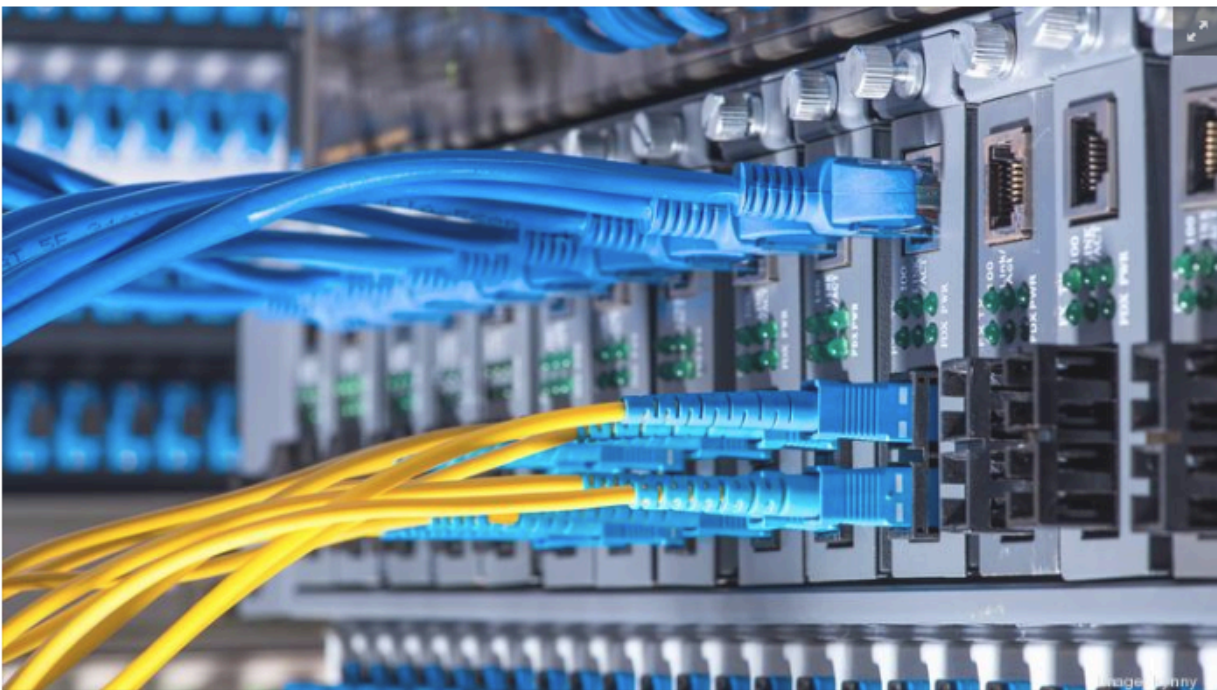


How the nation's first Connected City found its home in Pasco County



Fiber Optic cables and UTP Network cables connected hub ports.

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By [Lauren Coffey](#) – Reporter, Tampa Bay Business Journal
4 hours ago

Pasco County's Connected City started ironically enough with reluctance when a consultant told [Greg Singleton](#) he needed a broadband plan for his Epperson Ranch community.

“And I was like, ‘Why do we need a technology plan?’”

Three months later, he said he was “drinking the Kool-Aid” and started realizing that gig-speed is necessary for all the things his team was doing as the consultant started talking to him about internet of things and telehealth bandwidth needs.

“It basically was growing an infrastructure from the internet up,” he said.

Singleton, who is the president at Metro Development Group (see a profile on Page 16), was soon all-in on the idea. The Connected City refers to a connection of fiber network infrastructure, which holds gigabit internet services. In Pasco County’s case, the Connected City is also literally connected through extra wide paths that allow electric and autonomous vehicles to pass through.

But once Singleton was on board, he had the task of getting everyone — from community members, to city officials, to homeowners — to the internet service providers to follow suit.

“When I say forced, they reluctantly got there; they didn’t want to do it,” Singleton said of Bright House, later Spectrum. “It was just an expense. He would argue with me about – Greg, your iPhone can’t even pick up gig speed.’ And we were like, ‘Yeah, we’re trying to future-proof these communities.’”

‘Future-proofing’ turns out to be a little more pertinent to the Metro Development today. There’s currently a Crystal Lagoon in the Epperson community with another planned for the Mirada community. The lagoons will range from 5 to 15 acres and are available to residents, who visit the lagoon in droves. It too, needs connectivity.

“I’ve got 50 moms and dads around the pool with iPads trying to stream Netflix and they are all buffering because you have them on this [slow] system,” he said.

The idea that spawned an idea

The word ‘innovative’ tends to be used when Pasco County officials talk about the Connected City.

“Once it’s completed it will change the entire landscape of northeastern Pasco County,” [Hope Allen](#), president/CEO of North Tampa Bay Chamber said. “It’s a wide open space: It could be a Silicon Valley with affordable housing for families, where they can live, work and play. Affordable housing is unrealistic in Silicon Valley.”

And even the state Legislature believes in the power of the Connected City.

In 2015, Senate Bill 1216 passed to create a state law which allows Pasco to implement a special land use plan for the pilot program of the Connected City. It is the only pilot of its kind in Florida and allows the county to have an expedited planning and approval process.

“The Connected City corridor promises to bring high tech jobs in a high quality community to Pasco County, as Pasco County continues to become known as a place to live, work and play,” state Sen. Wilton Simson said in a statement. “Having cutting edge internet is a must today and leveraging that to attract quality companies and residents is the right thing to do.”

Officials may not be too far off from how disruptive the Connected City truly is. Unlike cities that use Google Fiber for internet connectivity, the Connected City in Pasco County wants to go beyond that and include automated vehicles, solar powered light poles and Wi-Fi parks. Pasco County also had the benefit of foresight: it knew it wanted to add high-speed internet capabilities before development of the master-planned communities really kicked in.

“For [infrastructure providers], when you are putting it in a green field, it is so much easier because you aren’t having to go in and jack and bore under,” Singleton said. “That was the issue with Google Fiber — they were having to go in and retrofit infill areas where every mile is so expensive. This is basically, we are already digging a trench. Let’s throw in conduit to the line and put in access points for gig Wi-Fi throughout the community.”

Experiences with Google Fiber in places like Kansas City influenced Singleton and Metro Development Group’s planning.

“People were moving in there – and these businesses, startups were happening,” Singleton said. “If you go to Zillow, they call them ‘fiberhoods.’ It’s in [Metro Development’s] DNA to do fun and exciting things like that.”

‘Fiberhoods’

Allen believes once the Connected City is in place, it will have a similar “fiberhood” rush of businesses to the area.

“I think it’ll definitely serve as a recruitment tool with the gigabyte technology that’ll be at the site,” she said. “It will also help existing businesses around the area.”

And the area will draw in a new, less-sought out demographic, too: entrepreneurs.

For every house built in the Connected City, a small monetary amount will go to an innovation fund through the county, said Kartik Goyani, vice president of operations for Metro Development Group.

“As part of Connected City, one of our goals is to encourage entrepreneurs here,” he said in a previous interview.

Plans for the Connected City are underway and mapped out for the next 50 years, but the team behind it has high hopes for the more near future.

“We had this crazy thought — we are talking 10 years from now,” Singleton said. “That you will be able to live in Epperson and just like you would call up an Uber, I think it will be a self-driving electric car that will come pick you up and take you to the lagoon or to work or the grocery store.”

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