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**CITY TO HOST OPEN HOUSE ON CITYWIDE FIBER OPTIC FEASIBILITY**

**NORTHFIELD, MINN.** (October 23, 2008) – The City of Northfield, assisted by a grant from the Blandin Foundation, is funding a Fiber Optic Feasibility Study to guide the city on how to appropriately build a robust information highway for future generations. Members of the public are invited to an open house to meet the consultants who will carry out the feasibility study and learn more about what fiber optic technology can do and how it can be financed. The event will take place from 7 to 9 p.m. on Thursday, November 6, in the City Hall Council Chambers.

Over the past three years, nearly 3 million U.S. households have been connected directly to the Internet via end-to-end, fiber-optic cable. The data capacity and speed of fiber optics are enormous: a single bundle of fiber optics not much thicker than a pencil could carry all of the world’s current communications traffic. The study that the city is funding will offer insight on the feasibility of installing a technology-neutral fiber optic network providing a wide range of speeds including 50 megabits-per-second or more to every home and business in Northfield. In comparison, a recent study from the Communications Workers of America suggests that the U.S. as a whole is falling behind other countries in its Internet speed; currently, the median download speed in the U.S. is just under 2 megabits-per-second.

Melissa Reeder, IT director for the City of Northfield, said, “As a small community, we should not wait passively for private companies to invite us to the party. Fiber networks are the new essential utility. They are as vital to economic growth as good roads and reliable power. We have an obligation to provide the next generation with the proper tools and infrastructure to stay globally competitive. Fiber optics plays a key role in giving Northfield a sustainable future in our ever-more connected world and will allow the community to participate directly in the global economy.”

The November 6 open house will provide an informative, interactive opportunity for residents to learn more about fiber optics; what the technology can do for an individual, family, business or community; alternative methods of financing the infrastructure; and ownership and service provider scenarios.

Minnesota cities that are currently deploying fiber optics through a variety of ownership scenarios and/or relationships between municipalities and private telecommunications companies include Monticello, St. Charles, Wabasha, Grand Rapids, Bemidji and Windom.

Reeder noted, "The opportunity for Northfield to enhance the fiber optic infrastructure means people who live here will have access to the Internet at speeds unimaginable. The demand is growing for digital TV, 3D gaming and the capability to work from home. Fiber is the only technology that will reliably deliver large amounts of data at a low enough cost to meet these and other demands in future decades."

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