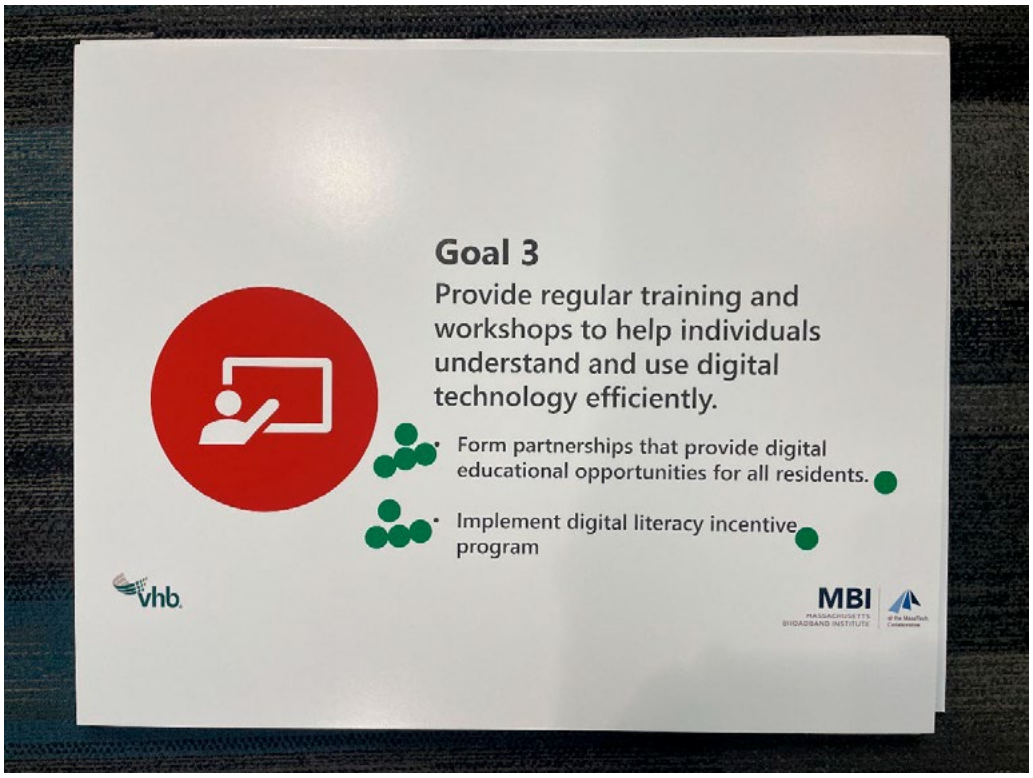
5. Next Steps

VHB and the Steering Committee will consider the community's feedback and integrate it into the final Digital Equity Plan, with a tentative internal deadline of the end of July.


High speed internet for all
Digital literacy training
Regional collaboration
Access to devices
Information sharing


Include "affordable" in this goal?
Goal 1
Ensure all households and businesses in Westhampton have access to reliable, high-speed internet at speeds of at least 100/20 Mbps.
Address local connectivity discrepancies at broadband serviceable locations
Expand and promote equitable broadband access in public areas
vhb
MBI


Goal 2
Enhance use and access of digital devices such as computers, tablets, or smartphones.
Partner with local organizations to distribute refurbished devices
Expand access and support for technology
vhb
MBI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vhb
MBI


Goal 4
Consistently review and improve community engagement and information sharing.
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Goal 5
Create and maintain connections with local and regional digital equity champions to support digital equity implementation.
Secure support for implementation projects
Coordinate regional digital equity efforts
vhb
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Town of Westhampton, MA


Stakeholder
Interviews

Appendix V: Local Digital Equity Survey and Results

In April and May 2024, VHB and the Town of Westhampton published and disseminated a local digital equity survey to identify internet speeds/reliability, device access, and desired training opportunities.

The following is the Digital Equity Survey, created through Microsoft Forms.

2024 Westhampton Broadband Survey

In June 2024, the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) will run a broadband internet challenge so that town governments can correct the official federal broadband map if a location is listed incorrectly in terms of the availability and speed reliability of broadband internet service at that location. The Town of Westhampton plans to submit revisions and we need information from you in order to do so. Our goal is to ensure universal, reliable, and affordable high-speed internet service is available at all locations in Westhampton for residents, businesses, and institutions.

Your answers will be confidential.

Thank you for completing the survey!

* Required

Basic Information

1

What is your primary address? *

Why do we need this? To properly assess broadband availability and subscription of internet service in Westhampton and to identify any gaps in service, it's helpful for the Town to know what Broadband Serviceable Locations (BSLs) are considered served.

- Served (have internet at speeds greater than 100/20 Mbps)
- Underserved (have internet at speeds between 25/3 Mbps and 100/20 Mbps)
- Unserved (have internet at speeds of less than 25/3 Mbps)

2

This address location is: (Please select all that apply) *

- [ ] Residence
- [ ] Home business
- [ ] Business
- [ ] Institution (public or non-profit)
- [ ] Other

Internet Service

3

Do you subscribe to internet service? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

4

If you do not have internet service, what is the primary reason for not subscribing? (Please select all that apply) *

- ☐ Service is not available
- ☐ Service is too expensive to install
- ☐ The monthly service fee is too expensive
- ☐ I don't need or want to use the internet
- ☐ Other

5

Who is your internet service provider? *

Why do we need this? To properly assess broadband availability and subscription in Westhampton, it's helpful for the Town to know which internet service providers (ISPs) are being used, and any internet access challenges being experienced by residents, institutions, or businesses.

- ◯ Comcast Corporation (Xfinity; cable)
- ◯ Verizon Communications (fixed wireless)
- ◯ T-Mobile (fixed wireless)
- ◯ Verizon Communications (DSL)
- ◯ Hughes Network Systems (Hughesnet; satellite)
- ◯ Space Exploration Technologies (Starlink; satellite)
- ◯ Viasat (satellite)
- ◯ Other

6

If you subscribe to a service ***other* than fiber or cable, what is your reasoning?** *

Why do we need this? To properly assess broadband availability and subscription in Westhampton, it's helpful for the Town to know which internet service providers (ISPs) are being used, and any internet access challenges being experienced by residents, institutions, or businesses.

- [ ] Cable is not available
- [ ] Fixed wireless is available
- [ ] Fixed wireless is cheaper
- [ ] Satellite is available
- [ ] Satellite is cheaper
- [ ] Other

7

Do you bundle your internet services? (pay for internet, cable, and phone or some combination) *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ I don't know

8

Approximately how much do you pay for internet service each month? *

Why do we need this? Knowing what residents pay can help the Town compare rates among different Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in the area. This information can help the Town understand why people may not be subscribing, and possible remedies (for example, encouraging competition between ISPs to lower prices over time).

- ◯ $0 - $50
- ◯ $50 - $75
- ◯ $75 - $100
- ◯ $100 - $150
- ◯ $150 -$200
- ◯ More than $200
- ◯ I don't know

Approximately how much do you pay for bundled service each month? *

Why do we need this? Knowing what residents pay can help the Town compare rates among different Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in the area. This information can help the Town understand why people may not be subscribing, and possible remedies (for example, encouraging competition between ISPs to lower prices over time).

- ◯ $0 - $50
- ◯ $50 - $75
- ◯ $75 - $100
- ◯ $100 - $150
- ◯ $150 -$200
- ◯ More than $200
- ◯ I don't know

10

How reliable would you say your internet service is? *

- ◯ Very reliable – sufficient to meet my household and/or business needs
- ◯ Mostly reliable – occasionally service is not available, slow or freezes up
- ◯ Not reliable – frequently service is not available, is slow or freezes up

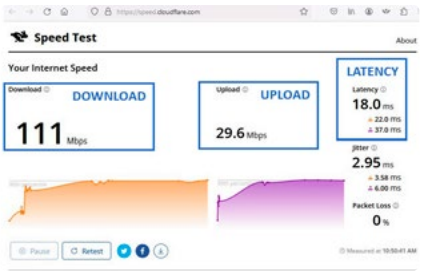
11

Please open this speed test link in another window and report the results:

speed.cloudflare.com

Why do we need this? To properly assess broadband speeds in Westhampton, it's helpful to have an accurate record of speeds experienced by consumers. See sample chart below for how your results will be shown. **See next question to report your data.**

Note: It would be useful to do the speed test multiple times including during a time when your service is not reliable to get a more accurate picture. You can always submit updated speed tests for your location to the Town Coordinator after completing this survey.



What is the **DOWNLOAD** speed? (enter a number only: "120", "53") *

The value must be a number

13

What is the **UPLOAD** speed? (enter a number only: "25", "50") *

The value must be a number

14

What is the **LATENCY?** (enter a number only: "15", "29") *

The value must be a number

Digital Devices and Digital Literacy

15

What kind of computer devices do you have at home? (check all that apply) *

- [ ] Desktop computer
- [ ] Laptop computer
- [ ] Tablet
- [ ] Smart phone
- [ ] None of the above
- [ ] Other

16

Does everyone in your household have access to the devices they need to meet their everyday needs? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

17

Would you or someone in your household or business like assistance in learning how to use your devices? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ N/A (I don't use digital devices)

What would information/education would be most helpful? (Please select all that apply) *

- [ ] Basic information on how to use devices
- [ ] Internet searching
- [ ] Accessing online or remote services like health care, public services, etc.
- [ ] Searching and applying for a job
- [ ] Using standard programs like Google documents, Microsoft Office, Apple documents, etc.
- [ ] Business applications
- [ ] Other

Additional Information

19

What is your age? *

Why do we need this? Some broadband infrastructure funding is designed to support internet access specifically for "Covered Populations" defined by the Digital Equity Act of 2021. Residents over the age of 60 are categorized as one of eight "Covered Populations."

- ◯ Under 18
- ◯ 18-29
- ◯ 30-39
- ◯ 40-49
- ◯ 50-59
- ◯ 60 and over

20

What is your household income? *

Why do we need this? Some broadband infrastructure funding is designed to support internet access specifically for "Covered Populations" defined by the Digital Equity Act of 2021. Residents of low-moderate income households (not exceeding 150% of the poverty level) are categorized as one of eight "Covered Populations."

- ◯ Less than $20,000 per year
- ◯ $20,000 - $45,000 per year
- ◯ $45,000 - $60,000 per year
- ◯ $60,000 - $75,000 per year
- ◯ $75,000 - $90,000 per year
- ◯ $90,000 - $105,000 per year
- ◯ More than $105,000 per year

How many people currently reside in your household, including yourself? *

Why do we need this? This information can help identify the number of people that might be sharing a single internet connection, which can impact broadband speed and the overall internet experience. It also helps determine if there are sufficient digital devices in the household for everyone to use. Households with multiple people, particularly children, might require more digital resources.

- ◯ 1
- ◯ 2
- ◯ 3
- ◯ 4
- ◯ 5
- ◯ 6
- ◯ More than 6 people

22

Do you identify as any of the following? (Please select all that apply) *

Why do we need this? Some broadband infrastructure funding is designed to support internet access specifically for "Covered Populations" defined by the Digital Equity Act of 2021. The following are categorized as additional "Covered Populations."

- ☐ Veteran
- ☐ Individual with a disability
- ☐ Individual that speaks a language other than English as their primary language
- ☐ Individual of a racial or ethnic minority group
- ☐ I do not identify as a member of any of these groups

2024 Westhampton Broadband Survey

71 Responses | 11:44 Average time to complete | Active Status

1. **What is your primary address?**

71
Responses

Latest Responses

"*334 Southampton road*"

"*87 Montague Rd Westhampton MA 01027*"

"*155 Tob Hill Road*"

41 respondents (**58**%) answered **rd** for this question.

2. **This address location is: (Please select all that apply)**

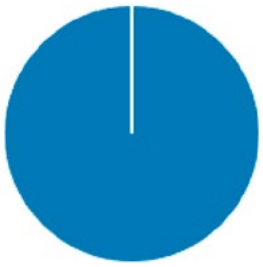
Residence	71
Home business	6
Business	0
Institution (public or non-profit)	0
Other	1

3. **Do you subscribe to internet service?**

Yes	70
No	1

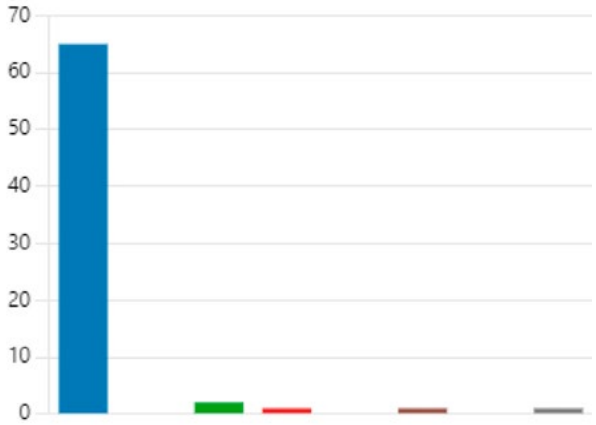
4. **If you do not have internet service, what is the primary reason for not subscribing? (Please select all that apply)**

Service is not available	1
Service is too expensive to install	0
The monthly service fee is too e...	0
I don't need or want to use the i...	0
Other	0



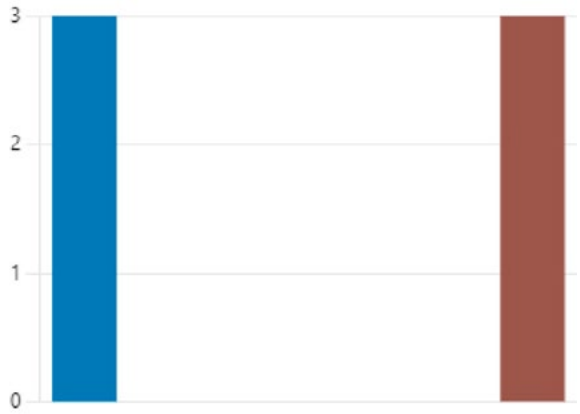
5. **Who is your internet service provider?**

Comcast Corporation (Xfinity; ca...	65
Verizon Communications (fixed ...	0
T-Mobile (fixed wireless)	2
Verizon Communications (DSL)	1
Hughes Network Systems (Hugh...	0
Space Exploration Technologies ...	1
Viasat (satellite)	0
Other	1



6. **If you subscribe to a service *other* than fiber or cable, what is your reasoning?**

Cable is not available	3
Fixed wireless is available	0
Fixed wireless is cheaper	0
Satellite is available	0
Satellite is cheaper	0
Other	3

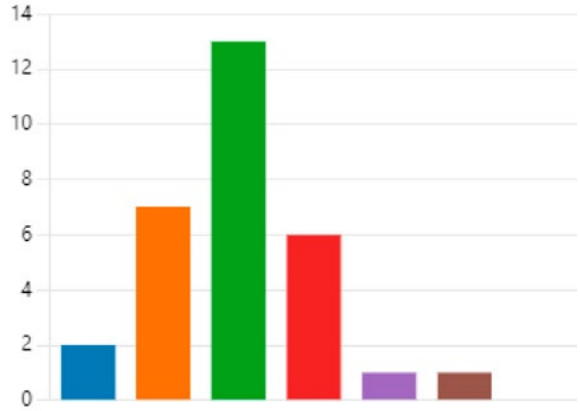


7. **Do you bundle your internet services? (pay for internet, cable, and phone or some combination)**

Yes	41
No	29
I don't know	0

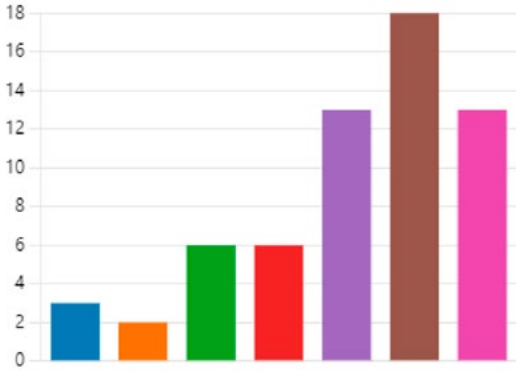
8. **Approximately how much do you pay for internet service each month?**

$0 - $50	2
$50 - $75	7
$75 - $100	13
$100 - $150	6
$150 -$200	1
More than $200	1
I don't know	0



9. **Approximately how much do you pay for bundled service each month?**

$0 - $50	3
$50 - $75	2
$75 - $100	6
$100 - $150	6
$150 -$200	13
More than $200	18
I don't know	13



10. **How reliable would you say your internet service is?**

Very reliable – sufficient to meet...	36
Mostly reliable – occasionally se...	32
Not reliable – frequently service ...	2

11. **Please open this speed test link in another window and report the results:**

12. What is the **DOWNLOAD** speed? (enter a number only: "120", "53")

70
Responses

Latest Responses
"91.3"
"281"

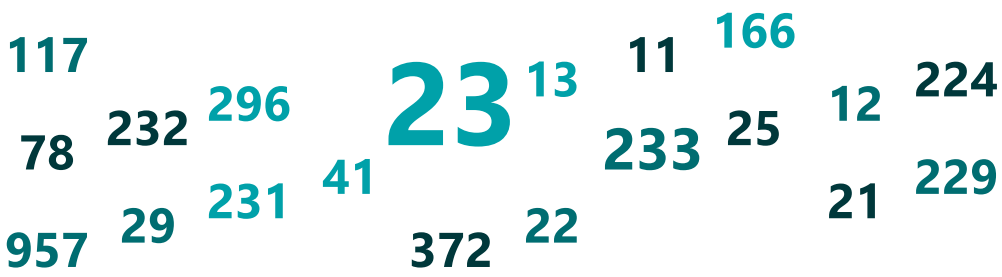
5 respondents (**7**%) answered **111** for this question.

13. What is the **UPLOAD** speed? (enter a number only: "25", "50")

70
Responses

Latest Responses
"23.6"
"23.3"

14 respondents (**20**%) answered **23** for this question.



14. What is the **LATENCY?** (enter a number only: "15", "29")

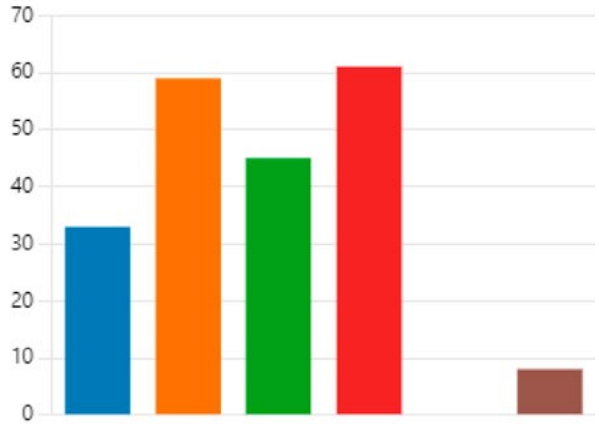
70
Responses

Latest Responses
"17.5"
"21.5"

10 respondents (**14**%) answered **18** for this question.

15. **What kind of computer devices do you have at home? (check all that apply)**

Desktop computer	33
Laptop computer	59
Tablet	45
Smart phone	61
None of the above	0
Other	8



16. **Does everyone in your household have access to the devices they need to meet their everyday needs?**

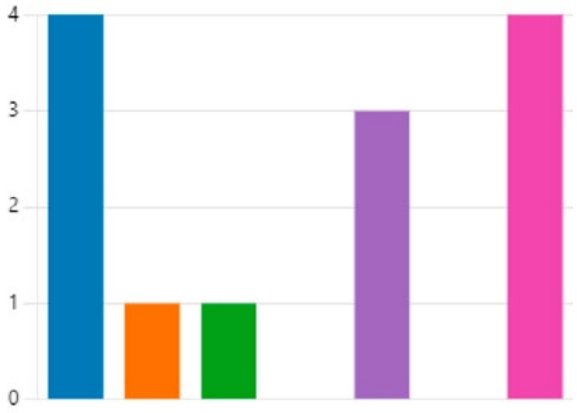
Yes	67
No	4

17. **Would you or someone in your household or business like assistance in learning how to use your devices?**

Yes	6
No	65
N/A (I don't use digital devices)	0

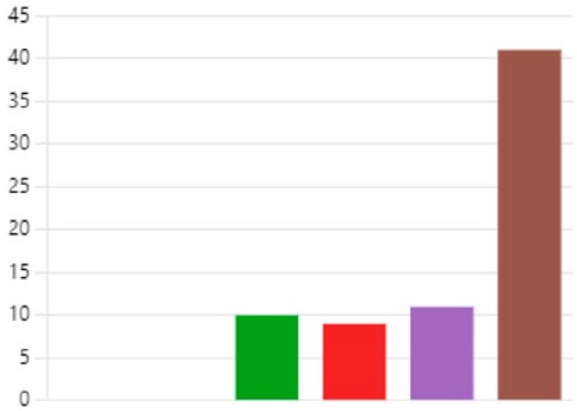
18. **What would information/education would be most helpful? (Please select all that apply)**

Basic information on how to use...	4
Internet searching	1
Accessing online or remote serv...	1
Searching and applying for a job	0
Using standard programs like G...	3
Business applications	0
Other	4



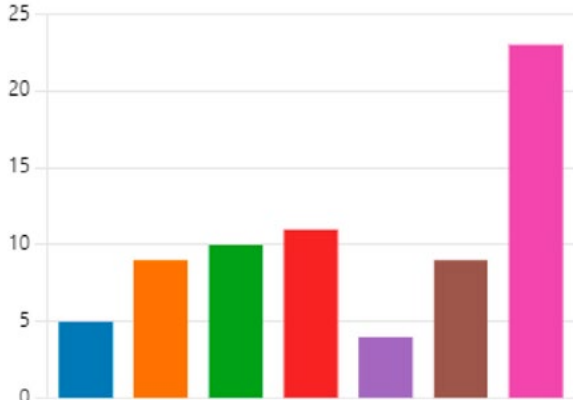
19. **What is your age?**

Under 18	0
18-29	0
30-39	10
40-49	9
50-59	11
60 and over	41



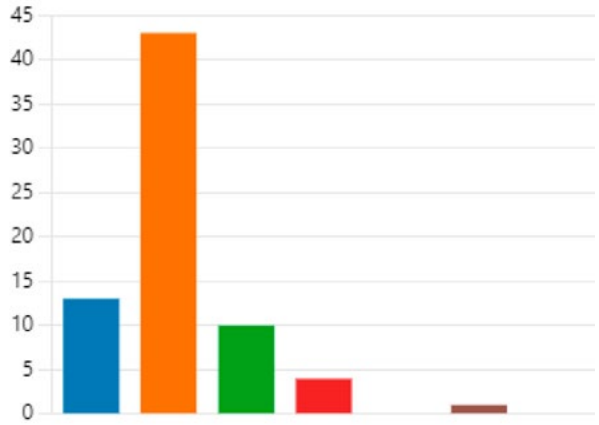
20. **What is your household income?**

Less than $20,000 per year	5
$20,000 - $45,000 per year	9
$45,000 - $60,000 per year	10
$60,000 - $75,000 per year	11
$75,000 - $90,000 per year	4
$90,000 - $105,000 per year	9
More than $105,000 per year	23



21. **How many people currently reside in your household, including yourself?**

1	13
2	43
3	10
4	4
5	0
6	1
More than 6 people	0



22. **Do you identify as any of the following? (Please select all that apply)**

Veteran	7
Individual with a disability	8
Individual that speaks a languag...	0
Individual of a racial or ethnic m...	4
I do not identify as a member of...	54

Appendix VI: Available Funding

The Town of Westhampton and local CAI's can leverage numerous public and private funding opportunities to support digital inclusion initiatives. These funding programs target critical implementation areas of digital equity planning, including workforce development, digital literacy education, device distribution, broadband adoption, infrastructure, and outreach.

Local Funding Sources

Funding for broadband infrastructure
e.g. construction, equipment, materials

Funding for planning
e.g. feasibility, data collection, mapping

Funding for digital inclusion
e.g. broadband adoption, devices, training, tech support

Northern Hilltowns Consortium of Councils on Aging

In 2023, the Consortium was awarded a grant of nearly $300,000 from the Executive Office of Elder Affairs. The Town of Westhampton could work with the Consortium to determine whether a portion of these funds could be used to service Westhampton residents.

Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts

» Community Space Public Wi-Fi Program (annual cycle)

With funding from the Alliance for Digital Equity and Baystate Health, the Community Space Public Wi-Fi Program provides funds to purchase wireless network hardware and install it to expand internet access in public spaces. Eligible applicants: municipalities, libraries, public housing common spaces, community centers, senior centers, educational facilities, workforce training centers, nonprofit organizations, and any other public space, including those that are municipality-owned, which serve residents in Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden, and Hampshire counties.

Funding for broadband infrastructure
Funding for planning
Funding for digital inclusion

» Flexible Funding Opportunity (annual cycle)
Flexible Funding provides grants of up to $30,000 to support operations and sustainability of organizations focused on improving racial justice, building post-secondary education opportunities, improving education and care of children, and supporting local arts and culture ecosystems. Eligible applicants: 501(c)(3) organizations that benefit residents in Hampshire, Hampden, and Franklin counties.

State Funding Sources

Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI; under Massachusetts Technology Collaborative)

» Gap Networks Grant Program
The Gap Networks Grant Program is a competitive grant program designed to support ISPs with last-mile broadband installation. The first funding round closed December 2023. The second funding round will close in July 2024.

» Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program
In January 2024, MBI announced the new Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program, through which municipalities who have created Digital Equity Plans through MDEPP are automatically eligible to receive up to $100,000 in state funding to implement projects or programs that support the community's digital equity goals.

» Residential Retrofit Program
The Residential Retrofit Program is a funding program for ISPs to construct fiber to eligible affordable housing properties. The second Request for Proposals (RFP) launch is in August 2024.

Commonwealth Corporation (CommCorp) YouthWorks Funding
Commonwealth Corporation's YouthWorks is a state-funded youth employment program that supports skills training for youth up to age 25 from households earning less than 200% of the federal poverty rate.

Community Compact Cabinet (under MA Department of Revenue Division of Local Services)

» Efficiency & Regionalization Grant Program
The E&R Grant Program is a competitive grant program that provides financial support for government bodies interested in regionalization and other efficiency strategies. Funds may be administered by government entities, regional school districts, regional planning agencies, and councils of governments. Example eligible expenses include equipment or software, technical assistance, or transition or project management costs for one year. Eligible applicants: municipalities, regional school districts, school districts considering forming a regional school district or regionalizing services, regional planning agencies and councils of governments.

Funding for broadband infrastructure
Funding for planning
Funding for digital inclusion

» IT Grant Program
The IT Grant Program provides grants of up to $200,000 to support the implementation of local innovative IT projects, including one-time capital needs related to planning, design, installation, implementation, and initial training.

» Municipal Fiber Grant Program
The Municipal Fiber Grant Program assists municipalities with the construction and completion of municipal fiber networks. A cohesive municipal network "allows for centralized management of IT infrastructure, including an enterprise approach to network monitoring, cyber security, records management, and backup and recovery." Eligible applicants: all municipalities that are not grantees of the program's previous fiscal year-round.

Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) Apartment Wi-Fi Program
The Metropolitan Area Planning Council's (MAPC) Apartment Wi-Fi Program works with municipalities, public housing authorities, and affordable housing developers to build Wi-Fi networks for residents. The Apartment Wi-Fi Program provides funding, project management, and procurement support to fund the construction of Wi-Fi networks, providing residents with equal or superior service to what is available from commercial ISPs at no cost to residents. Program funding covers all capital costs associated with network design, construction, equipment, and the first year of ongoing operating expenses.

State and Local Cybersecurity Grant Program
Administered by the Executive Office of Technology Services and Security (EOTSS), the Office of Municipal and School Technology facilitates cybersecurity training at no cost to participating organizations.

Federal Funding Sources

Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program
The BEAD Program, created by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and administered by NTIA, is a $42 billion dollar program with the goal of increasing access and affordability of broadband, creating jobs, increasing access to healthcare services, improving educational experiences of students, and improving quality of life for residents. Funds can be used for broadband deployment activities (e.g. construction and deployment of broadband infrastructure, personnel costs, leasing of infrastructure, etc.) and non-deployment activities (e.g. multi-lingual outreach to support adoption and digital literacy, direct subsidies for broadband subscriptions, costs associated with stakeholder engagement, etc.).

Funding for broadband infrastructure
Funding for planning
Funding for digital inclusion

[Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)]
The Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) CDBG program provides annual grants on a formula basis to states and local governments. Communities use CDBG funds to address local needs with eligible activities including public facilities, infrastructure, housing, economic development, and planning. The projects should also accomplish a National Objective of either: 1) benefitting low- and moderate-income persons; 2) eliminating slums or blight; or 3) addressing urgent needs for community health and safety.

[E-Rate Program]
The E-rate program, administered by the FCC and Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC), helps schools and libraries gain affordable access to broadband. Eligible institutions may apply individually or as part of a group, requesting funds under two categories of service: (1) data transmission services, and (2) internal connections, managed. Discounts are determined by poverty levels and location (urban or rural) and range from 20% to 90% of service costs. Eligible applicants: libraries and schools.

[Lead for America—American Connection Corps]
The American Connection Corps program advances broadband development and digital inclusion while building civic leadership in local communities through a network of fellows. ACC fellows are paid AmeriCorps members who typically serve 35-40 hours per week, providing key capacity-building services for the host organization/site to advance broadband development and digital inclusion efforts. MBI has secured funds via a public-private partnership to cover host-site funding matches for up to 15 members in Massachusetts.

US Department of Agriculture

» [Community Connect Program]
The Community Connect program helps fund projects that will provide broadband to rural, economically challenged communities that lack services of at least 10/1 Mbps. Matching funds of at least 15% from non-federal sources are required and can be used for operating costs. Eligible uses of funds include the following.

1. The construction, acquisition, or leasing of facilities, spectrum, land or buildings used to deploy broadband service for:
2. All residential and business customers located within the Proposed Funded Service Area (PFSA)
3. All participating critical community facilities (such as public schools, fire stations, and public libraries)

Funding for broadband infrastructure
Funding for planning
Funding for digital inclusion

4. The cost of providing broadband service free of charge to the critical community facilities for 2 years.
5. Less than 10% of the grant amount or up to $150,000 may be used for the improvement, expansion, construction, or acquisition of a community center that provides online access to the public.

» Community Facilities Direct Loan & Grant Program

This program provides affordable funding to develop essential community facilities in rural areas (no more than 20,000 residents). An essential community facility is defined as a facility that provides an essential service to the local community for the orderly development of the community in a primarily rural area, and does not include private, commercial, or business undertakings. Eligible applicants: public bodies, community-based non-profit organizations, federally recognized tribes.

» Telecommunications Infrastructure Loans

This Telecommunications Infrastructure Loan program provides financing for the construction, maintenance, improvement and expansion of telephone service and broadband in small rural areas without telecommunications facilities or where the applicant is the recognized telecommunications provider. Most entities that provide telecommunications in qualified rural areas are eligible to apply. Eligible uses of funds include improvements, expansions, construction, acquisitions, and refinancing of broadband capable telecommunications services. Applications are accepted year-round.

» Distance Learning & Telemedicine (DLT) Grants

The DLT Grant program, administered by the USDA, is a competitive grant program that helps rural communities (with populations less than 20,000) use advanced telecommunications technology to connect to each other. Key priorities for the program include supporting health care needs stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring racial equity, rebuilding the U.S.'s rural economy, and addressing the climate crisis. Eligible applicants include state and local government entities, non-profit organizations, for-profit businesses, groups of eligible entities working together, and federally recognized Tribes.

U.S. Department of Education Title IV, Part A

The Title IV, Part A (Title IV-A) Student Support and Academic Enrichment Program (SSAE) was authorized under the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015. The Title IV-A program is intended to improve students' academic achievement by increasing the capacity of states, local education agencies (LEAs), schools, and local communities to (1) provide all students with access to a well-rounded education, (2) improve school conditions for student learning, and (3) improve the use of technology in order to improve the academic achievement and digital literacy of all students.

Funding for broadband infrastructure
Funding for planning
Funding for digital inclusion

Philanthropic Funding Sources

AARP Community Challenge Grant Program

The AARP Community Challenge is an annual program that provides small grants to fund quick-action projects that can help communities become more livable for people of all ages. Focus areas include public places, transportation and mobility, housing, digital connections, community resilience, community health, and economic empowerment. In 2024, $3.8 million was invested into 343 projects. Maximum grant award is $50,000 with the average grant amount of $11,900. Eligible applicants: government entities and 501(c)(3), 501(c)(4), and 501(c)(6) nonprofits.

ENDNOTES

1 FCC. Broadband Data Collection Help Center. About the Fabric: What a Broadband Serviceable Location (BSL) Is and Is Not. https://help.bdc.fcc.gov/hc/en-us/articles/16842264428059-About-the-Fabric-What-a-Broadband-Serviceable-Location-BSL-Is-and-Is-Not

2 BroadbandUSA. BroadbandUSA Community Report: Hampshire County, Massachusetts (FIPS 25015). https://sanbamdata.blob.core.windows.net/bbusa/BBUSACommReports/202106/Counties/25015.html.

3 Benton Institute for Broadband & Society. The Affordable Connectivity Program Enrollment Performance Tool. Accessed June 14 2024. https://www.benton.org/acp_tool?zip=01027

4 U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). S2801: Types of Computers and Internet Subscriptions. ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles 2022. U.S. Department of Commerce. https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2022.S2801?q=internet%20in%20westhampton%20town,%20massachusetts

5 U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). DP02 Selected Social Characteristics in the United States. ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles 2022. U.S. Department of Commerce. https://data.census.gov/table?q=dp02&g=060XX00US2501519370

6 National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). Digital Equity Act Population Viewer 2021. https://mtgis-portal.geo.census.gov/arcgis/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=c5e6cf675865464a90ff1573c5072b42.

7 Westhampton Public Library. Westhampton Public Library Strategic Plan 2023 – 2028. https://www.westhampton-ma.com/sites/g/files/vyhlif5191/f/uploads/wpl_strategic_plan_2023_-_2028.pdf