

News Brief
June 14, 2021



STATE OF OHIO MAKING MOVES TOWARDS SHUTTING DOWN FAIRLAWNGIG

Ohio State Senate Budget Legislation Forbids Funding Municipal Broadband and Seeks to Ban Municipal Broadband Altogether

Ohio House Bill 110, the statewide budget bill, is scheduled to be voted on in the coming days and no later than June 30, after being approved in the State Senate. It contains provisions to eliminate municipal broadband, including already established entities like FairlawnGig. Fairlawn, Ohio is imploring its citizens as well as residents across the State to contact their State Senators and House Representatives to demand that language banning municipal broadband, an item completely unrelated to the state budget, be removed from House Bill 110. In Fairlawn, this includes:

Representative Bill Roemer

rep38@ohiohouse.gov

614-644-5085

Senator Kristina Roegner

roegner@ohiosenate.gov

614-466-4823

In 2014, Fairlawn Mayor William Roth returned from a European business recruitment trip where he received “wish lists” from European businesses looking to establish or possibly move American operations. At the top of the list was robust, 21st century network that would support ever evolving and increasing needs for broadband. Businesses were asking for multiple gigabytes of speed and service while Fairlawn’s incumbent internet service providers (ISPs) were only providing services in the 10 Mbps range, a fraction of what the companies Mayor Roth was trying to attract said they needed. The mayor had also heard from residents who wanted a viable alternative to their existing slow and expensive service.

Charged with growing Fairlawn’s economy and attracting businesses, the Mayor and City Council summoned ISPs to a series of meetings where the Mayor’s request for infrastructure and speed improvements were rebuffed.

“They didn’t understand why I wanted better service,” explains Roth. “Their position was that no one is complaining about the (current) service, why would they need to spend more to upgrade their

networks? Large ISPs who weren't in Fairlawn were telling me what Fairlawn wanted and needed. And they told us that we didn't need what prospective businesses were telling me we did need to get them to consider moving to Fairlawn. So, we went it alone, and built a network, now FairlawnGig. We would pay for it from our general revenues, without raising taxes."

City Council unanimously approved the investment and established what it called a "municipal broadband utility," FairlawnGig, as a forward-thinking, economic development strategy founded on the belief that business growth, innovation, and community transformation will follow with every connection. By June 2017, FairlawnGig reached every home in the City of Fairlawn as well as areas of Akron and Bath in Fairlawn's joint economic district.

Today, FairlawnGig delivers blazing fast Internet access – incredible performance, unmatched reliability, and exceptional value. Gigabit Internet access is delivered to businesses and residences over FairlawnGig's 100% fiber network. There are no equipment fees and no long-term contracts. And while the pandemic has increased demand and led traditional ISPs to employ data caps and overage surcharges for heavy users, FairlawnGig has never raised its prices or limited data use, and more importantly, never will.

While traditional ISPs and government entities continue the debate on what "broadband" is in terms of download speeds (10, 25, or 100 Mbps), FairlawnGig's lowest offering delivers 300 Mbps symmetrical speeds (both download and upload) at an affordable \$55/month.

Four years since launch, FairlawnGig is now delivering service to 61% of Fairlawn homes and businesses, proving that even an offering that didn't include video/TV service was needed and wanted in Fairlawn. This, of course, was accomplished despite the misguided opinions of the incumbent ISPs that better service wasn't needed because "no one is complaining." In our latest survey, 95% of respondents rated FairlawnGig's service as "very good to excellent."

"In 2014, we had ISPs who didn't know Fairlawn, its residents or businesses tell us what our people needed or wanted," says Ernie Staten Director of Public Service for Fairlawn. "Now, post-pandemic when FairlawnGig has been demonstrated to be more important than ever, when our businesses and residents are demanding service levels they didn't know they needed prior, our Ohio legislatures want to tell the people of Fairlawn who can and can't bring them Internet service? We know we're doing a great job as our customer satisfaction scores are through the roof at 96% and we're getting new

customers every day. Why are legislators in Columbus telling us, or any community for that matter, we cannot fill in gaps that the private sector refuses to fill itself?"

Ohio House Bill 110, which is the House's chance to weigh in on the statewide budget, will come to a vote in the coming days and no later than June 30.

"We're asking our residents, and residents across the State to get in touch with their State Senators and House Representatives to tell them to strip out the language banning municipal broadband service as well as directing Federal Rescue Act funding to broadband initiatives. Tell them to preserve FairlawnGig today and protect your own chance for better broadband tomorrow, no matter where you live. The language was introduced into the Ohio Senate's version of the budget bill with no opportunity for public comment. Let's take that opportunity now with our state elected officials," says Staten.

The pandemic showed communities everywhere, including some slow-to-adopt Fairlawn citizens, the importance of robust internet connections to work, educate, and live our lives, but the benefits of FairlawnGig were apparent to Fairlawn long before anyone had heard of COVID-19.

While FairlawnGig has lowered the average cost of internet service for residents from \$4.23 per Mbps to 7.5 cents per Mbps monthly, the real story of FairlawnGig is about economic development. FairlawnGig is attracting businesses, at least twenty to-date, and has created well over 250 (reported) jobs. Home resale values in Fairlawn have risen at least 7% every year of service and the investment in FairlawnGig has made the city run more efficiently while improving public safety. FairlawnGig has more than paid back its investment with a profitable network that has also increased Fairlawn's tax base and saved the city operational dollars.

Employing more than fifty, Tufin is one such company that located to Fairlawn because of FairlawnGig. "FairlawnGig's technology and accompanying customer support is what keeps us in Fairlawn," says Raj Motwane, Tufin's Vice President, Global Services & Support. "We're incredibly happy not only with the world-class infrastructure we receive in Fairlawn for our operations, but also for the partner we've found in the FairlawnGig technical staff, dedicated to providing us with the custom solutions for our business."

Tim Winter, the VP & Regional Manager at the Hilton Akron/Fairlawn explains just how important FairlawnGig has been to their business, "Before FairlawnGig came along we'd actually lost guests

because of our poor Internet connectivity. Since FairlawnGig was installed, we now keep happy guests staying and coming back. Additionally, we are making plans to buy and install Smart TVs for our guests as the incredible connection speeds FairlawnGig delivers enables us to have each and every guest streaming television content in their rooms. We're able to promote our Internet service as the fastest in the area and attract corporate and international clients who need the robust service FairlawnGig provides."

"At a time, post-pandemic, when cities like Fairlawn, Dublin, Westerville, and Hudson should be taking a victory lap for successfully supporting our citizens and businesses," says Staten, "our State Legislators have decided to declare war on municipal broadband. We're providing far better service and support than the private sector and incumbent ISPs are willing to do. Ask your state representatives to remove this language outlawing better broadband from House Bill 110!"

For More Information:

Ernie Staten
FairlawnGig/City of Fairlawn
330.668.9550
StatenE@fairlawn.us

OR
Doug Adams on behalf of Fairlawn
The Think Agency
720.412.7876
doug@thethinkagency.com