



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **ONE|NB awarded \$125,000 to enhance and expand WiFi in Olneyville**

PROVIDENCE, RI—The State has awarded up to \$125,000 to ONE Neighborhood Builders to enhance and expand its existing free neighborhood WiFi network, called ONE|NB Connects, in the Olneyville neighborhood of Providence.

Overall, the state's Office of Housing and Community Development awarded \$1.7 million in Community Development Block Grants to increase internet access for low- and moderate-income households. ONE|NB applied for \$125,000 to help enhance the speed of its existing mesh network and to expand the coverage area, with a goal of reaching about 2,100 households in Olneyville.

“Free WiFi access is essential to bridging the digital divide,” said Jennifer Hawkins, Executive Director of ONE|NB. “It’s essential for learning, working, socializing, and interacting with needed social services. This grant will go a long way toward improving the internet access we now provide and expanding it to many others in our community.”

When COVID-19 struck in 2020, ONE|NB understood that many people in the Olneyville neighborhood, its historic home, did not have reliable, in-home access to the internet, which was suddenly crucial for children to attend remote classes and for people to obtain telehealth services. ONE|NB knew that only 66.1% of households in Olneyville had internet access between 2015 and 2019, compared with a citywide access rate of 78.2%, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey.

To help solve this problem, in less than 9 months, ONE|NB conceived of, planned, and launched a mesh WiFi network—which currently provides free internet to more than 1,000 unique users.

While the network successfully provides residents with internet access today, there are system gaps, and the radio technology needed for connectivity occasionally goes down. The CDBG funding will be

used to enhance the speed of the network, fill gaps in the system, provide redundancy in coverage areas, and expand access to 1,000 more households.

The current ONE|NB WiFi mesh covers the core residential area of Olneyville, which includes the D'Abate Elementary School, the Joslin Rec Center, Joslin Park, and Riverside Park. The area represents about two-thirds of the homes in the .44 square miles that make up the Olneyville neighborhood, whose population is 6,933 residents. The network covers most of the affordable housing developed by ONE|NB in the neighborhood.

The award announcement follows shortly after President Biden signed the \$1-trillion infrastructure bill into law. The plan includes \$65 billion for broadband access nationally, with the potential to deliver more than \$100 million directly to Rhode Island for this purpose.

#### **ABOUT ONE NEIGHBORHOOD BUILDERS:**

ONE Neighborhood Builders (ONE|NB) is a nonprofit community development leader in Rhode Island that is expanding its work to the broader Greater Providence area while maintaining its deep roots in its historic home of Olneyville. ONE|NB's mission is to develop affordable housing and engage neighbors to cultivate healthy, vibrant, and safe communities. Since its founding in 1988, then as Olneyville Housing Corporation, ONE|NB has developed 458 affordable apartments; 130 for-sale homes for low- to moderate-income homebuyers; and nearly 35,000 square feet of commercial and community space—totaling more than \$133 million of investments. ONE|NB is the convening entity of the [Central Providence Health Equity Zone](#), which brings together residents, community organizations, health professionals, and others to address root causes of health disparities, and of the Central Providence Collaborative, which includes more than four dozen community-based organizations, local businesses, residents, and elected officials who work together to improve neighborhood conditions. ONE|NB is the backbone organization of [Central Providence Opportunities](#), a collective-impact initiative to increase economic mobility for residents in Central Providence. ONE|NB also created [the first free community wireless network](#) in Rhode Island, providing high-speed broadband to about 1,000 users in the Olneyville neighborhood.