The St. Lucie Critical Facilities Fiber Network is a public-private partnership of the St. Lucie County Dept. of Public Safety, Fire District and Sherriff’s Dept., Indian River State (Community) College and Home Town Cable designed to address a community need for an underground fiber ring connecting community anchor institutions and public safety agencies to the Internet and each other that will reliably remain in operation during hurricanes and other disasters. The plan was designed with the Economic Development Council and the Mayor of Port St. Lucie to maximize job creation, economic development, and access to broadband in the County’s sixteen underserved census tracts and beyond. The public partners are contributing access to 22 towers for wireless ISPs to offer competing services, and the Project would offer open access for competitive broadband service providers to interconnect and obtain backhaul as an alternative to AT&T’s overpriced services. Public safety needs an underground fiber ring but no one can build it for free. Wireless competitors need more towers which the public safety agencies have, so the public safety agencies are contributing access to their towers to enable wireless and in turn this makes it viable for HTC to contribute the matching funds to build the underground fiber ring to benefit public safety. The Project delivers all of the CCI priority criteria: (1) Deploys middle-mile broadband infrastructure with a commitment to offer new service to 130 community anchor institution locations; (2) The Project is a public-private partnership between a local for-profit provider, a community college, and County public safety agencies that have a critical, life-saving need for the improved reliability of the Project's broadband infrastructure; (3) The Project will bolster growth in the 'economically distressed area' of St. Lucie County, with 14.9% unemployment rate and a foreclosure rate 5 times the national average; (4) The Project will deploy middle-mile broadband infrastructure with a commitment to serve the local Community College, whose support letter demonstrates a demand and need for the direct broadband connectivity to the Florida LambdaRail broadband educational high-speed research network and new broadband interconnection between its three area campuses that would be delivered by the Project; (5) The Project will deploy middle-mile infrastructure to all public safety entities in the area, all of which have endorsed this Application because it would assure reliable interagency communication and broadband access during future storms; (6) The Project spans all 16 census tracts within the County that the FCC has identified as underserved. HTC has committed to the open access to the middle mile network, and has received letters of intent from two last-mile providers, one of which projects to add 12,000 customers within five years using the Project; (7) The Partners are contributing over 30% of the total eligible Project costs. A) Opportunity the proposal seeks to address: Community leaders have sought to promote the construction of underground fiber to the premises (FTTP) facilities to deliver next-gen broadband
services. Unlike the aerial wires used by the area's other wireline and wireless broadband providers, underground facilities have been proven to be the only reliable option to withstand hurricanes. The incumbents failed to commit to this objective, so at the City's urging, local investors founded HTC. Congress passed legislation making non-rural areas in St. Lucie County eligible for RUS Broadband loans for last mile underground FTTP construction. HTC then obtained RUS funding to build a last mile FTTP network that serves 7 communities with the area's fastest residential broadband speeds. However, most of the County remains served only by slower above-ground facilities. As HTC learned in launching its last mile network, competitive providers lack affordably-priced middle mile alternatives needed to compete. The lack of competition has contributed to several portions of the County having broadband adoption rates under 40%. This Project delivers that competitive middle mile alternative, and supports lower prices, more reliable and faster broadband service to more than a quarter of a million people. The Project would also provide affordable Internet connectivity to a middle mile project being developed by the Florida Heartland Rural Economic Development Initiative to serve a predominantly underserved adjacent 6-county area with 250,000 people. Another key element of the Project is to deliver local access to emergency and government agencies and anchor institutions that they can use to connect to any ISP and to each other. This access will save these institutions millions of dollars. Local, state and the federal governments will save more than $2.5 million on schools' broadband served by the Project. The Mayor filed her strong support for this Application, stating: 'it is no understatement that lives could be saved' by this Project. St. Lucie is in one of the most hurricane-prone areas of the nation, and has been struck by 3 major hurricanes in the past 5 years. In these storms, our first responders, the EOC (911 service), fire stations, rescue and relief centers, and hospitals lost access to their broadband services, and the incumbents' systems went out of service for as long as one month. HTC's underground system remained fully operational. HTC made its network available to emergency personnel and to residents at temporary access locations. HTC was commended by the Mayor for its outstanding performance and public service, and that experience led the Fire District, the Department of Public Safety and the Sheriff's office to partner with HTC on this Application. The Project also will produce significant benefits to education and health care services by creating an interconnected network for schools to share information on educational projects and by connecting universities, schools, libraries and the Torrey Pines Institute for Molecular Studies (TPIMS) to the National LambdaRail Internet2 network that enables educators to collaborate with colleagues worldwide. TPIMS, an existing HTC customer, is a renowned '501(c)(3) biomedical research center, and its connection to LambdaRail, which has provided a support letter, would benefit public health. B) Description of service areas: St. Lucie County has a 14.9% unemployment rate and 5 times the national foreclosure average. It is designated as a federal 'Recovery Zone' under '1401 of the Recovery Act and includes a state-designated Enterprise Zone. C) Households and businesses passed: The fiber routes would directly pass approximately 1800 commercial businesses and 25,000 residences, and are strategically positioned to support broadband to all of the estimated 265,000 residents and 14,000 businesses in St. Lucie County. The Project will directly pass or be within one mile of 30 commercial communication towers in addition to the 22 towers contributed by the Partners, and it will pass within approximately one mile of more than a majority of the County's households and businesses. D) Number of anchor institutions passed: The Project will directly connect 130 community anchor locations including all local police, fire, EOC stations, schools and hospitals, and will extend to a new interconnection point for access to the Martin County municipal network
connecting additional schools, libraries, hospitals, police, fire, EMS and County offices. E) Proposed services: The Project will provide broadband speeds of up to 10 gbps. F) Approach to non-discrimination and interconnection: The Project will comply with and exceed the non-discrimination and interconnection obligations by offering interconnection on reasonable and nondiscriminatory terms and thereby facilitate a multiple service provider environment in which consumers can choose from more than one provider. Our customers will determine how to manage their services. G) Type of broadband system: An underground fiber ring with a diverse, redundant path to ensure reliability. H) Qualifications of the applicant: HTC currently operates one of the most advanced broadband networks in the country. HTC's management team has a combined 200 years experience in broadband, cable and telecom. HTC's founders have been major figures in the industry as the founders of the SciFi Channel. HTC possesses the network infrastructure to operate the Project. I) Overall infrastructure cost of the broadband system:$40,995,185 J) Overall expected subscriber projections for the project: 1693 Hi-Capacity Broadband Users, Networks, and Community Anchor Institution Locations, and other direct customers within 5 years (does not include new end users of last-mile ISPs using Project). This does K) The number of jobs years created or saved by this project: 937.