

Is Google-Utopia romance in the offing?

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Google has a few Utah hearts all a-flutter.

The search engine company, which in February announced it wants to build fiber-optic networks in one or more U.S. cities, gave one local politician and several Utopia executives something to smile about when it invited them in late June to its headquarters to discuss the project.

“They were interested in our [Utopia’s] deployment model, our service providers and the technology we were using,” said West Valley City Mayor Mike Winder. He accompanied Utopia Executive Director Todd Marriott and two other network executives to the June 22 meeting in Mountain View, Calif.

Although Winder declined to speculate whether the meeting suggested Utah has the inside track on landing the much-coveted network, Mayor Dan Snarr of Murray, who didn’t attend, was a lot more optimistic after he heard about the meeting.

“It looks like we might be one of the final contestants,” he said.

Utopia is a quasi-public agency involving 11 Utah cities that have invested millions in building a fiber-optic network. And those cities joined dozens of other communities across the country in publicly announcing they wanted to be part of the Google team.

At the time, Winder viewed Google’s decision to experiment with a fiber-optic system as a validation of Utopia’s efforts since 2002 to make high-speed Internet a “fundamental utility” that cities provide.

Yet others viewed Google’s announcement as a condemnation of Utopia’s premise that private enterprise was unwilling to step up to build fiber-optic systems that consumers need.

Google spokesman Dan Martin, however, said in an e-mail the company will meet with local officials and conduct site visits as part of the process it will go through in deciding where to build its network.

“We aren’t commenting on specific communities until we’re ready to announce where we plan to build,” he said, adding Google plans to announce its target communities by the end of the year.

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