

Norfolk Attracts Telecommunications Provider, Plans Carrier Hotel and Data Center

Business and City Leaders Lead Effort

Business and city leaders in Norfolk wanted to expand options for fiber broadband service for businesses and residences.

Community leaders including Mike Flood, owner of News Channel Nebraska and former speaker of the Legislature, and Mayor Josh Moenning contacted Allo about providing service in Norfolk.

“When we look at a community we look at a lot of different demographics. We look at the density of the community, the cost to build, the access to resources,” said Dwight “Doc” Wininger, director of external relations for Allo. Those factors in addition to strong community leadership convinced Allo to come to Norfolk.

Building Relationships

Building a relationship with Allo was also a key to the project’s success.

“First you have to establish those relationships and open up that door for growth,” said Andy Colvin, city administrator and economic development director for the City of Norfolk. “And that is really all we did for Allo. And I am glad to see that they are under construction and I am really happy that we are going to have another broadband option for our businesses and citizens

to choose from.”

With the support of the mayor and the business community, the city worked with Allo to streamline the permitting and franchise process.

Construction of the aerial fiber network is expected to be completed by the end of 2020.

Carrier Hotel, Data Center Planned to Improve Capacity & Redundancy

To address the need for high capacity, high redundancy business class broadband to attract tech companies, Norfolk is also planning to build a carrier hotel and regional data center. With broadband providers using only two paths in and out of Norfolk for backhaul, the region needed additional carriers and fiber paths to improve redundancy.

“We didn’t have high speed, lots of capacity bandwidth and high redundancy bandwidth,” said Dan Spray, president of PrecisionIT in Norfolk. “The best way to do that is to get all of the carriers to come together into town and the best way to do that is to look at putting in a carrier hotel so that it entices those carriers to come into town.”

The carrier hotel and data center project is part of the Growing Together Northeast Nebraska’s multi-faceted development project designed to

attract and retain young people to Norfolk and Northeast Nebraska. The initiative is led by the Aksarben Foundation.

Norfolk Nebraska

Model: Local leaders attract telecommunications provider and plan carrier hotel and data center to improve broadband capacity and redundancy

Champions & Key Supporters: Business community, city leaders and Growing Together Northeast Nebraska

Funding: No public funds were used to support Allo’s broadband buildout.

A variety of funding sources will likely be used to finance the carrier hotel and data center.

Key Takeaways

Strong community leadership and support along with good demographics, density and cost to build made Norfolk attractive.

Norfolk is planning a carrier hotel and regional data center to improve broadband redundancy and capacity to attract tech businesses.

Interview Date: May 2020

Through the Growing Together initiative, the community has an option on the land and is working on getting commitments from carriers before beginning construction.

The initial response from carriers has been positive. “We’ve had really, really good responses from the carriers,” said Spray. “They seem to be very interested in that concept.”

The community also plans to couple the carrier hotel with a regional data center to make the carrier hotel more attractive to carriers. Local businesses will be able to house their servers in the data center and replicate to other regional data centers or a large data center instead of housing their servers in Chicago or Omaha, explained Spray.



The Growing Together Norfolk IT Effort Summit held on March 5, 2020 attracted a large crowd. Photo Courtesy of Growing Together Northeast Nebraska

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Carrier Hotel and More Broadband Terms

Most community broadband projects focus on last mile connections—connections to the customer. Norfolk is also focusing on improving middle mile connectivity and redundancy. The following definitions may be helpful:

Middle Mile – Network connection between the last mile (the local network connecting the customer) and the greater internet.

Last Mile – The local network connecting the customer.

Backhaul – A high-capacity network segment between a remote site or network to a central or core site where it connects to the Internet.

Carrier Hotel or Colocation Center – A building where telecommunications providers can rent cabinet, equipment, space, internet and bandwidth.

Data Center – A large group of networked computer servers for the remote storage, processing, or distribution of large amounts of data.