

INTERNET ...
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According to the Broadband Planning and Primer Toolkit, a document referenced in Schmelzer’s letter, a 4 mbps increase in a county’s average internet speed increases average household income by \$2,100 a year, facilitates re-employment 25 percent faster, creates 80 new jobs for every 1,000 households put on broadband and increases the area’s gross

domestic product by 1 percent for every 10 percent increase in broadband access. She also theorizes that better internet infrastructure may help attract businesses when coupled with the county’s proximity to the I-5 corridor. At the Dec. 14 Administrative Workshop Meeting, Simon Hare claimed that upgrades to the county’s internet infrastructure are paramount because Josephine County has 10 times more small online businesses than the national average. The grant for which Schmelzer is pursuing

will be used to fund a feasibility study which will cost \$80,000. The study is set to be completed, should the state approve the grant, Aug. 1, 2018. Twenty thousand dollars of the total \$80,000 will be provided by the county. After the study is completed, it’s estimated that a solidified plan for the upgrade will be complete nine months thereafter. According to evidence provided by the Economic Development Strategic Plan, the primary reason that internet services in Josephine County have fallen behind is because

existing infrastructure is poor to non-existent. In summary, the private sector isn’t willing to invest vast amounts of resources building it up so the public sector must step in. Although the planning stage utilizes state and county dollars, Schmelzer said that the execution of the upgrades will necessitate federal funding because of their extreme cost. Schmelzer estimates that she’ll hear back from the state whether or not she has permission to go ahead with filing for grant money sometime in mid to late January.

GROCERY ...
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“The Junction Inn has been an embarrassing blight on our community for longer than anyone cares to recall,” IVCDO’s community development coordinator Kate Dwyer said, “It’s out of state owners have been unresponsive to community interests, and it sits like a carbuncle on the most central land parcel in the Valley, literally at the junction of the famed Redwood Highway and the Caves Highway.” At this time there’s no indication that the owners of the Junction Inn are willing to sell the rest of their land and business. Lisa Richardson, city clerk said that the new building will likely result in the removal of the city’s ceremonial Christmas tree but added that nothing is as of yet written in stone. Furthermore, she said that Grocery Outlet is willing to donate funds for the decoration of a new tree at a different location. Neighbors within 300 linear feet of the site have been notified in case they would like to voice their concerns.

ABSENT ...
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Last year there were 474 homeless students in the district. Homeless numbers broken down by school are not available, perhaps in part because this population tends to be quite mobile. Durant explained that all the high schools have a graduation coach who works very closely with homeless students. Every school in the district, including all three Illinois Valley schools, also have a family advocate who has a dedicated hour every day to work with homeless students and their families, connecting them with resources, checking on attendance, contacting parents to see what needs they have, and also talking with the teachers to see what assistance homeless students need in the classroom. “The district also partners with the Maslow Project, a nonprofit organization that helps homeless youth and their families in Josephine and Jackson counties,” said Durant. “They provide resources not available to us.” According to outreach worker McKenzie Maddigan of the Maslow Project, she is in the Illinois Valley public school system for an hour every day. At the high school, Maddigan meets directly with homeless students who are in high crisis; those who are living on their own rather than with families; those who need

help with food, clothing, hygiene items. She helps them connect with social services such as food stamps, healthcare and housing. In the case of students in the lower grades, Maddigan generally works with the family as a whole. “The lack of identification is a huge barrier for homeless students,” said Maddigan, “whether living with their families or not.” Our conversation with Durant and Alderson then moved on to student retention, i.e. keeping students in school through graduation. Unlike in days of yore, the Three Rivers School District has a policy of not holding back failing students. “Retention is one of least effective tools to help a child succeed,” said Alderson. “Statistically across the United States, it does not prove to be successful.” According to the spring 2000 newsletter of the National Dropout Prevention Center/ Network, “Dozens of studies have found that retaining students actually contributes to greater academic failure, higher levels of dropping out, and greater behavioral difficulties rather than leading to success in school.” Durant added: “A student who is retained has a higher than 70 percent chance of not graduating from high school. Instead, we try to work on students’ skills and bring them up to speed.” Durant explained that could mean tutoring after school or extra time during the day when students receive interventions.

In terms of after school academic enrichment, the Illinois Valley High School is currently benefiting from its fifth and last year of funding under the state’s 21st Century Community Learning Center. It is not clear if Three Rivers will be able to find other funding to continue a version of this program in following years. Last year, only 64 percent of Illinois Valley High School students earned the required credits to graduate. The high school’s dropout rate in the same year was 7.3 percent. Alderson explained that the dropout rate is not the inverse of the graduation rate, as one might suppose. There are students who attend all four years of high school, but do not earn enough credits to earn a high school diploma. Alderson said that graduation coaches are at all of the district’s high schools to monitor and assist freshmen and sophomores. “One of the key indicators for graduation is being on track, credit wise, after their freshman year. Alderson added that, of the students who actually drop out, some do so because they feel they are too far behind. Others drop out in order to go to work to provide for themselves or their families. “School, for them, comes second or third or fourth or fifth in the priority list, because they have to get their basic needs met, whether through housing, food or taking care of their families.”



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