

## **Chambersburg looks at adding Internet service to power lines**

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July 28 – The idea of providing broadband Internet service through electric power lines is an idea whose time has come, and Chambersburg is thinking about jumping on the “broadband over power lines” bandwagon.

Borough Council voted this week to do a feasibility study to find out what it would take to add broadband capability (BPL) to its power lines, at what cost.

Broadband Internet service is already available over telephone lines, but Borough Manager Eric Oyer said the same service could now be offered over electric lines, and he suggested council have the study done to determine if it would be worthwhile for the borough to invest in the equipment necessary to adapt the borough’s lines to the technology.

Oyer and Borough Solicitor Tom Finucane said the borough would not provide the Internet service itself, but would act as a “landlord” for the lines over which the service would move.

In addition to a fast Internet service, the broadband capability on its power lines could accommodate alarm and surveillance services and be used for core applications by the borough such as automatic meter reading, outage notification and energy management.

The borough would need to install adapters on its lines to separate the broadband current from normal household current, and users would use special modems similar to those used for cable Internet service to connect.

As a landlord, the borough would provide the power lines and conversion equipment for those lines and maintain that line equipment. A private Internet service provider would provide the service and collect the monthly usage fee.

The arrangement would be much like the current cable franchise agreement the borough has with Comcast.

Oyer told council that in recent years electric utilities have experimented with the prospect of offering broadband communications over their existing powerline infrastructure.

“Today technology has developed to the point where they are seeing promising results from the field trials of BPL,” he said.

Council voted unanimously to award a contract to Shpigler Group, a consulting firm based in New York.

The study will determine what equipment would be needed to add BPL capability to the borough’s existing power lines and look at regulatory issues connected with the service.

Electric Superintendent Richard Hamsher said BPL would allow digital Internet signals to be put on the power line at some point in the local electric grid, and then taken off at another point using either a wireless connection or a special modem.

Internet users subscribing to the service could conceivably access the Internet from any electrical outlet where the BPL line runs, at a speed of about 10 times faster than basic dial-up service over a telephone line, he said.

Although the technology is a relative newcomer to the Internet service field in the U.S., at least three communities – Cincinnati, Ohio, Allentown, Pa. and Manassas, Va. – are already testing the concept, according to Cnet News.com.

“It’s not a pie in the sky concept,” Hamsher told council

Shpigler Group will begin the study tomorrow and it should be completed within three weeks.