Winter Garden, initially settled in the 1850s, began to grow significantly after the arrival of the railroad in the 1880s. Early settlement consisted of scattered farms and homesteads along the south shore of Lake Apopka. The local economy depended largely on citrus and vegetable production. By the turn of the century a small commercial district had emerged along Plant Street and residential neighborhoods began to appear. Fondly referred to as a modern-day Mayberry USA by residents, Winter Garden is a Florida destination - only without pretense. Stroll down Plant Street in the Historic Downtown District and witness the renaissance of a vibrant community. Art studios and live theatre, bicycle stores and flower shops, and a wide range of restaurants flank the West Orange Trail. Ranked as one of the fastest growing suburbs by Forbes.com, Winter Garden is much more than just another bedroom community. It is a place for growing families and businesses. The City of Winter Garden is committed to the economic development of both the City and its surrounding communities. The City Council, City Manager and City Department Heads stand ready to assist the business community, encouraging vision and cooperating in both short- and long-range planning and decision-making. Over the past decade, it has become clear that a modern and robust telecommunications infrastructure is essential to providing critical community services. Currently, the city relies heavily on incumbent service providers to provide leased lines for remote connectivity, often times at a very high cost for the performance received. It has become apparent that in order to flourish, the City of Winter Garden will need to invest in building their own fiber-optic infrastructure to service their municipal facilities with substantially upgraded connectivity. Currently, the City of Winter Garden owns and operates approximately one (1) mile of fiber interconnecting their City Hall facility with the Police Department and Public Works Facility, providing up to 10G service between its locations. The proposed middle mile build out will connect virtually all city facilities via a redundant fiber optic infrastructure providing fast and reliable service to support the city’s critical operations. Additionally, the Winter Garden Critical Community Network will greatly enhance the Winter Garden community's access to high-speed broadband services. Proposed coverage areas will bring new services to the surrounding area, some of which are underserved or unserved. Network interconnects and collocation facilities will be placed in un-served areas allowing the network to bring affordable broadband telecommunications to the city's facilities, schools, community support organizations, public safety entities, and eventually the city's business community. Several areas that are designated as unserved or underserved within the proposed network's service area are contained within the boundaries of the Winter Garden Critical Community Network. As a result, many businesses in the area have expressed a keen interest in attracting more choice of telecommunications providers to the area and have submitted letters of support for the City of Winter Garden’s grant application. This
middle-mile project will put in place the necessary infrastructure to provide direct connectivity to last-mile service providers in the area and a footprint of high-speed services to reach a substantial portion of the market. The Winter Garden Critical Community Network is committed to serving its markets with a true open-access network to bolster the deployment of broadband services in and around Winter Garden. Services will be made available to third-party service providers in the area looking to deploy new and enhanced services to businesses, residents, community anchor institutions and others. The City of Winter Garden City Council has approved and will provide a 20% cash match as well as an in-kind match of 4.33% (from private partners and the City of Winter Garden) of the total project cost needed to build the middle mile fiber and wireless infrastructure. The City of Winter Garden has garnered support from the local community in the form of partnership letters from Orange County Schools, Magellan Advisors LLC, and Reel Telecommunication Services LLC to ensure the success of this project. The participation of these key organizations in each of their capacities, will contribute to the development of the Winter Garden Critical Community Network in effort to promote accelerated deployment of broadband in effort to serve the local community, promote economic development and have a positive impact on job creation.