

Mahoosuc Community Broadband Committee

Meeting Minutes

11-23-2021 – 12:00 - 1:00 p.m.

Committee members present:

- Art Marshall (Albany)
- Steve Smith (Albany)
- Sarah Vedella (Milton Plantation)
- Mike Muir (SAD44)
- Michele Varuolo Cole (Bethel)
- Jeff Martin (Bethel)
- Steve Wight (Newry)
- Vern Maxfield (Woodstock)
- Marcel Polak (Woodstock)

Others in attendance: Mia Purcell (CCFC) and Mike Wilson (NFC).

1. *What are you hearing about broadband in your community?*

- Michele Cole reported that the Bethel selectmen signed the resolution designating the town's ARPA funds for broadband.
- Mia Purcell added that the Woodstock, Greenwood and Newry select boards also designated their ARPA funds for broadband and signed the resolution.
- Mike noted that the Northern Border Regional Commission received triple its usual funding allocation through the bipartisan infrastructure bill – making a more important potential funding source for broadband projects.

2. *Managing receipt and review of proposals from FirstLight and Spectrum*

- Confidentiality of proposal content – It was agreed that proposal content would remain confidential and not to be discussed outside the Committee until review is complete and the Committee members agree they are ready to report and/or recommend action to the selectboards.
- Considerations for proposal review and evaluating proposals in the context of the Mahoosuc broadband goal – universal, reliable, affordable high-speed broadband for all
 - Proposed cost for expanding service – Provider vs. town costs
 - Timing for expanding service
 - Subscription rate/user cost – What determines rate increases and is there a guarantee that rates would be set at a certain level and remain there for what length of time?
 - Universal coverage – How is “uneconomic to serve” defined?
 - Consistency of service – Would all service to the premise be fiber or cable?
- It was recommended, and agreed, that a rubric be developed for evaluating proposals
- Scheduling a committee workshop in December for analysis of proposals – including review of more complete public option to be provided by CBA – Tuesday, Dec. 21, 12:00-1:30.
- Timing and process to deliver recommendation to selectboards to be determined

3. *Oxford County financial support for expanding high-speed broadband in Albany Township and Milton Plantation*
 - A spreadsheet with each organized town's ARPA allocation and other variables (i.e., population, number of households, number of locations) was discussed.
 - The committee agreed to approach the county about allocating ARPA funding to enable unorganized townships to contribute to local broadband projects at a similar per person or per household rate as organized towns that dedicate their ARPA funds to broadband. Separate from the county's expected ARPA funding "application" process.
 - Art Marshall agreed to research the population and households for Albany and Milton.

4. *Comments on and thought about proposed Outreach and Engagement activities:*
 - **Community survey** that persuades residents to support funding for broadband by pointing out how broadband solves a variety of problems: Working remotely, Telehealth, Learning remotely, Job creation and retention. Mike Muir is taking the lead in designing the survey questions.
 - **30-Second Video** that helps brand the committee and its work. Laurie Gilbert referred Mia to Nora McCormack. Steve Smith, Steve Wight and Mike Wilson will assist Mia, and she will contact Jessie Perkins at the Bethel Chamber for another reference of a videographer. Steve Wight mentioned Erin Martin with Social Mana as a possible contact.
 - **PowerPoint presentations**, both internal and external, to use in making public presentations about the Committee and its work. Mia shared an updated version of the PowerPoint presentation for the County and will add a slide with funding sources to the deck. Once finalized we will post this on the MCBC website.
 - **One page infographic** that outlines the broadband development process in five or six steps and shows where the Committee is in the process. See ppt presentation checklist for basis.
 - **Monthly broadband update in the Bethel Citizen.** Mia shared a draft article for the Bethel Citizen with everyone. The article was submitted to the paper on Tuesday, 11/22.
 - **Consider holding open forums:** One to discuss municipal investment in broadband and the other to provide information about a specific broadband proposal and get feedback and comments on it.

Next meeting – December 21 @ noon