DIGITAL EQUITY PLAN

EAST LONGMEADOW
MASSACHUSETTS
— EST. 1894 —

June 2025

DIGITAL EQUITY PLAN | EAST LONGMEADOW MASSACHUSETTS

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

DIGITAL EQUITY PLAN | EAST LONGMEADOW MASSACHUSETTS

1   Introduction

1.1   Project Background

Chapter 231 of the Acts of 2008 established the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) as a new division within the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative to provide for a program to achieve the deployment of affordable and ubiquitous broadband access for every citizen of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.[1] This legislation provided funding to MBI to oversee and administer across the commonwealth.

Additionally, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) allocated $147 million to Massachusetts under the BEAD program to build out broadband infrastructure to remaining unserved[2] and underserved[3] locations across the state.[4] The NTIA has also allocated $1 million to Massachusetts to develop a State Digital Equity Plan and another $14.1 million to implement that plan under the Digital Equity Act. Funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) were then used to establish a Municipal Digital Equity Planning Program, supporting these efforts at the local level. Specifically, the Municipal Digital Equity Planning activities will accomplish two goals:

1. Guide municipal decision-making and investments that will increase access, adoption, and usage of the internet for the populations most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Prepare municipalities to submit grant proposals to existing or forthcoming state or federal programs to support digital equity activities.

1.2   What is Broadband?

The term broadband, also known as high-speed internet, is the transmission of data using a wide range of frequencies that allows for the fast and efficient transfer of large amounts of information. In contrast to traditional Digital Subscriber Lines (DSL) or dial-up access, which requires a telephone line to connect, broadband remains consistently connected to the internet without the need for manual connection initiation.

Broadband can be split into two (2) types, fixed and mobile. Generally speaking, fixed broadband includes those types of connections with a physical wire and cables to the home (e.g.: VDSL (Very High Speed Digital Subscriber Line), fiber optic, cable modem, fixed antenna, and satellite) and

---

[1] Source: https://broadband.masstech.org/

[2] An unserved service project is defined as a project in which not less than 80 percent of broadband-serviceable locations served by the project are unserved locations. An "Unserved Service Project" may be as small as a single unserved broadband serviceable location (NOFO Section I.C.ee). An unserved location is defined as a broadband-serviceable location that the Broadband DATA Maps show as (a) having no access to broadband service, or (b) lacking access to Reliable Broadband Service offered with - (i) a speed of not less than 25 Mbps for downloads; and (ii) a speed of not less than 3 Mbps for uploads; and (iii) latency less than or equal to 100 milliseconds (NOFO Section I.C.dd).

[3] An underserved service project is defined as a project in which not less than 80 percent of broadband-serviceable locations served by the project are unserved locations or underserved locations. An "Underserved Service Project" may be as small as a single underserved broadband serviceable location (NOFO Section I.C.cc). An underserved location is defined as a broadband-serviceable location that is (a) not an unserved location, and (b) that the Broadband DATA Maps show as lacking access to Reliable Broadband Service offered with - (i) a speed of not less than 100 Mbps for downloads; and (ii) a speed of not less than 20 Mbps for uploads; and (iii) latency less than or equal to 100 milliseconds (NOFO Section I.C.bb).

[4] The current federal administration has halted the continuation of the Digital Equity Act and terminated grants to states as of May 12, 2025, including MA's award of $14.1 million.

wireless broadband includes anything without a physical wire connection (e.g.: mobile and cellular). Broadband speed can vary based on factors such as technology, level of service, or congestion. In March 2024, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) voted to increase the threshold for speed from 25 megabits per second (Mbps) download speed and 3 Mbps upload speed to 100 Mbps download speed and 20 Mbps upload speed.

There are three (3) main metrics that must be all adequate for the internet to be considered high-speed.

- **Speed** is typically measured in Mbps, which is a measurement of the amount of data capable of being transmitted each second.
- **Bandwidth** is the connection's capacity for transmitting data. Broadband is like an internet highway, the higher the bandwidth, the more lanes your internet highway has and the more devices you can connect simultaneously.
- **Latency** is the time it takes for the information to reach its destination related to potential delays. It is critical to applications that use live connections. The effects of high latency include jittery connections and frequent pauses while connected.

In 2015, the FCC defined high-speed internet as download speeds of at least 25 Mbps and upload speeds of at least 3 Mbps. In order to keep up with the increasing data demands, a new definition of "high-speed" is recommended by the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). The law sets a minimum threshold of 100 Mbps download speeds and 20 Mbps upload for new projects to receive federal broadband funds.

1.3   What is Digital Equity and Why is it Important?

Digital equity is a concept that ensures individuals and communities have equitable access to and use of information technology, enabling them to fully participate in social and economic life. It recognizes that in today's digital age, access to technology and the internet is essential for various aspects of life, including education, employment, healthcare, and civic engagement.

According to the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA), "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 is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services."

1.4   Vision and Goals

The Town of East Longmeadow recognizes the importance of digital accessibility for all its members. East Longmeadow recently established a Municipal Light Plant (MLP), which is a town-owned company that can provide utility services, including telecommunications systems, and is quickly moving forward on establishing an affordable and accessible fiber internet network for the community. Given the user-end technology changes associated with fiber internet, along with a large older adult population, the Town is concerned that there may be a lag or even some resistance on the part of the older adult population to transition to a fiber network. The Digital Equity Plan will help map out barriers older adults might face when opting into the fiber network and develop a proactive plan for outreach, education, and skills workshops that can be leveraged to support the older adult population and others through this transition.

The Town is dedicated to ensuring that every individual has the opportunity and ability to access reliable, affordable, and high-speed internet service. By prioritizing digital equity, the East Longmeadow community aims to promote full personal, civic, and economic participation. Access to

reliable internet service and digital literacy skills are essential for individuals to fully engage in the community and contribute to its growth and prosperity.

Consistent with the Massachusetts Broadband Strategic Plan, the strategy involves these four (4) pillars.

- **Extend and Improve Broadband Access and Infrastructure.** Investments in reliable infrastructure where it's lacking, which may be found in pocket locations along town edges, low-density areas, and low- income urban neighborhoods.
- **Reaching Target Populations through Partnerships.** Best practice from the Mass Internet Connect implementation experience is that it is vital to have a distribution partner trusted in the community with the ability to reach the target population and deliver support on devices, subsidies, and digital literacy training.
- **Digital Literacy.** Go beyond connectivity by providing the necessary digital and computer skills for vulnerable populations. More than one out of four participants in the Mass Internet Connect program with MassHire has requested Digital Literacy support.
- **Adoption and Affordability.** Getting devices to people who need them and directing consumers to broadband service subsidies and low-cost service options.

2 Community Engagement

2.1 Steering Committee

The Digital Equity Steering Committee included representatives from the Town Manager Department, Town Council, East Longmeadow Cable Access Television, East Longmeadow Public Schools, East Longmeadow Public Library, and East Longmeadow Broadband Committee. The Digital Equity Steering Committee was informed on the project's process, provided strategic support, and facilitated communication with selected stakeholder groups.

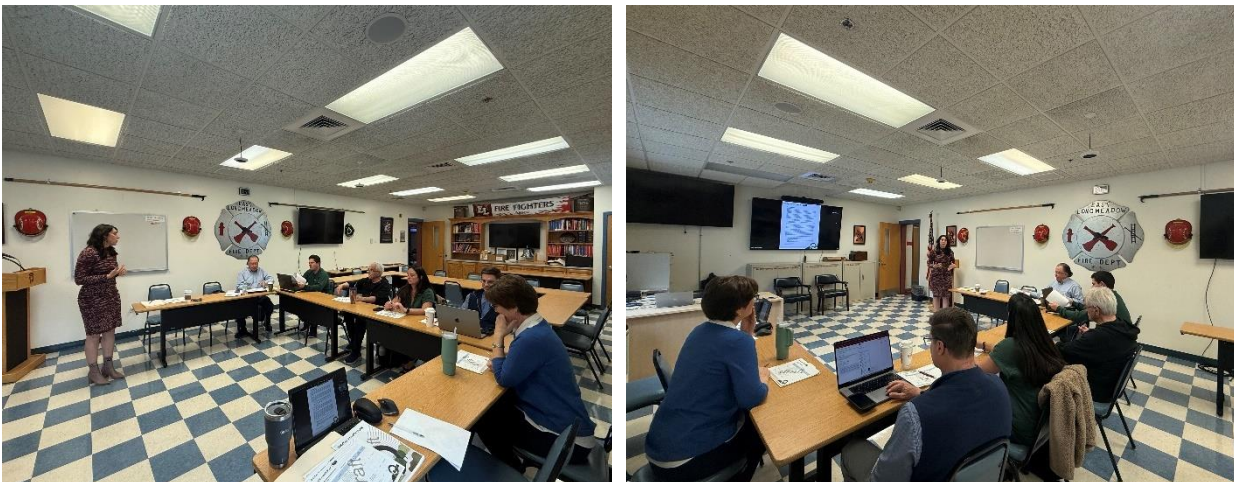Figure 1. Steering Committee Meeting #1 (September 24, 2024) Photo

Figure 2. Digital Equity Plan – Findings Review Meeting (May 20, 2025) Photos

2.2 Stakeholder Interviews

The Steering Committee identified additional stakeholders within the community who could help provide further insight into the state of broadband for various groups across the community. Members of the Steering Committee then hosted one-on-one meetings with those stakeholders to discuss their perspectives and experiences, broadband and digital device barriers and opportunities within the community, and their vision for improved equity. Stakeholder interviews from the Town of East Longmeadow included the IT Director, Town Nurse, and a technology volunteer member from the Council on Aging (COA).

- Ryan Quimby, IT Director
- Kris Buffington, Town Nurse
- Donna Schroyer, Technology Volunteer at COA.
- East Longmeadow Housing Authority
- East Longmeadow Broadband Committee
- Mapleshade Elementary School

2.3 Community Outreach
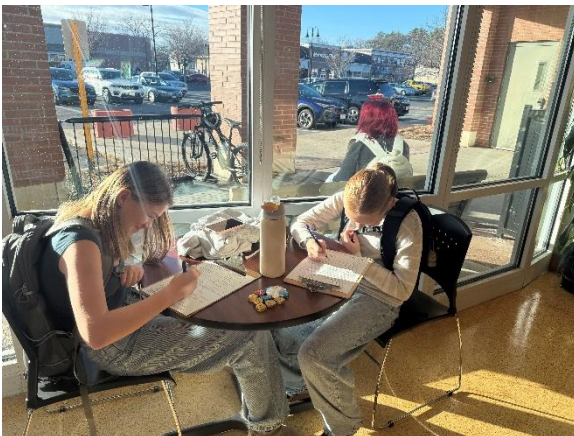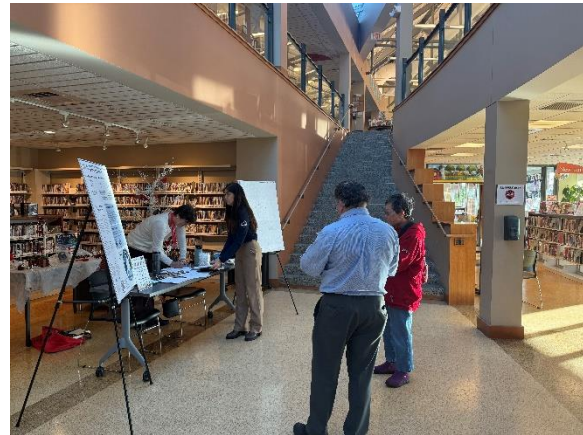
The two (2) pop-up events and charette were held on Wednesday, November 20, 2024, at different locations to reach different community members, ranging from the Senior Center and Public Library. There were different activities for the public to engage with, identifying areas with limited or no mobile coverage, positive experiences with wireline or mobile connections, and specific input on devices, affordable/reliable connection, and digital literacy.

To continue reaching out to the community, seminars were held at the Housing Authority, Village Green, Quarry Hill, and Inward Commons on Wednesday, May 14, 2025. Surveys were provided ahead of time, and during these seminars, residents were encouraged to bring their completed surveys with them and to continue the dialogue about adequate computing devices, affordable/reliable broadband connections, and digital literacy skills. The Housing Authority provides decent, safe, affordable housing for the low-income elderly, veterans, disabled, and families.

Two (2) supportive housing case managers assist residents with providing benefits, coordinating services, providing resource information, and more. Specifically, at Quarry Hill, a computer with a printer is available in the common area for residents, and targeted information about the Fraud Watch Network, published by AARP, is also available. "This brings awareness to residents on how to proactively spot scams, get guidance from our fraud specialists if you've been targeted, and feel more secure knowing that we advocate at the federal, state, and local levels to protect consumers and enforce the law[5]".

---

[5] Source: Fraud Watch Network, published by AARP
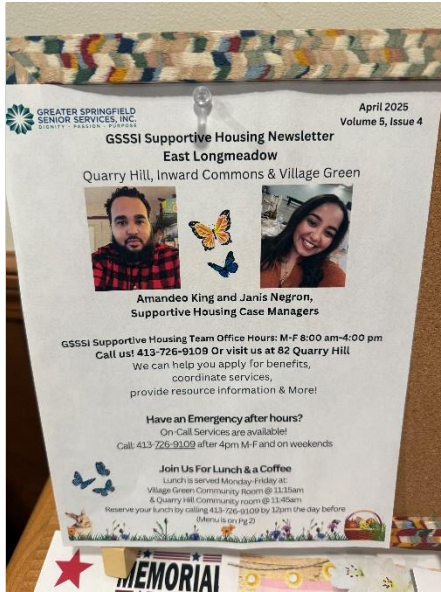
2.4 MBI Survey

MBI also prepared a survey to assess broadband access and needs across the state. This anonymous survey included questions regarding residents' internet service provider, type(s), quality, and cost, as well as questions regarding their personal experiences with device access and desires to participate in training opportunities. As of May 16, 2025, East Longmeadow residents had submitted 106 responses to the survey. Some of the information gathered from these responses includes the following:

- On average, respondents are spending $97 per month on their internet subscriptions. However, it should be noted that when communicating with the folks, many folks had bundle subscriptions and were unaware of the breakdown between cable, internet, and landline. Therefore, the average may be slightly skewed.
- Less than 50% of the respondents indicated it is hard to pay for their internet bill.
- Approximately 75% of the respondents are concerned about internet safety specifically, could get scammed or tricked and data could get stolen or used without their consent.

3 Community Assessment

The Town of East Longmeadow is located in Hampden County with a population of 16,431[6] residents and covers an area of 12.94 square miles, resulting in a population density of about 1,264 residents per square mile. It is a part of the Springfield-Chicopee-Holyoke Metropolitan Area and falls within the Connecticut River watershed. It is bordered on the west by Longmeadow, on the north by Springfield, on the east by Wilbraham and Hampden, and on the south by Enfield and Somers, Connecticut. The Town recognizes the importance of addressing gaps in broadband access and is actively working to ensure equitable availability for all residents, especially children, older adults, and low-income groups, since there are 6,008 households and 4,140 families. State-level data show that the Town of East Longmeadow has a growing income-qualifying population at the elementary and middle school levels that brings the district above the 25% state community eligibility provision threshold.

As shown in Figure 3, almost half of the land uses in town in terms of acreage are residential (4,011 acres @ 48%). Commercial and industrial uses, including the 'mixed use' category of commercial + residential) take up 13%. Agriculture is currently just 2% of land use, but almost 22% is "Open land". The _Town of East Longmeadow Resilient Master Plan, 2021_ provided the opportunity for residents to present comments and concerns about growth in the Town. It was very important to survey takers that the town manages and guides commercial development – all of which can be addressed through the Town's land use policies and regulations. The following were issues and opportunities identified in the Master Plan.

- Encouraging Redevelopment – The Town Center can continue to attract small businesses to support the local economy and offer a continuation of the types of structures and character the town seeks. A Village Center bylaw, or exploring an expansion of the Mixed Use Village District and those standards, could help the town advance the maintenance of appropriate development in the center.
- Small Town Features – Urban design can help preserve historic small-town character, ensuring that new development complements the area surrounding it, and creates an accessible, pedestrian-friendly environment. By addressing fundamental site dimensions, like building height, width, coverage, and setbacks, design guidelines can also focus on elements such as signage, building materials, streetscape components, and landscaping.
- Affordable Housing – East Longmeadow could support additional affordable housing in town by exploring an expansion to the inclusionary zoning component in the Mixed Use Village District. This would support the implementation of the recommendation raised by residents and other stakeholders for varying housing types and affordable units. As described, new housing constructed under this zoning can require affordable units built on-site, payment in lieu of units, or donation of land that could support affordable housing development.
- Community Resilience – The Town's ability to utilize its available resources (energy, communication, transportation, food, etc.) to withstand and recover from adverse situations is known as its community resilience. East Longmeadow's resilience will rely on a proactive and planned approach to protect its resources and direct where development and redevelopment can occur.

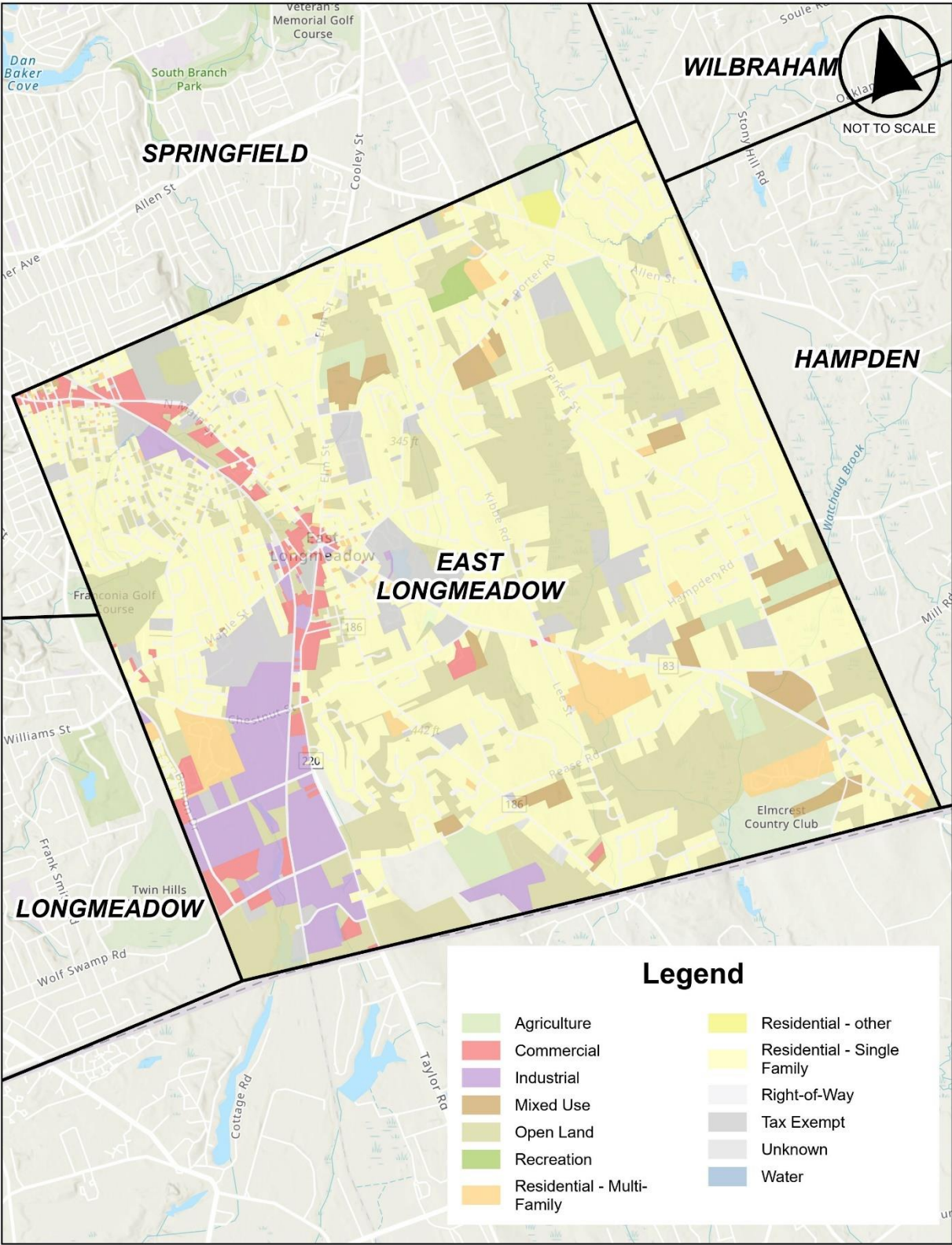[6] US Census Bureau, Population Estimates July 2023

Figure 3. Land Use

3.1 Demographics

Key Demographics

Population	Household Ownerships	Race	Language	Education	Disabilities	Median Household Income	Median Age
16,431	15% occupied units are rental units 85% occupied units are owned	15% are non-White	10.5% speak language other than English at home	43.1% have a Bachelor's degree or Higher	12.9% are disabled	$101,570	42.7

Source: US 2020 Census/Census Reporter

The most recent census data indicates the town has a population of 16,431, and there are a total of 6,008 households, of which 85% are owner-occupied. The median value of owner occupied housing unit is $342,000, as shown in Figure 4, which is about 25% higher than the amount in Hampden County[7]. The median rent in East Longmeadow is between $1,575 and $2,650. This information is important to consider when it comACPes to income and expenses, as it can impact the ability of individuals and families to afford better internet services. Renters may have limited financial resources, and the cost of rent can significantly impact their ability to allocate funds for internet access. "Cost burdened" refers to the percentage of households that spend more than 30% of their household income on housing expenses. For owners who are still paying a mortgage, about 29.4% are considered cost burdened. For renters, this percentage increases to 56.6%. Even with a median household income that is about $35,000 higher than the overall county median, the fair percentage of residents burdened by the cost of housing may still struggle to cover the costs of high-speed internet.
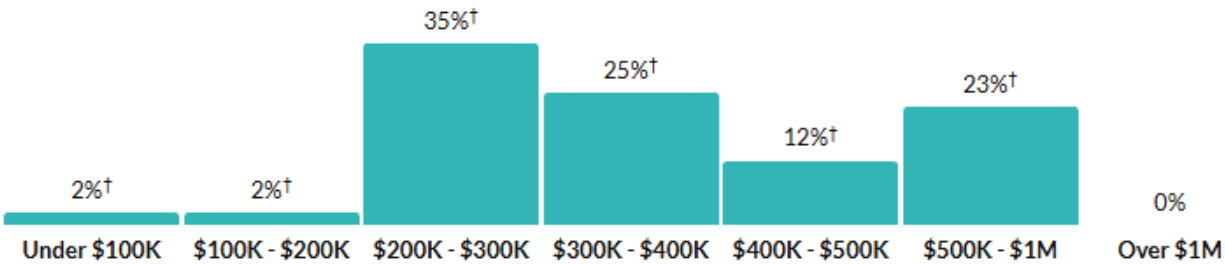

Figure 4. Value of Owner-Occupied Housing Units (Census Reporter)

---

[7] https://censusreporter.org/profiles/06000US2501319645-east-longmeadow-town-hampden-county-ma/

East Longmeadow is a primarily white community, with only about 15% of residents identifying as non-white. Non-white residents are majority black or multiracial. The racial distribution of East Longmeadow is provided in Figure 5. While only relevant to a small percentage of the population, it is important to consider historical boundaries which may create socioeconomic or technology access inequities and develop a plan to be inclusive to all residents. Solutions should involve input from a diverse representation of the population.
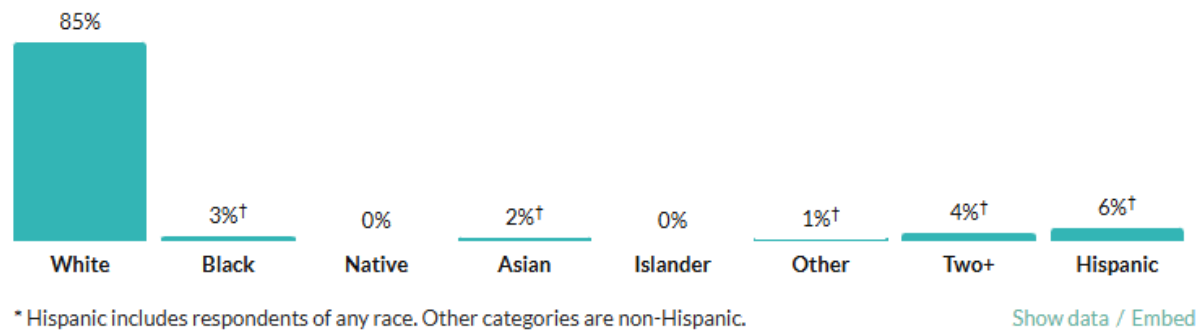
Figure 5. Race & Ethnicity (Census Reporter)

Understanding disabilities is crucial because it promotes inclusivity, fosters a more equitable society, and ensures individuals with disabilities have the same opportunities as everyone else. It is important to note that residents may have multiple types of disabilities and may require different accommodations to bridge digital literacy gaps as shown in Figure 6. About 12.9% of the population of East Longmeadow has some form of disability which may impact their access to broadband.

Figure 6. Common Disabilities (Source: US Census Bureau)

Income in East Longmeadow varies greatly across the population, with 18% of households making under $50,000 per year and 22% of households making over $200,000 per year. The overall distribution of household incomes in East Longmeadow is shown in Figure 7. The median household income is $101,540, which is about 1.4 times the amount in Hampden County, $70,535.
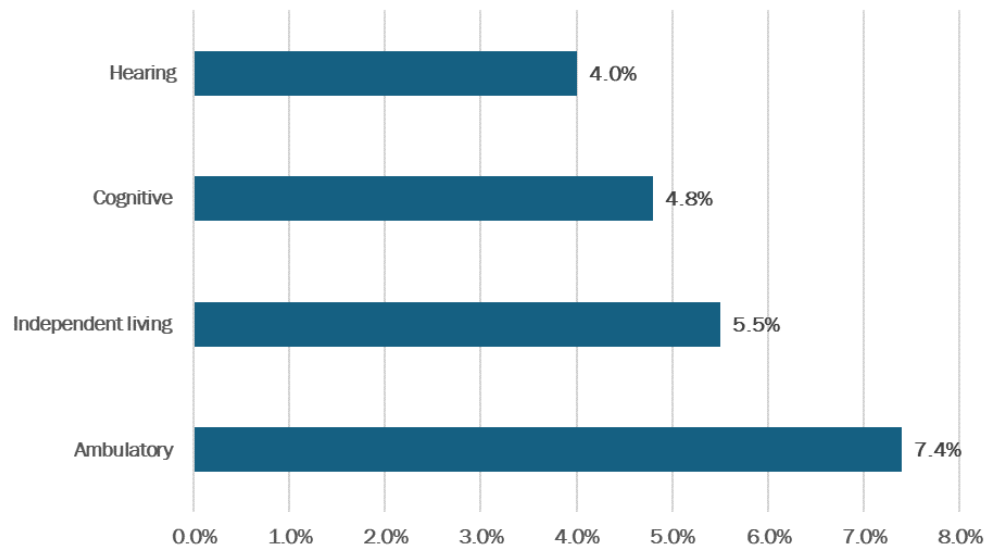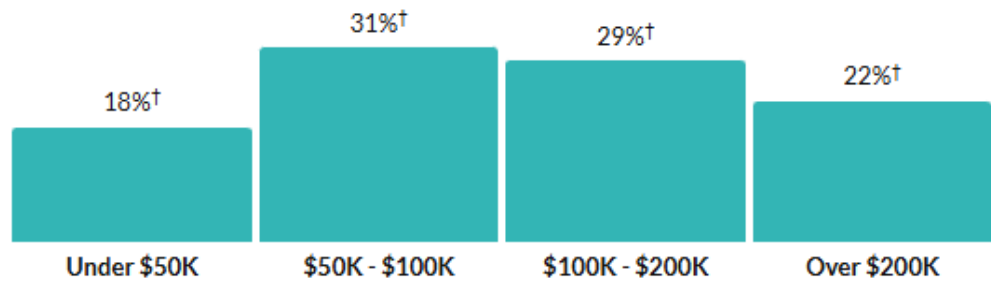

Figure 7. Household Income (Census Reporter)

The population of East Longmeadow is a few years older, on average, than Hampden County as a whole. The median age of 42.7 years is about 10% higher than the median age in Hampden County, 39.8, with 21% of the population above 65. The age distribution of East Longmeadow is shown in Figure 8. Older adult residents often face unique challenges in connecting to broadband internet and technology, which they can access due to more significant gaps in digital literacy and the ability or desire to travel. However, with expanding online services that make their lives easier, they stand to gain the most from this connection.

Figure 8. Population by Age (Census Reporter)

3.2 Broadband Access

East Longmeadow has six (6) providers of fixed internet connections. All providers offer residential connections, while two (2) have business options. These providers are listed, with their offered speeds, in Table 1. Note that some of these providers represent fixed options offered by wireless provi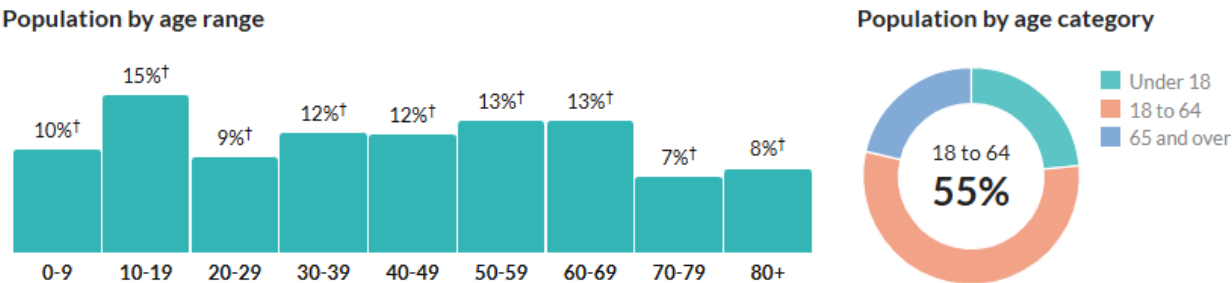ders (the ability to install a Wi-Fi router in your home that is served by cellular or satellite internet). Currently, Spectrum/Charter and Verizon are the only providers offering fixed (or wired) internet to homes in East Longmeadow.

Table 1. Summary of Fixed Internet Providers

Provider	Residential		Commercial	
	Download (Mbps)	Upload (Mbps)	Download (Mbps)	Upload (Mbps)
Spectrum	1,000	35	-	-
Verizon	300	25	-	-
Starlink*	220	25	-	-
Viasat*	50	3	50	4
T-Mobile*	100	20	25	0.2
HughesNet*	100	5	-	-

High-speed internet has a minimum threshold of 100 Mbps download speeds and 20 Mbps upload.
* Provider offers Wi-Fi in the home serviced by wireless internet or satellite

Wireless internet is available through four (4) providers. The providers are listed, with their upload and download speeds, in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of Wireless Internet Providers

Provider	Network	Download (Mbps)	Upload (Mbps)
New Cingular	5G-NR	35	3
Project Genesis	5G-NR	35	3
T-Mobile	5G-NR	35	3
Verizon	5G-NR	35	5

It was noted during public engagement sessions that there are a number of areas with poor cellular coverage due to terrain and tree coverage. Therefore, wireless internet and Wi-Fi hotspot options are not always viable for all residents in East Longmeadow.

In addition to services provided to homes, a number of Metro Networks and third-party fiber providers are serving businesses within East Longmeadow: MassBroadband 123 (built and owned by MBI), Crown Castle, and Firstlight. These middle-mile fiber networks are being used by the Town to bring ISPs into the area and serve as the basis of their municipal fiber network. The Town's Broadband Committee is currently working with a consultant to continue to develop a fiber service area map that will help the Town identify areas the residents are interested in expanding the municipal broadband network to other businesses and residences.

According to FCC data, over 99.9% of East Longmeadow is adequately served, while only 87.07% of residents have broadband internet subscriptions. All served[8] locations have speeds of at least 100/20 Mbps. About 12.47% of residents have no service and 0.47% of residents have dial-up.

On average, East Longmeadow residents pay about $97 each month for their internet service. According to MBI survey results, 45% of residents find it hard to pay their internet bill.

3.2.1 Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) Enrollment

The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) offered monthly service and device discounts to eligible households to reduce the burden of internet and technology. Households were eligible for ACP if their income was at or below 200% of the federal poverty guidelines or if they received benefits from certain assistance programs or grants. In January 2024, the zip code which East Longmeadow primarily occupies had 613 ACP subscribers[9]. In 2022, it was estimated that 460 families out of 4,140 and 854 individuals out of 15,966 would qualify by income. Due to a lack of funding, the program ended on June 1, 2024.

A program called Lifeline, established in 1985, is also available to support low-income households access broadband services. However, not all residents who previously received assistance from the ACP program may qualify for Lifeline, suggesting a potential gap in residents' ability to afford internet services. It is important to note that before its discontinuation, the ACP program had a high adoption rate among eligible East Longmeadow households.

However, while the ACP offered a $30 per month subsidy, the Lifeline subsidy is only up to $9.25 per month.

3.3 Community Anchor Institutions (CAIs)

Community anchor institutions (CAIs), such as schools, libraries, healthcare providers, public safety entities, and community support organizations, play an important role in providing outreach, access, equipment, and support services to help vulnerable populations, including low-income individuals, the unemployed, and older adults, make greater use of broadband services. These institutions serve as resources and allies in bridging the digital divide and ensuring that everyone has access to the benefits and opportunities that broadband connectivity can bring.

The **East Longmeadow Public Library** has many resources available for residents who may not have access to stable internet or technology. Within the library, 20 total computers are available for patron use. Additionally, the library has Chromebooks and WiFi Hotspots available for check out . These

---

[8] The National Broadband Map shows that a location has broadband service available at a speed of at least 100 Mbps for downloads and at least 20 Mbps for uploads and latency less than or equal to 100 milliseconds using Technology Codes 71 or 72, that location will be treated as "served."

[9] Based on data published by Universal Service Administrative Co. at https://www.usac.org/about/affordable-connectivity-program/acp-enrollment-and-claims-tracker/

services can potentially connect patrons to quality internet from the library and their own home for a short period. Previously, technology support in the library was offered by library staff as needed and by East Longmeadow's IT Department once a month.

The **East Longmeadow Community Access Television (ELCAT) provides** programming, production, and media-education services that reflect the diverse interests, accomplishments, and concerns of East Longmeadow residents. They offer training, technical assistance, and resources for creating and broadcasting community programming on their public access channel. ELCAT also records public meetings, provides facilities and equipment for video production, and offers instructional resources for students interested in media production.

Pleasant View Senior Center offers one-on-one technology support from its volunteers to its seniors. In addition to the one-on-one technology support, there are monthly group support between September and May, which is also led by a volunteer. Programming in the center also includes monthly technology help and cell phone help and pop-up sessions with information about security and fraud. Depending on demand, the center could be funded to offer more frequent technology services or sessions specific to getting connected to broadband internet.

East Longmeadow Public Schools provides Chromebooks to its students for use at home, reducing technology gaps among children. However, more programs could be offered to help families connect to the Internet so that their children may use their Chromebooks. Schools can serve as a public meeting space for informational sessions about internet connections or available resources around town.

East Longmeadow **Religious Institutions**, such as Cornerstone Church, St. Michael's Parish, and East Longmeadow Methodist Church, could play an important role in connection of the community to quality internet and reliable technology. Religious centers may host technology classes and seminars for community members to close digital literacy gaps. With knowledge about the struggles of their patrons, religious leaders can play a vital role in determining appropriate programming and encourage members to attend.

The mission of the **East Longmeadow Housing Authority** is to provide decent, safe, affordable housing for the low-income elderly, veterans, disabled, and families. Two (2) supportive housing case managers assist residents with providing benefits, coordinating services, providing resource information, and more. Specifically, at Quarry Hill, in the common area, a computer with a printer is available for the residents.

3.4 Digital Literacy

Beyond the physical infrastructure, there is also a need to increase digital literacy so that the community has meaningful access once they are connected. Digital literacy is low among older adults, those with disabilities, English as a Second Language speakers, and immigrants, creating barriers to success for these groups. Privacy and security concerns create hesitancy that may be reduced through education on how to be safe online and how to protect personal identifiable information when accessing and utilizing the internet.

3.5 Device Access

In East Longmeadow, about 89.1% of households have a computer. While this is a high percentage of households, it is important to understand the reasons for which the remaining 10.9% of households do not have one. They should be adequately connected to resources at the East

Longmeadow Public Library or Pleasant View Senior Center, if applicable, to guarantee their technology needs are being met.

3.6   Fiber Internet Network

East Longmeadow's is moving forward on establishing an affordable and accessible fiber internet network for the community. The town is engaging with Whip City to bring fiber to the community with the hope of lowering costs and providing more responsive service. East Longmeadow has established a Municipal Light Plant (MLP), a locally owned and operated public utility authorized under state law (M.G.L. Chapter 164) to provide essential services like electricity—and more recently, high-speed internet—to residents and businesses. This will facilitate the implementation of the fiber and working with Whip City. Unlike private utilities, MLPs are governed by local officials and operate with a focus on community benefit rather than profit. A town must establish an MLP through a two-step town council vote to offer municipal broadband service. Once established, the MLP can build and manage critical infrastructure like a fiber-optic network, enabling affordable, reliable internet service controlled by the community, not outside corporations. For towns like East Longmeadow, an MLP is the foundational legal and operational vehicle that makes town-wide fiber internet possible.

3.7   The Alliance for Digital Equity

The Alliance for Digital Equity is a Western Massachusetts based coalition of community-focused organizations working toward digital equity for all people. The goal of the Alliance is to provide people with the access they need—to the equipment, infrastructure, and knowledge and skills—that will enable them to participate fully in the digital world, as shown in Figure 9. The Alliance works to develop big picture solutions as well as the routes that lead to them.

The Alliance plays several key roles to promote digital equity. The first is to help people understand what digital equity is, why it is vital to communities, and why it is a civil right for all people. The Alliance works at a grassroots level to raise awareness and to highlight community-focused efforts that help eliminate the digital divide. By bringing people and existing community resources together, the Alliance acts to increase the rate of positive change. Through collaboration, impact can be expanded by boosting the number of people reached and the number of people served.

Figure 9. The Alliance for Digital Equity

4 Key Findings of Existing Conditions

From public input and stakeholder interviews, challenges, opportunities, and resources were identified throughout East Longmeadow in regard to digital literacy and access. The specific percentages are results from the MBI survey.

4.1 Barriers and Challenges

4.1.1 Vulnerable Populations

Affordability is the main concern among older adults and low-income residents. According to the MBI survey, respondents spend an average of $97 per month on their internet subscription, which causes financial strain for about 45% of respondents. Discussions with seniors and lower-income residents indicated that some are paying much more than $100 per month.

Additionally, approximately 15% of respondents to the MBI survey indicated they have difficulties accessing medical needs via telehealth.

Approximately 10.5% of the population speak other than English at home, which has the potential to be a barrier to participating in support and training programs.

4.1.2 Broadband Access and Quality

Connection to broadband in East Longmeadow varies. According to feedback received during the development of this plan, connection speeds are acceptable, but service is inconsistent. Many residents have a Wi-Fi booster to help improve wireless internet signal strength at home, but it is costly to obtain the booster device. Furthermore, 19% of survey respondents indicated their internet services do not work well enough to meet their household needs.

Additionally, Spectrum is the only fixed (wired) service provider in East Longmeadow. 99% of respondents indicated they have internet at their home, and the FCC indicates 0.02% of homes have no service available, but the FCC also indicates only 87.07% of households have an internet subscription. 70% of survey respondents indicated Spectrum is their service provider and 9% of survey respondents indicated Comcast Cable Corporation as their service provider.

While East Longmeadow's public Wi-Fi is available for residents without home internet service, residents have reported that the connection speed is fairly slow at municipal buildings alone.

4.1.3 Digital Literacy

Most residents' primary device is a cell phone which means there may be limited experience in using other digital devices. Most households access the internet using a cellphone (10%) or laptop/desktop computer (8%).

Approximately 75% of respondents said they were concerned about internet safety, with the most common concern being that their data could get stolen or used without their consent and a loved one could get scammed or tricked. Based on the people interacted with during the development of the Plan, concerns include Social Security Fraud, not online banking, and preferring hard copies for bills. Some residents also have trouble using the internet, reporting that they are unsure how to connect to Wi-Fi such as the username and password.

According to the MBI survey, approximately 10% of respondents would be interested in digital literacy training. Approximately 8% indicated online would be preferred as compared to in-person.

4.2 Assets and Strengths

4.2.1 Internet and Device Access

Based on the feedback received from the MBI survey and resident interaction during the development of the Plan, nearly all of the **older adult population** has cell phones. Additionally, several of the senior residents mentioned they have a panic button at home. It should be noted that when opting-in to the fiber network for the senior population, a proactive plan for outreach, education, and skills workshop will need to be held through the transition.

The **library** provides several resources to connect residents and visitors to devices and the internet, including public Wi-Fi, 10 hot spots and Chromebooks for loan, 20 public work stations, mobile printing and faxing, and study rooms that can be booked for meetings or those working remotely. The Chromebooks and hot spots are available to lease for one (1) week. The library pays the $20-30 per month service fee for the hot spots. Demographics are not tracked to know whether certain populations use these resources most often. The library was looking into providing streaming service support (Roku sticks) but is not pursuing Roku sticks at this time due to the terms of service and the time requirements to review and reset the sticks after each patron check-out. The library is open to exploring this again if there are changes to the platform's terms of service.

The **Senior Center** also provides several resources including public Wi-Fi, hot spots and iPads that can be leased, and a Chromebook that can be used on-site.

Additionally, the **schools** have a 1 to 1 Chromebook program for students and the **Housing Authority** have a computer and printer available for residents at Quarry Hill.

The Town itself is also committed to connecting residents to resources. The Town currently provides **public Wi-Fi** in certain public spaces and is in the process of building out **municipal fiber** to public facilities with plans to expand. They also have connections to **middle-mile fiber** providers to bring more providers into town and bring more options to residents.

4.2.2 Literacy

At the time of this Plan's development, the **library** provides some on-demand technology support. The library also worked with Tech Foundry's Tech Hub (through the Western MA Alliance for Digital Equity) to offer a six-workshop-series on digital skills, classes included Computer Maintenance, Online Safety Basics, Avoiding Misinformation, Cloud Basics, Intro to Google Workspace, and Google Chrome.

At the **Senior Center**, there is a volunteer available every Friday for one-on-one support (how to use Teams, help them answer questions they have, helps navigate grocery store apps, other apps, and phone setting)). In addition to the one-on-one technology support, there are monthly group support between September and May, which is also led by a volunteer. Furthermore, August 2025, Maura Lassard of Nurse Advocates, LLC will be scheduling a time to meet with older adults one on one to show and teach them how to use medical portals to access their medical information and history. These appointments will be free to the seniors and the Center. Additionally, the Senior Center occasionally offers presentations on digital literacy, including how to use Google Maps, Facebook, etc. Volunteers and students lead these presentations.

There are also two (2) supportive housing case managers at the **Housing Authority** to assist residents with providing benefits, coordinating services, providing resource information, and more.

5 Recommendations and Conclusions

5.1 Action Plan

The Town of East Longmeadow's Digital Equity Plan provides a framework to unite existing work efforts and build new initiatives under a focused, evidence-based strategy for cooperative effort. Achieving digital equity for all residents will require a concerted effort by the government, community-based organizations, higher education organizations, and individuals who are committed to the goals of the Digital Equity Plan. To achieve the vision and goals, the Digital Equity Steering Committee/ Broadband Committee is committed to taking the following strategies, as shown in Table 3. Each strategy identifies the focus areas, lead organization, cost, funding opportunities, and timeframe.

The cost is an approximation of the financial cost (capital or operational), defined as follows:

- "$": less than $5,000
- "$$": $5,000 to $50,000
- "$$$": more than $50,000

The timeframe is the anticipated length of time for the completion of a given strategy, defined as follows:

- "short-term": 0 months to one (1) year
- "mid-term": one (1) to three (3) years
- "long-term": more than three (3) years

Table 4 depicts the nine (9) focus area icons for the different strategies.

DIGITAL EQUITY PLAN

Table 3. Action Plan

Focus Area(s)	Strategy	Description	Lead Organization	Cost	Funding Opportunities	Timeframe
	Restructure/rebrand the Broadband Committee with a name and members that will support progress on the Digital Equity Plan and Town-wide Fiber internet	The East Longmeadow Broadband Committee's mission was to research and analyze data relevant to current and future availability of access to broadband services by the town's residents and businesses, and make appropriate policy recommendations to the Town Manager, to advance the access, affordability, and reliability of broadband service in the community. Currently, East Longmeadow is preparing to build an EPON (Ethernet Passive Optical Network) to provide residents and businesses with an alternative internet access. Restructure the Broadband Committee with the name and members to make progress on the Digital Equity Plan and Town-wide Fiber Internet.	Digital Equity Steering Committee/Broadband Committee	$	N/A	Short-term
	Champion for Funding	Designate a champion to be responsible for continuous coordination, guiding, pursuing funding for improvements, and equipment & etc. Continue collaboration and connection with the Alliance for Digital Equity.	East Longmeadow Community Access TV (ELCAT) Department, Library	$	N/A	Short-term
	Town's Website Digital Services/ Resources	Create or enhance the Town's website, specifically focused on digital services/resources, which can include a refresh of the Broadband Committee's page and provide weblinks to the Municipal Light Plant's page and Library resources. This website may include short	Broadband Committee/Town Staff, ELCAT Department	$	N/A	Short-term

Focus Area(s)	Strategy	Description	Lead Organization	Cost	Funding Opportunities	Timeframe
		training videos on various topics of "how to", security protections, etc.				
	Establish "Digital Navigators"	Assign "Digital Navigators" at Library, Senior Center, Hospital, Housing Authorities, and Public Safety Facility. A Digital Navigator typically involves assisting individuals, especially those from marginalized communities, in accessing and utilizing technology to improve their lives.	Digital Equity Steering Committee/Broadband Committee, East Longmeadow Public Schools	$*	AARP, Healthy Aging Funds	Short-term
	Purchase additional digital devices for public use at the Library, the Senior Center, and the three (3) Housing Authorities, Village Green, Quarry Hill, and Inward Commons	Acquire additional tablets, desktop/laptop computers, printers, hot spots, and instructional materials. Modernized the space/equipment for residents and visitors.	Town IT Department, East Longmeadow Public Schools, East Longmeadow Housing Authority	$$$	AARP, Healthy Aging Funds	Mid-term
	Update Broadband Infrastructure at Housing Authority Buildings	Provide new and updated capabilities for residents to connect to the internet with durable, high-quality infrastructure	Town Administration and East Longmeadow Housing Authority	$$	Residential Retrofit Program	Mid-term
	Increase device support staff at Library and Senior Center	Provide additional staff at Library, Senior Center, Housing Authority to manage new digital devices and provide troubleshooting support to the public.	Library, Council on Aging, Housing Authority, East Longmeadow Housing Authority	$$*	AARP, Healthy Aging Funds	Mid-term
	Create a digital library of on-demand digital skills training	Create/compile a library of on-demand training that can be hosted in-person or viewed online for free.	Digital Equity Steering Committee/Broadband Committee, Library, ELCAT, East	$	Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program	Mid-term

Focus Area(s)	Strategy	Description	Lead Organization	Cost	Funding Opportunities	Timeframe
			Longmeadow Public Schools[10]			
📖	Identify a Telehealth Champion	A Telehealth Champion is a trusted individual within the community who advocates for and promotes the use of telehealth services. This person acts as a bridge between healthcare providers and community members, ensuring that everyone has access to necessary telehealth resources. The Telehealth Champion should be well-versed in using telehealth technology, empathetic to the needs of the community, and proactive in engaging with community members to address and eliminate barriers to digital health access. The Telehealth Champion can do drop-ins at different CAIs.	Health Department, Senior Center	$*	AARP, Healthy Aging Funds	Mid-term
📖💬	Provide digital skills workshops	Host in-person workshops covering online safety, digital skills, and device troubleshooting	Library with Tech Foundry's Tech Hub or East Longmeadow Public Schools or Seniors	$*	Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program	Mid-term
🕐	Update East Longmeadow's Zoning and Land Development Regulations by-laws to include accommodating fiber service	Ensure that all the local permitting regulations for subdivision, site plan reviews, and special permits have in place , requirements that would, as part of the design and local permitting for the applicant of a new development, to install at minimum conduit and any other underground infrastructure to accommodate future fiber service to the	Planning and Community Development Department	$	N/A	Mid-term

---

[10] Collaborate with East Longmeadow Public School to coincide with the video class to create a digital library of on-demand digital skills training.

Focus Area(s)	Strategy	Description	Lead Organization	Cost	Funding Opportunities	Timeframe
		development with connection capability to the main street "line."				

*   This strategy could be accomplished at no cost by volunteers but may require paid staff.

Table 4. Focus Area Legend

Focus Area Icon	Focus Area Description	Focus Area Icon	Focus Area Description
👤	Staff Capacity for Digital Equity	📖	Digital Literacy
📶	Wi-Fi Access and Innovative Connectivity Technology	💻	Device Distribution and Refurbishment
🏠	Public Space Modernization	💬	Education, Outreach, and Adoption
🏠	Connectivity for Economic Hardship	🕸	Access Diversification
🕐	Policies for Future Access		

5.2 Funding Programs

Various funding programs are available to help address the needs listed in Section 4. Project-specific applications should be researched and prepared before the application deadlines, but the following programs have been identified as applicable to the Town of East Longmeadow's identified needs.

- BEAD Program: https://broadband.masstech.org/bead-program
- MBI Digital Equity Implementation: https://broadband.masstech.org/digital-equity-implementation[11]
- USDA's Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grants: https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/telecommunications-programs/distance-learning-telemedicine-grants
- Affordable Housing Trust: https://www.mass.gov/info-details/affordable-housing-trust-fund-ahtf
- Residential Retrofit Program: https://broadband.masstech.org/retrofit
- Community Compact IT Grant: https://www.mass.gov/community-compact-it-grant-program
- Community Compact Municipal Fiber Grant: https://www.mass.gov/municipal-fiber-grant-program
- Gap Network Grant: https://broadband.masstech.org/gap-networks-grant-program
- Massachusetts Community Health & Healthy Aging Funds: https://mahealthfunds.org/
- AARP Foundation Grants: https://www.aarp.org/aarp-foundation/grants/
- Retrofit Ancillary Grantee (RANGE) Program: https://broadband.masstech.org/RANGE
- Launchpad Program: https://broadband.masstech.org/launchpad-program

5.3 Conclusion

The Town of East Longmeadow has completed a holistic analysis of its existing infrastructure regarding digital equity. East Longmeadow's focus is moving forward on establishing an affordable and accessible fiber internet network for the community. The town continues to engage with Whip City to bring fiber to the community with the hope of lowering costs and providing more responsive service. East Longmeadow has established a Municipal Light Plant (MLP), a locally owned and operated public utility authorized under state law (M.G.L. Chapter 164) to provide essential services like electricity—and more recently, high-speed internet—to residents and businesses. This will facilitate the implementation of the fiber and working with Whip City. Unlike private utilities, MLPs are governed by local officials and operate with a focus on community benefit rather than profit. To offer municipal broadband service, a town must establish an MLP through a two-step town council vote. Once established, the MLP can build and manage critical infrastructure like a fiber-optic network, enabling affordable, reliable internet service controlled by the community, not outside corporations. For towns like East Longmeadow, an MLP is the foundational legal and operational vehicle that makes town-wide fiber internet possible.

The town will build an EPON (Ethernet Passive Optical Network) to provide residents and businesses with internet access. It uses a single fiber optic line from our central hub that splits to serve multiple homes and businesses, like a tree with many branches. This setup is energy-efficient, highly reliable, and capable of delivering lightning-fast internet through light signals, ensuring every connected resident enjoys modern, high-speed connectivity with minimal infrastructure. The Town of East Longmeadow has partnered with Westfield Gas and Electric (Whip City Fiber). It should be noted that

---

[11] As of May 2025, the MBI Digital Equity Implementation Program is on pause.

pricing is currently anticipated to be in the $80 to $90 per month range for a standard 1 Gbps service. We intend to offer additional options for speed and pricing. Per the MBI survey, on average, respondents are spending $97 per month on their internet subscriptions.

The MLP's timeline is shown in Figure 10, and will connect homes in built-out fiber service areas (FSAs) that have signed up in 2027.
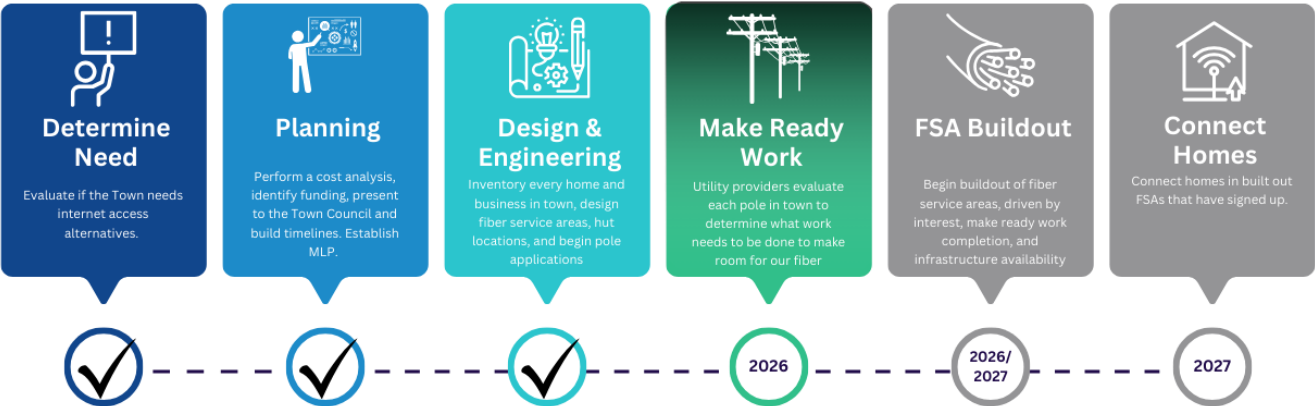

Figure 10. Municipal Light Plant's Timeline