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# Advance for Phila. wireless network

By Miriam Hill

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The wireless network that is expected to blanket Philadelphia by the end of next year is another step closer to completion.

The city and Wireless Philadelphia, the nonprofit group set up to make wireless-fidelity service, or Wi-Fi, available to lower-income residents, have approved the network's 15-square-mile test area built by Atlanta's EarthLink Inc. That means the city and Wireless Philadelphia believe the system works well enough to proceed with building the rest of it.

EarthLink said it did not know which outside company had been chosen by the city to test the system, and city officials did not return calls seeking comment, even though the project is one of Mayor Street's major initiatives.

The test area stretches from North Philadelphia south to the edge of Chinatown and from the Delaware River to parts of Strawberry Mansion and Hunting Park.

EarthLink is marketing its services at special introductory rates within the test area. Consumers who sign up for EarthLink Wi-Fi will enjoy download and upload speeds up to one megabit per second at a promotional rate of \$6.95 a month for the first six months. The cost rises to \$19.95 a month after the introductory period.

The company also is offering three-megabit download speed and one-megabit upload speed for \$9.95 a month for the first six months, with a recurring rate of \$21.95 a month thereafter.

Customers may need to buy extra computer equipment to use the service, and an early termination fee could apply to some subscribers, EarthLink said.

"We expect to have about 5,000 customers paying by July and 12,000 by the end of the year," EarthLink Municipal Networks president Don Berryman said.

The entire project is expected to be completed in the third quarter of 2007. It will blanket all of Philadelphia's 135 square miles.

Municipal wireless networks were all the rage a few years ago, when Philadelphia and other cities began discussing them as a way to bring Internet service to the masses at relatively low cost. In recent months, however, news articles have raised questions about how well the networks will work and how well they will compete with costlier but faster services.

Glenn Fleishman, editor of the Wi-Fi Networking News site, said it would be years before such questions were answered.


"There's always this cycle of hype and disillusion," Fleishman said. "I think this technology may have a longer term of adoption than people thought."

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