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The cost of the project would be around \$1.4 million dollars.

"This represents about 40,000 feet of installation," Wright said.

To help cover the costs, Siuslaw School District would front Hyak that \$1.4 million amount out of the district's reserve of \$3.8 million. In return, the district would get a five-year deal with Hyak to give students free or reduced internet access.

"If you're in the free and reduced lunch program, you are eligible for 100 percent free internet," Wright said of the proposal. "If you do not have a student in that program, you're eligible for a 25 percent discount on any of the fiber internet that's in these particular areas."

Once the actual fiber is installed, Hyak would also be able to offer its service to homes in the area, regardless of whether or not they have children.

Hyak would also be waiving maintenance fees for the district, totaling an estimated \$900,000.

"While fiber is really expensive to construct, it is also a moderately expensive thing to maintain," Wright said. "That's one of the things we're effectively donating to the cause."

If Hyak began installing the fiber now, it could be ready for the next school year, starting in September.

"The school district is not going into the internet business. We're not going to be putting things in the ground," Rosinbaum said. "What we're doing is guaranteeing five years of connectivity for a number of students, however we choose to do it."

COVID and equity

There were two main justifications for the proposal between Hyak and Siuslaw School District, the first of which being the growing importance of online information.

"With so many teachers jumping in and getting on board with distance learning and using some of the technology that's been introduced the prior years, I think people realize that these classrooms are a great tool to be able to organize and have a ready database for parents and kids for resources — materials and lesson notes," Grzeskowiak said. "They can go to at any time, whether we're distance learning or we're back at the regular campus."

Students and teachers rely on email for communication, and studies have shown that access to online databases helps students succeed.

"If we're talking about the greatest equitable access, how we provide good, quality internet [is important]," Grzeskowiak said.

The other justification for the deal was to prepare for a "new normal" in the era of pandemic.

For Rosinbaum, "The question I had to ask myself, and what brought this about, is what does this look like next year, and a year after that. I don't know where everybody sits on the science of the virus. I personally don't think this is going anywhere anytime soon. Even if we had a vaccine last month, we would be looking at a year of manufacturing time before we could cover the United States. And that doesn't include the rest of the world."

But how the district could handle social distancing is unknown, as the school is already facing an

overcrowding problem.

"We've been asking our community for years, since I've been on the board, for a new high school," Rosinbaum said. "One of the major reasons we wanted a new high school is we're getting crowded."

One of the ways to overcome this is to have staggered schedules, with students coming into the school only part of the time, but also doing distance learning. While Rosinbaum expected some funding from the state, it wouldn't come until the state began to seriously look at reopening the schools.

The issue is complicated further with the job losses in the state. If the economic outlook worsens, families without employment could begin to cut internet services from their home to save money.

"Internet is going to be the first things people give up," Rosinbaum said. "They're going to feed themselves, keep the power on and make a house payment long before they're going to keep their internet connection."

However, to get the fiber internet to the students by next September, Hyak would have to begin working now.

"I really want to stress that if we're going to do this and have it ready for September, we're going to need to make a decision pretty soon," Rosinbaum said.

Concerns

District Business Manager Kari Blake questioned the financial prudence of dipping into the district's \$3.8 million reserve.

"I'd love to say we have lots of extra money, but I think the

beauty of having those reserves is times like these, when we can sustain while not knowing our future," she said.

Blake pointed out that the state was already predicting budget shortfalls.

More than 90 percent of the state's general fund comes from only two sources, personal and corporate income taxes. But with mass unemployment, taxes have slowed while unemployment benefits have gone up. The state's next revenue forecast, which is due in May, will give a more precise picture of the economic impacts of the shutdown.

"We don't know about funds coming from the state level," Blake said. "With a 3.8 million reserve, we can dip into that but then we're back to square one. \$1.4 million equals about 14 teachers for our district. Not knowing what's happening right now, I would feel a little uncomfortable putting that money out, knowing that later we may have to lay off teachers for that decision. ... For me, it seems premature to dip that much out of our funds without looking at all options."

Blake also questioned whether or not fiber was the only internet available.

"I get the internet here in town for a monthly service, so I don't understand what the infrastructure is necessarily for," she said. "Are you saying that's the only way we can get these kids on the internet?"

Wright replied that most places within the district do have numerous options for internet.

"It could be Charter, Centurylink, Oregon Fast Net, lots of

different ways to get the internet today," he said. "How the district deploys their funds could be used in numerous ways, and just simply subsidize them for that."

The difference, Wright explained, was that fiber optics themselves could be upgraded over time that can benefit multiple technologies.

"It's an enabler, I guess you can look at it like that," he said. "The technology is dramatically different and significantly more future proof. Some of the things you can do on fiber, you can't do on Centurylink."

During the discussion, Siuslaw School Board Member Paul Burns asked if the City of Florence would be willing to partner on the project.

Wright stated that Hyak has worked closely with the city, stating, "Frankly, we couldn't do half the stuff we do without them. It's been a pretty good experience so far."

But currently, the city would

not be financially able to help on the project.

There were also concerns as to whether or not going online would lead to students dropping out, as they migrate to more established online schools.

"My take is, Andy can't predict the future, and I sure can't. I'm open to the fact that I could be completely wrong," Rosinbaum said. "We are in a unique position. We are a school district with a lot of extra money and no red tape that stops us from doing something like this. So now we have to decide whether or not it's the right idea, or a good idea. And I don't have the right answers. I'm going to defer to the board's wisdom on that."

No final decision was made on the proposal by the board. The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, May 13.

For more information on Hyak and its services, visit hyak.co. Siuslaw School District is online at siuslaw.k12.or.us.

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properly with the COVID-19 virus. The FDA's new "Best Practices" guide covers different aspects of safeguarding employees and the public, covering everything from food temperature controls to prevent spoilage and foodborne illness, to proper sanitation and operational guidelines aimed at limiting the potential for viral spread.

Perhaps most importantly, all of these guidelines require workers to implement each step in assuring both the continuity of the American food industry as well as the health of the American people — and all of these present new challenges under the shadow of the Covid-19 virus.

Agricultural workers, who are frequently seasonally employed from Mexico during crop cycles, have now been prevented from entering the United States. This ban comes in the form of new restrictions enacted by the federal administration for workers seeking entrance to the U.S. This includes an executive order signed this past Monday by President Donald Trump immediately suspending all immigration for an indefinite period of time.

The result is a situation where there is a shortage of workers who are needed to pick crops that are currently ripe and those that will ripen over the next few weeks and months.

Unfortunately, millions of tons of food have been destroyed in the weeks since state-imposed shutdowns went into effect in many states.

Specifics of the announced, but as yet unavailable order, are unknown as the Department of Homeland Security continues to craft the order. The resulting uncertainty is putting farmers in a difficult predicament moving into the summer growing season.

In the March edition of Modern Farmer magazine, which has closely covered the developing agricultural dynamic, Don Nosowitz wrote about the potential problem finding workers to harvest this summer's crops.

"Mexico supplies the vast majority of H-2A workers to the United States. Those H-2A workers have applied for and been granted temporary agricultural work visas, enabling them to legally work on American farms on a temporary basis," Nosowitz wrote. "It's a fundamental part of the American agricultural system; roughly 250,000 H-2A visas were granted in 2018, and the number of those visas has increased every year for over a decade."

Nosowitz added that the Agriculture Workforce Coalition, which includes several large agricultural organizations like the National Farmers Union and the U.S. Apple Association, wrote Secretary of State Mike Pompeo this past week urging the State Department to recognize H-2A workers as "essential" to ensure the American food supply.

An additional area of concern when discussing the evolving food paradigm is the central role

processing plants play in the food chain.

A warning was issued last weekend from one of the major players in the food processing sector and the employer of thousands of workers that are now in danger of infection.

"The food supply chain is breaking," Tyson Foods Board Chairman John Tyson wrote in a full-page advertisement published in the New York Times last Sunday. "There will be limited supply of our products available in grocery stores until we are able to reopen our facilities that are currently closed."

In addition to meat shortages, Tyson pointed out that soon there will be a serious food waste issue. Farmers across the nation simply will not have anywhere to sell their livestock and poultry to be processed.

At Restobar, Hargens has already run into shortages of food items that he would normally use while preparing his menu. Due to the shift in focus to retail distribution, he is unable to obtain some ingredients.

"I received a call from one of my food suppliers saying that we would not be receiving some of the items we ordered because so many restaurants have closed

that they have had to deliver more food to their retail customers [grocery stores] than before," he said.

Millions of animals will be depopulated and destroyed because of the closure of processing facilities. That vast nutritional resource will be wasted at a time when food banks across the country are supporting record numbers of Americans.

The Tyson Company is the world's second largest processor and marketer of chicken, beef and pork, and has had to close facilities due to plant contamination and lack of healthy workers.

Tyson went on to say his company has a responsibility to feed the nation and the world. Government bodies at the national, state, county and city levels must unite in a comprehensive, thoughtful and productive way.

"To allow our team members to work in safety without fear, panic or worry, the private and public sectors must come together. As a country, this is our time to show the world what we can do when working together," Tyson wrote.

The owners of the Little Brown Hen Café, 435 Highway 101, Stacy and Mike Wilson, said "We are reopening for to-go or-

ders on Friday (May 1). We will have a smaller menu, but we have many options," she said. "We will be baking daily our customer favorites, and we will be adding some new items that will be easy to transport."

The café's hours starting Friday will be 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Printed to-go menus will be ready to hand out to customers.

"We love our customers, and we are grateful to be back at work," the Wilsons said.

They encouraged people to call ahead for take-out orders and thanked them for their support.

For an up to date listing of the restaurants open, see florencechamber.com.



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