

**ASHLAND CITY COUNCIL
STUDY SESSION MINUTES
Monday, June 2, 2025**

Mayor Graham called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

Council Present: Mayor Graham, Councilors Bloom, Dahle, DuQuenne, Hansen, and Kaplan.

Council Absent: none

Staff Present:

Sabrina Cotta	City Manager
Johan Pietila	City Attorney
Dorinda Cottle	Communications Officer
Chad Sobotka	AFN Operations Manager

I. Strategic Communications

Cottle presented an overview of the city's communication strategy (see attached presentation). Current practices and plans for expansion were discussed, including communication goals, challenges faced in the past, progress made, and future objectives. Emphasis was placed on the importance of accuracy, accessibility, timeliness, and engagement in communications. Improvements made included launching a new website, expanding social media presence, and introducing various communication channels such as monthly newsletters and in-person presentations. Plans include transitioning to a fully digital newsletter, increasing video content, and enhancing regional outreach. Challenges addressed were capacity constraints and the need for better timing with communications.

Feedback from the council highlighted improvements in communications. Suggestions included exploring AI (Artificial Intelligence) tools for content creation and partnering with Southern Oregon University for internships. The need for communication partnerships with other organizations to reach a wider audience was also stressed. Discussions also included the transition to a fully digital newsletter and utilizing notices in utility billing mailings to expand the subscriber base. The council agreed on the need for simple metrics to gauge progress in communications and track the impact of transitioning to a digital newsletter on residents who may prefer printed communications.

II. AFN Pilot Program Update and Next Steps

Sobotka presented a PON (Passive Optical Network) pilot project update (see attached presentation). The project aimed to reach 500 homes with fiber and connect over 200 customers in the first year. Significant cost savings were achieved in construction and equipment purchases and details on customer adoption rates, service plans, and comparisons with other providers were presented. Expansion plans include deploying DOCSIS

(Data Over Cable Service Interface Specification) 3.1 technology for gigabit speeds in a larger portion of Ashland.

Council members raised concerns about the project's long-term financial sustainability and requested a detailed business plan with financial projections. AFN's potential as a revenue generator was discussed and marketing strategies for increased customer adoption was considered such as targeting residential and business customers. When asked about the status of upgrading outer-lying neighborhoods, Sobotka spoke about prioritization of central business area upgrades with PON technology and gigabit service deployment.

After extensive discussion, the council provided the following direction to staff:

1. Continue with the current deployment of the project as presented.
2. Develop a more refined business plan that includes aspects of economic development and the nexus with the local business community.
3. Hold off on appropriating additional funds from the ending fund balance until the business plan is presented and approved.

The council agreed to revisit the topic in a future study session once the business plan is developed.

III. Council Vacancy Appointment Options

Bloom and Kaplan presented two options for selecting a new city councilor to fill a vacant seat: an exhaustive ballot method or a ranked choice voting method. The proposed exhaustive ballot method involves multiple rounds of voting with potential instant runoffs in case of ties, emphasizing transparency and allowing the public and candidates to see how the process unfolds. The ranked choice voting method is a process of ranking all candidates and reallocating votes based on preferences. It was noted that over 70% of Ashland voters supported this method in a recent measure.

After discussion, preferences were expressed for the Exhaustive Ballot Method citing simplicity and transparency, discomfort with ranking all 8 candidates for a single position, and appreciation for the ability to lead with a top choice. The council agreed to use the Exhaustive Ballot Method for the upcoming council appointment. It was advised to prepare internal rankings to facilitate decision-making in case of multiple voting rounds.

Adjournment of Study Session

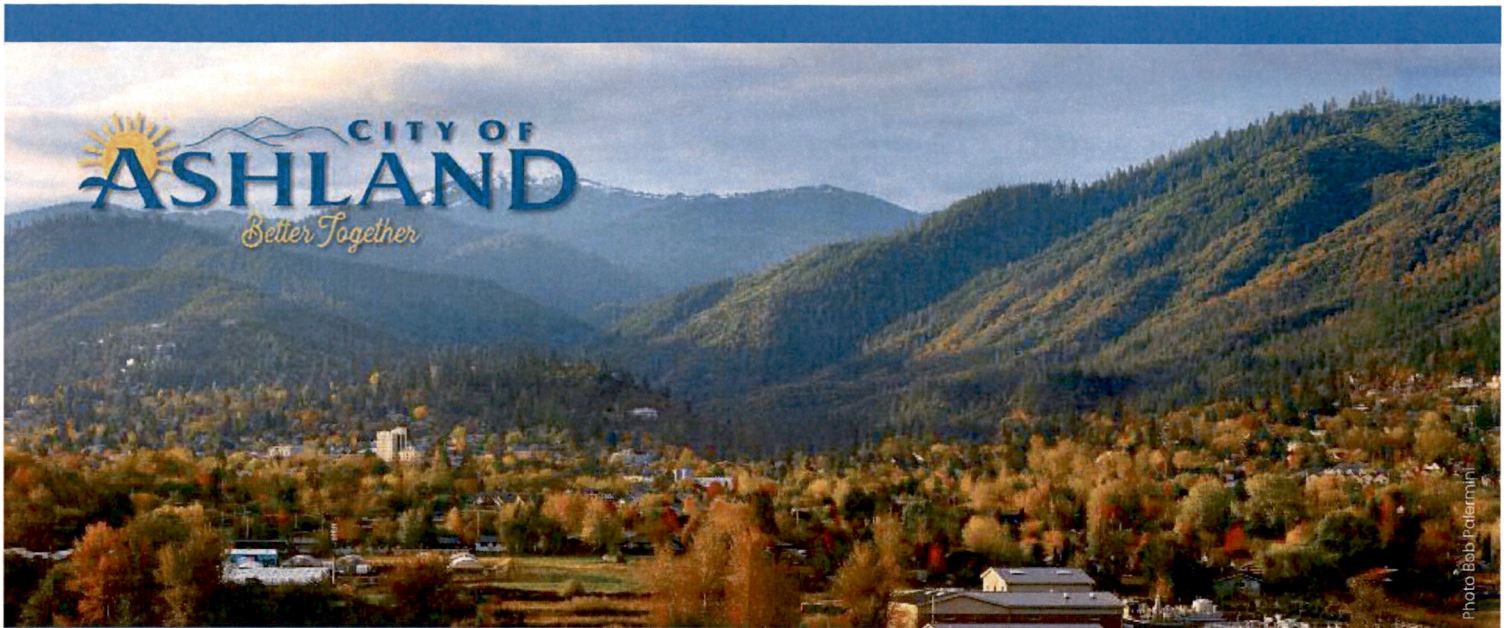
The meeting was adjourned at 7:46 p.m.



City Recorder Alissa Kolodzinski



Mayor Tonya Graham



Strategic Communications

City Council Guidance – June 2, 2025

Communications Goals

When it comes to communicating, we are...

Accurate – We are a trusted source of information for the community.

Accessible – Information is in a style and format that people can easily access and understand.

Timely – Information is available early enough that the community can proactively provide feedback and make effective personal decisions, if needed.

Engaging – Communication is two-way, interesting, and it helps people feel connected to our community.



Communication in the Past

We struggled to meet our goals.

NO DEDICATED VOICE –The Communications role was vacant from March 2018 for nearly 5 years, leaving the City without a consistent communications presence.

NEWSLETTER PAUSED –Production of the City Newsletter ceased in October 2021 and remained inactive for approximately 2.5 years.

OUTDATED WEBSITE –Challenging to navigate, limited search functionality, inefficient content discovery, and outdated information.

STALE BRAND –The City brand had lost its spark.



Communications Presently

We are making progress.

Accurate

- Dedicated PIO
- Website protocols

Accessible

- New Website
- Sneak Preview
- City Corner/Ashland.news
- Social Media
- Sandwich Boards

- Monthly communications
- Website project pages
- 2x per week News Releases

Timely

- Website Q&A
- Coffee & Conversation
- Office Hours
- Town Hall
- New Brand Identity

Engaging



Communications in the Future

Here is what we plan to implement this coming year.

Accurate

- The current protocols in place are working

Accessible

- Videos
- Fully digital newsletter
- Infographics
- Regional outreach

- Welcome new residents & business
- General communication calendar

- Get-to-know your City (staff and services highlights)

Timely

Engaging



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Challenges

Core issues we will continue to address.

Challenges

Capacity: we are communicating a lot of information, with only one dedicated staff member.

Timing: It can be challenging to match the timing of our communication with when decisions actually get made.

Relevance: we are still learning what topics matter most to our community.

How we plan to address them

Reduce the number of communication channels and/or reduce how we use certain channels.

Better align communication plan with City Council agendas. Share when decisions are delayed.

Continue to assess which topics have the most engagement on our various platforms.



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Priority Topics

Here is how we prioritize what we communicate.

- Emergency messaging
- Changes to fees or cost-of-service
- Large-scale projects that will impact access or City services
- Council agenda topics
- Community events



Measuring our Success

How we know if we are meeting our goals.

Website analytics

Social Media statistics

Qualitative feedback



Measuring our Success

WEBSITE Analytics Monthly Snapshot.

- **25K users**
- **71K View**
- **Top 5 page visits:** Home, Utility Billing, Parks, Agenda/Minutes, Civic Alerts
- **Top 3 downloads:** City Newsletter, Senior Services Newsletter, Parking Map
- **Top 3 search terms:** Parks, Utility Billing, Parking
- **Time spent on site:** 3.02 minutes or average session duration
- **Sessions average** 1.59 minutes per visitor



Measuring our Success

SOCIAL MEDIA / Facebook* – Monthly Snapshot.

- Approximately 35 posts in May 2025
- 73K views
- 29K reached
- 600 content interactions
- 200 links



* – Our most widely used social platform with 5.8K followers (up 2.3K in the past 2 years).

Measuring our Success

Qualitative Feedback

- New website
- Revived newsletter
- SeeClickFix
- Educational series
- Community events



Questions?

Thank you for the guidance and being Better Together!



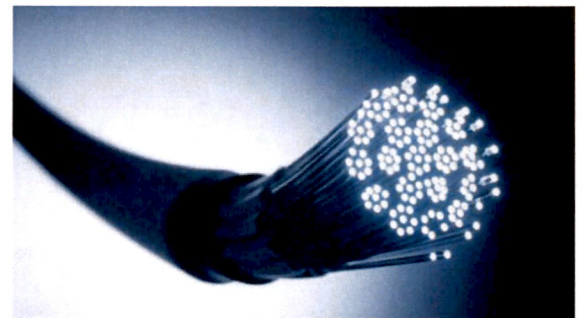


Ashland Fiber Network – Next Gen Fiber Pilot Project Update

June 2, 2025

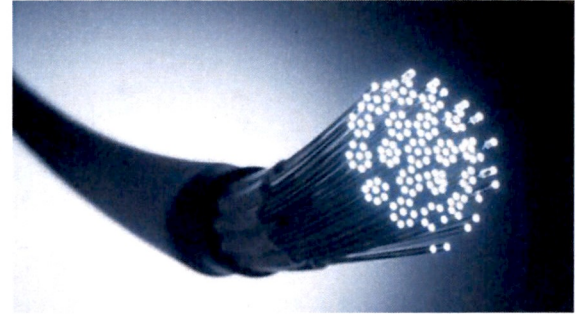
AFN's Goals

- Bring value to the community
- Provide internet service that is:
 - ✓ High quality
 - ✓ Reliable
 - ✓ Future proof
- Offer competitive pricing and speed
- Increase digital equity and inclusion
- Implement "green" technologies to reduce carbon footprint
- Deploy fiber to every home and business in Ashland
 - 10 Gigabit Passive Optical Network (XGS-PON)



Pilot Project Goals

- Deliver the fastest internet speeds
- Pass 500 homes with fiber per year
- Connect 200 customers (new & existing)
- Assessment for AFN staff
- Proof of concept for network design



Project Timeline

- July 2023 – Funds released; project approved
- Fall 2023 – Vendor selection
- January 2024 – Council contract approval
- February 2024 – Signed contract with Calix
- March 2024 – Request for Bid issued to 14 contractors
- July 2024 – One contractor responded
- August 2024 – Construction begins
- September 2024 – First PON customer connected

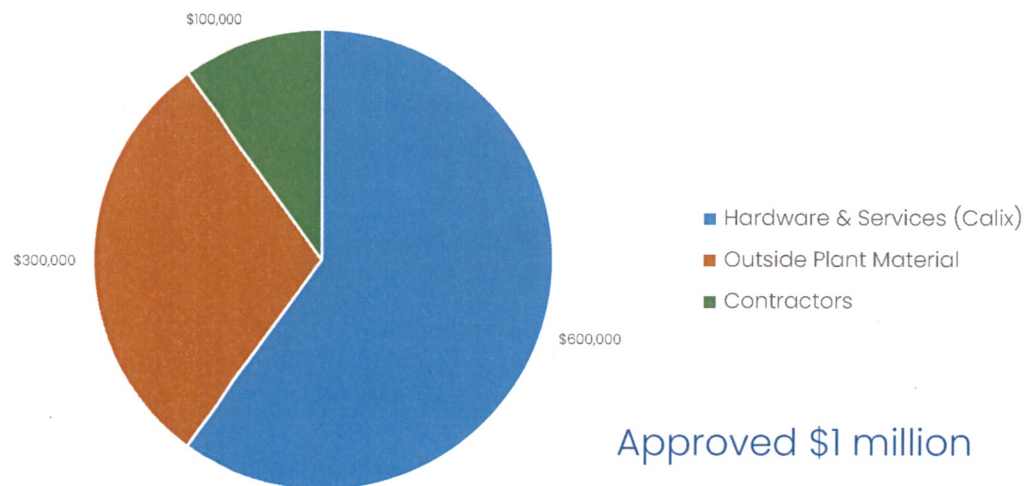


Timing Issues

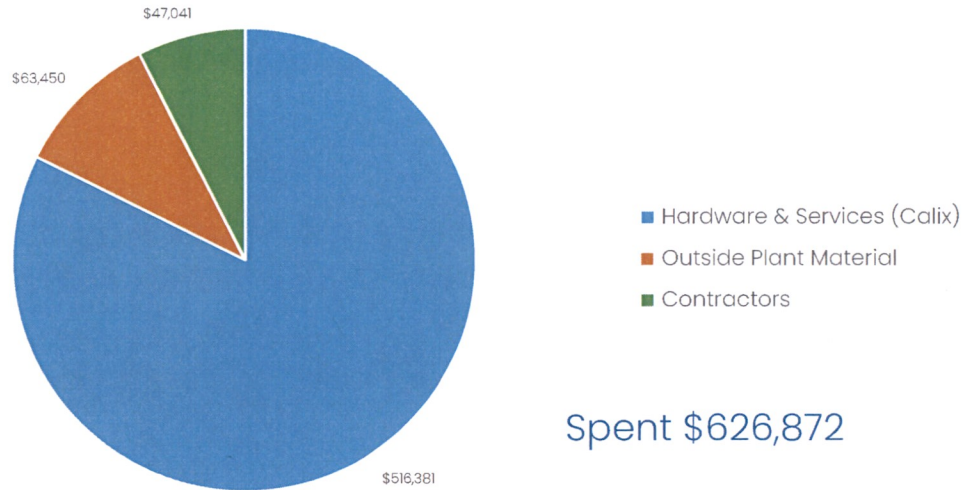
- Council presentation was pushed back three months
- It took four months for a contractor to bid
- Staffing shortage –fourth field tech brought on October 2024



Pilot Project Budget – Projected



Pilot Project Budget - Actual



Pilot Project Budget - Comparison

	Projected	Actual
Hardware & Services	\$ 600,000	\$ 516,381
Outside Plant Material	\$ 300,000	\$ 63,450
Contractors	\$ 100,000	\$ 47,041
	\$ 1,000,000	\$ 626,872

Remaining \$373,128



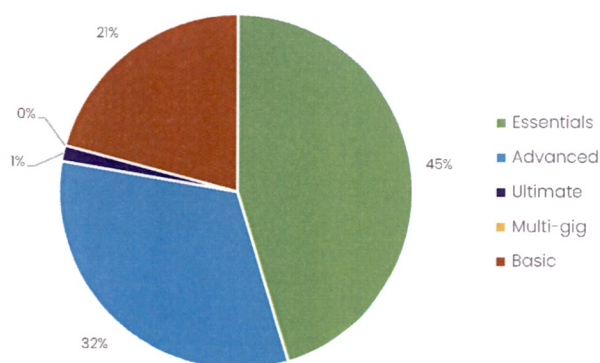
Current Status

- SOU Area:
 - All fiber has been spliced
 - Converting cable modem customers to fiber
 - Cost per home passed: \$193
 - Cost per home connected: \$427 to \$466
 - Cost per foot for fiber overlash: \$6.20
 - 14% customer increase, 50% market share
 - Average Revenue Per User (ARPU): \$48.60
- Granite Street Area:
 - Main splicing is complete
 - First customer has been connected
 - 70% of the drop cases have been spliced

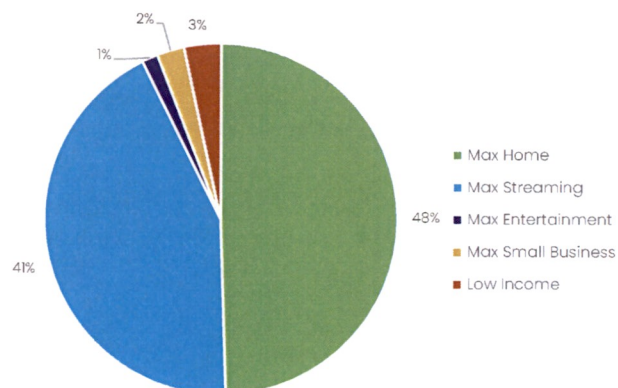


Current Status

Service Plan Breakdown (PON)



Service Plan Breakdown (Cable Modem)



Mid-Project Review

- Inadequate staff levels
- Contacting customers
- Competition
- Outside plant material
- Deploying fiber is slow
- Take-rate with minimal advertising
- AFN staff is incredible!



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Cost Comparison

Hunter				
Name	Download	Upload	MRC	Discount MRC
Value 100	100	100	\$50	\$40
Basic 500	500	500	\$70	\$60
Pro 1G	1,000	1,000	\$90	\$80
Ultimate 2.5G	2,500	2,500	\$130	\$120

Must sign up for autopay to receive discount.

Spectrum				
Name	Download	Upload	MRC	Discount MRC
Internet Advantage	100	20	\$50	\$30
Internet Premier	500	25	\$80	\$50
Internet Gig	1,000	35	\$100	\$70

Discount price valid for the first year

Quantum Fiber				
Name	Download	Upload	MRC	Discount MRC
Simply Fiber	200	200	\$50	\$45
500 Mbps	500	500	\$65	\$60
940 Mbps	1,000	1,000	\$90	\$85
2 Gig	2,000	1,000	\$115	\$110

Lifetime pricing, discount valid with bank account payment

AFN				
Name	Download	Upload	MRC	Discount MRC
Basic	500	200	\$25	
Essentials	500	500	\$50	
Advanced	1,000	500	\$60	
Ultimate	1,000	1,000	\$90	\$70
Multi-gig	2,500	1,000	\$120	

Lifetime pricing, bill included with City Utility bill, 100% local



AFN provides low-cost alternative with greater options

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The Next Biennium

Goals

- Symmetrical gigabit service to **over 60% of Ashland**
- Acquire more than 5,000 customers
- Adjust rate structure to ensure affordability
- Continue to provide service that is:
 - ✓ Stable & high-speed
 - ✓ Low / competitive cost
 - ✓ Offer utility assistance for low-income residents



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The Next Biennium – AFN Expansion Project

Total Project Budget = \$2,560,000

• DOCSIS 3.1 Upgrade	\$1.75M
• Fourth Field Technician	\$120K
• Bucket Truck with maintenance	\$140K
• Fiber Expansion	\$190K
• Cable Modems	\$250K
• Rebranding & target marketing	\$70K

\$1.5M
already in
budget

Unfunded in BN 25-27 = \$1,000,000



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The Next Biennium – AFN Expansion Project

Source of Funds for Biennium

- Debt has been retired \$1,200,000
- PON Pilot Project Carryover \$373,000 *already in capital*
- Capital Outlay \$1,500,000 *already in capital*

- Budgeted EFB BN 25-27 \$1,804,087
 - Request to appropriate \$1,000,000
 - New projected EFB \$804,087
 - Policy EFB \$700,000 *meets 20% requirement*



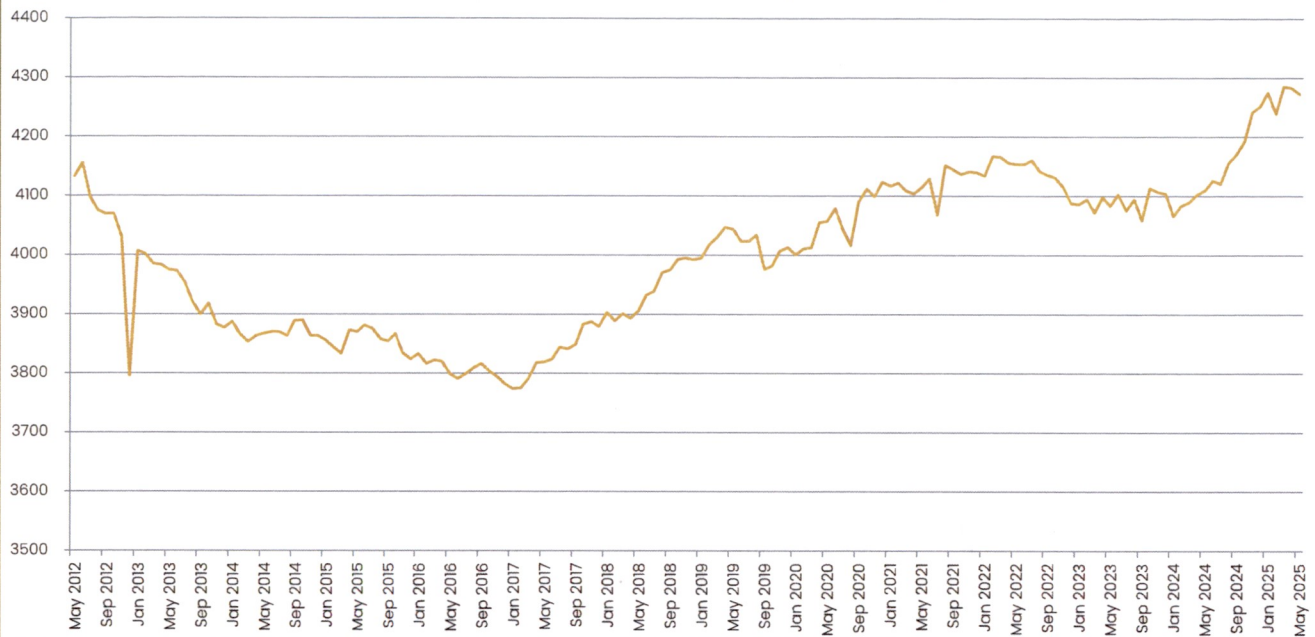
Staffing Levels

	Population	Market Share	Install Technicians	Field Technicians
Sherwood, OR	20,000	50%	2	11
Sandy, OR	13,000	78%	1	4
Anacortes, WA	18,000	42%	0	5
Ashland, OR	21,000	35%	0	4

	100 Mbps	250 Mbps	500 Mbps	1,000 Mbps	2,000 Mbps	5,000 Mbps
Sherwood, OR	\$30	\$40		\$60	\$80	
Sandy, OR			\$44.95	\$59.95	\$80	\$110
Anacortes, WA	\$39			\$69		
Ashland, OR			\$50	\$70	\$120	

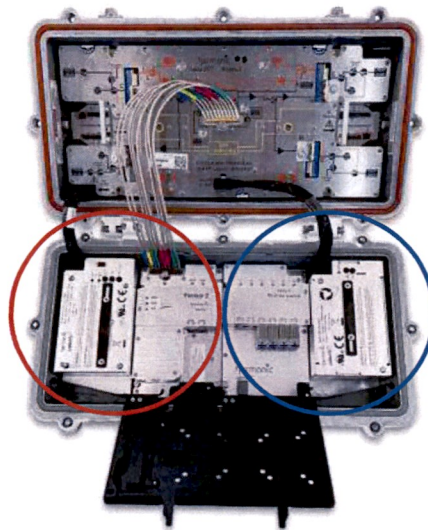


Total Cable Modem Customers, May 2012 - May 2025



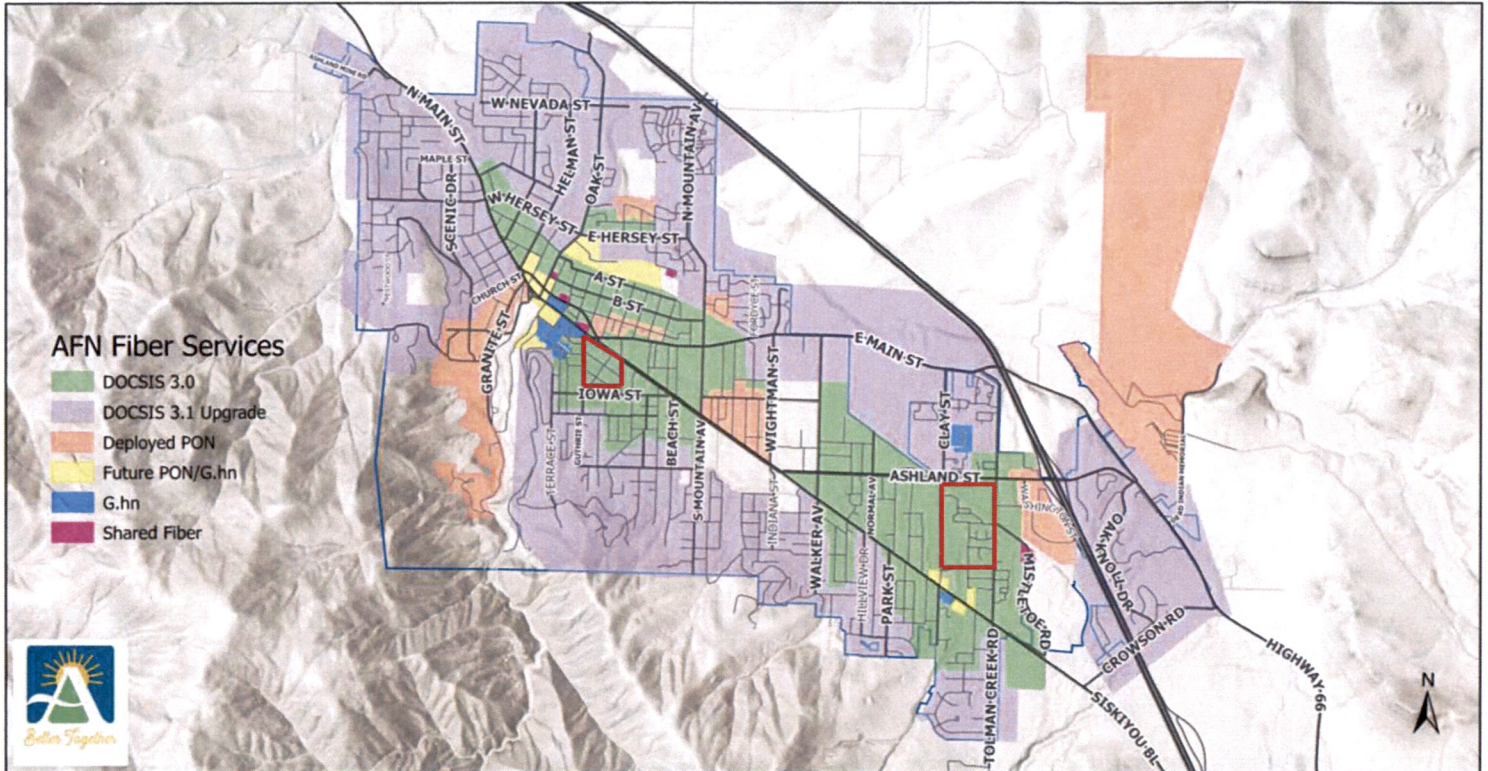
Remote PHY Node

DOCSIS 3.1
Module



PON Fiber
Module





AFN's Moonshot

- ✓ Strong ending fund balance
- ✓ Debt is retired
- ✓ We have a proven track record
- ✓ Our staff is incredible
- ✓ AFN is the only 100% local broadband network
- ✓ Support General Fund through franchise fees
- ✓ Provide low-cost internet to residents



*Not pictured is Nick



Questions?

