



City of Hartford * County of Van Buren * State of Michigan

TO: Mayor Hall and the Hartford City Commissioners

FROM: Nicol Brown, City Manager

DATE: June 24, 2024

RE: Project Compass

ITEM BEFORE THE COMMISSION:

The item before the Commission is the approval to participate in the US Department of Agriculture to aid communities in crafting strategies for expanding digital opportunities and broadband infrastructure over the long term.

DISCUSSION:

Project Compass, formally referred to as the USDA Broadband Technical Assistance program, will help support both the development of the strategy and several other activities, including listening sessions, community sentiment surveys, feasibility studies, and other measures to both identify assets and challenges and guide the development of a formal strategy that looks at immediate and longer-term solutions to close the digital divide within Hartford. These activities and deliverables will be of no cost to the city and will all derive from the grant and be paid for by Merit Network. In collaboration with the task force, the Merit team will help in providing the following deliverables over the next year:

- Community Listening Tours
- Sentiment Surveys on Residents' Needs and Perceptions of Digital Access
- Feasibility Study (if needed/wanted) for an Infrastructure Buildout
- Grant Support - Including Identifying Funding Sources and Grant Narratives
- Development of the Digital Equity Task Force
- Training Materials for Digital Skills Building
- Participation in a Statewide Coalition to Build Knowledge and Identify Other Solutions

RECOMMENDATION:

The City of Hartford City Commissioners support Project Compass and approve staff collaborating with Merit Network to provide the abovementioned deliverables.