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## **San Diego Turns to Smart City Tech to Bolster 'Promise Zone'**

*An initiative to address quality-of-life concerns in an underserved community in San Diego has identified priorities like job creation or affordable housing, and is turning tech to help shepherd those goals.*

A neighborhood in San Diego will turn to smart city technologies to improve quality-of-life outcomes around job training, affordable housing and transit access.

The area known as the “Promise Zone” is located in the southeast portion of the city and is home to about 85,000 residents. Formed in 2016, the zone covers about 6.4 square miles and includes ethnically diverse regions as well as underserved populations. The aim is to grow local, state and federal partnerships to promote investment there.

It has been identified as a region where the use of community engagement could formulate a road map for smart city projects as part of San Diego’s goal to build inclusive and smart communities.

“This is really looking at how the city, in partnership with the community, can prioritize investments in technology, within the boundaries of the Promise Zone,” said Jason Anderson, president and CEO of Cleantech San Diego, a smart city projects coordinator for more than a dozen cities and public agencies in the San Diego metro region. “The key to this, and really what the city wanted to start with, is community engagement.”

The city wanted to start with a community that “for the most part has not necessarily been served from a digital perspective,” Anderson explained Tuesday during a Meeting of the Minds webinar. Meeting of the Minds is a nonprofit dedicated to studying smart cities issues and solutions.

“They wanted to make sure that as smart city programs are implemented or deployed throughout the city of San Diego, they’re beneficial to all community members, and wanted to really start within those underserved communities,” he added.

At this point in the process, some of the key priorities — like job training and affordable housing — have been identified. A next step will involve exploring technology-aided solutions to address these priorities, said project team members. Some of those early tech possibilities include the deployment of sensors on LED streetlights to measure traffic counts, or putting out several pilot kiosks to provide various pieces of community information, said Steph Stoppenhagen, director of business development at Black & Veatch, a smart cities consulting company working on the project.

“It should be worth noting that this is a road map. This is a process,” Anderson reminded. “This is really identifying the priorities and the potential technologies that the city should invest in, or could invest in, as it relates to the needs of the community. This is a first step in a many-step process.”

The city will have the final word on how to move forward. This research phase of the project is being funded by the Community Development Block Grant program. Later funding could take a range of

paths including public-private partnerships.

A central goal of many smart city projects is putting technology to work to improve the lives of all residents, but especially those who may have been historically underserved. It's often what's meant when leaders speak of creating "equity" in cities, and the importance of not always hanging smart city tech in only the most robust neighborhoods.

"Again, going back to that notion of, investment in technology is cool. And it's bright and shiny and some of those types of things. But if we're not addressing some of the fundamental needs within the community, and training and employment options being one of those, then we're really missing the bigger picture," said Anderson.

"If we're trying to answer some hard questions about creating technology to help the quality of life, wouldn't this be the best place to start?" added Stoppenhagen. "And I think that that has definitely caught the eye of a lot of other cities and regions, to follow this project, and to hopefully replicate it."

GOVTECH

BY SKIP DESCANT / SEPTEMBER 26, 2019

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