



**Contact:** Don Reeder, Public Affairs Manager, (651) 215-4031, [dreeder@lmc.org](mailto:dreeder@lmc.org)

## North Branch honored by the League of Minnesota Cities for COVID-19 Response

**(Aug. 24, 2021 – St. Paul, MN)** The city of North Branch is the winner of the 2021 City of Excellence Award in this year's COVID-19 Response topical category for their work bringing high-speed internet service to the community.

The City of Excellence Awards are given each year by the League of Minnesota Cities in three population categories and one topical category. The awards recognize cities for outstanding programs or projects. Each winning city will receive a plaque, a check for \$1,000, and recognition in League publications and promotional activities throughout the coming year.

Prior to the pandemic, North Branch's city center had fast and reliable access to several high-speed fiber internet providers. However, 70 percent of North Branch's geography outside that core lacked basic cell service and were reliant on dial-up. It became clear when COVID-19 hit that high-speed internet access was a critical need of all residents for work, telemedicine, and distance learning.

As part of their COVID-19 response, the council and staff configured a public-private partnership that would quickly and efficiently establish high-speed internet service for all residents. A draft plan that had been developed three years prior was quickly updated for today's technology and infrastructure — for almost half the cost of the previous plan. Construction took three months and was completed in May. A Minnesota company will operate and maintain the network under an equipment lease agreement with the city.

The results provide broadband coverage with speeds up to 100 mbps/20mbps (megabits per second) to 36 square miles. The service offers additional coverage to areas adjacent to the city boundaries, providing a regional benefit. While the project addresses an immediate need, the infrastructure and service will provide a long-term benefit to the community.

The 2021 League awards were judged by panels of city officials including representatives from League boards and committees. More League award winners for City of Excellence, elected and appointed officials, as well as the Sustainable City award will be announced at city council meeting presentations throughout August, September, and October.

### **About the League**

The League of Minnesota Cities is a membership association dedicated to promoting excellence in local government. The League, governed by a Board of Directors consisting of local elected and appointed city officials, serves its more than 800 member cities through advocacy, education and training, policy development, risk management, and other services.