The City of Bartow began as Fort Blount in 1851 as a refuge from the Seminole Indians. In 1861, the first Board of Polk County Commissioners was organized. During the early months of 1867, with full approval of the settlers, the County Commissioners made the decision that the seat of government for Polk County would be known as Bartow, named in honor of the first confederate general to fall in the Civil War. With a population of slightly more than 17,000 Bartow remains the county seat of one of Florida's geographically largest counties. Polk County has more than 584,000 residents, and thousands of government and private business employees drive to work to Bartow on a daily basis. The City of Bartow, also known as the city of Oaks and Azaleas, covers fifty-one (51) plus square miles, and is located forty (40) miles east of Tampa and sixty (60) miles southwest of Orlando. Five (5) elected Commissioners and an appointed City Manager govern the City. Bartow's community also includes five (5) main shopping areas, forty-nine (49) churches, a Public and a Historical Library/Museum, three (3) Recreation Centers, seventeen (17) Parks, one (1) private, nonprofit, fully-accredited hospital and adjoining Medical Center, various restaurants that include sports bars, cafes, and sandwich shops, Bartow Airbase and City Golf Course just to name a few. The City of Bartow 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. Out of this mindset was born the Bartow Critical Community Network. Over the past decade, it has become clear that a modern and robust telecommunications infrastructure is essential to providing critical community services. In the past, the City relied heavily on incumbent service providers to provide leased lines for remote connectivity at often times very high costs for the performance received. Gradually, the City of Bartow began to invest in building their own fiber-optic infrastructure to service their municipal facilities with substantially upgraded connectivity. Currently, the City of Bartow operates nearly fifty (50) miles of fiber-optic infrastructure, largely servicing public sector entities (City, County, and School District) in downtown Bartow with a ring extending northwest to service the Airbase and future Clear Springs D.R.I. and a nine (9) mile lateral extending south to service the City of Fort Meade, FL. Although the City already owns and operates a substantial amount of fiber-optic infrastructure, there are two critical needs for additional fiber connectivity within the City and community anchors served by the network. First, upgraded connectivity to all locations, with Gigabit connections to every facility will provide improved service and new high bandwidth applications, required by community anchors in Polk County, including schools, municipal location and other anchor institutions. Second, redundancy is a critical need in the network as there are many locations that have no redundancy within the existing fiber network.
Furthermore, the City needs to incorporate into the fiber-optic infrastructure WiMax and WiFi components that will support police, fire and other municipal applications. This proposed middle-mile build out of the Bartow Critical Community Network will greatly enhance the Greater Bartow community's access to high-speed broadband services. Proposed coverage areas will bring new services to the surrounding area, many of which are underserved or unserved. A key unserved market through which the network passes is Mulberry. The network will bring broadband telecommunications to the city's high school, middle school, elementary schools, city hall, and library. In addition, a collocation facility will be place at Mulberry High School to provide a critical interconnection point to service the unserved area. A second ring will extend north to the City of Winter Haven and through the City of Eagle Lake. This will service various schools and municipal facilities while providing a much needed interconnection point at the T3 Communications collocation facility in downtown Winter Haven. Several communities that are designated as unserved or underserved within the proposed network's service area surround the Bartow 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 Bartow'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 Bartow 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 Bartow. 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 Bartow City Council has approved and will provide a 20% cash match as well as an in-kind match of 2.37% (from private partners and the City of Bartow) of the total project cost needed to build the middle mile fiber and wireless infrastructure. The City of Bartow has garnered support from the local community in the form of partnership letters from Polk County Schools, Polk State College, City of Winter Have, the Library Cooperative, 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 Bartow 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.