

Mahoosuc Community Broadband Committee

Meeting Minutes

1-5-22 – 12:00 p.m.

Committee members present:

Art Marshall (Albany)

Steve Smith (Albany)

Per Nygren (Albany)

Mike Muir (Bethel)

Michele Varuolo Cole (Bethel)

Jeff Martin (Bethel)

Steve Wight (Newry)

Marcel Polak (Woodstock)

Others in attendance: Brian Lippold (Casco Bay Advisors), Mia Purcell (CCFC) and Mike Wilson (NFC)

1. Discussion of a possible Wireless Internet solution

- Art Marshall reported that he spoke with a member of the community who had heard about Fayette adopting a wireless solution and wondered if the Mahoosuc Broadband Committee is considering wireless service as an option. Brian Lippold responded that Redzone is the company that is providing wireless internet service that can deliver a gigabit/gigabit speeds with no line-of-sight requirements.
 - The equipment being used is made by Tarana.
 - Redzone is focused on working with communities that are willing to contribute to the project cost.
 - Installing wireless service costs approximately one fifth cost of fiber to the home and is deployed much more quickly.
 - If grant funds are needed to fund a wireless solution we don't know how ConnectMaine will view this technology.
 - Brian Lippold volunteered to contact Redzone about providing a high level proposal. *Redzone will be making a presentation at the January 28 meeting of the Committee.*

2. Discussion of Charter's preliminary proposal

- Charter is updating the passings in its proposal to provide service to unserved locations.
- Most of the last mile connections would be fiber, not cable and Charter will not build over its existing network with fiber.
- Charter's pricing was discussed and comments were made about it being too expensive. Brian Lippold advised that Charter's pricing is not negotiable.
- Art Marshall expressed concern that the areas that already have cable will not get an upgrade to fiber for their service. He raised the question of whether we want fiber to the home for everyone or if cable is acceptable as a broadband solution.
- *Charter will be presenting a more complete proposal later this month.*

3. American Rescue Plan Act funds and County financial support for Albany Township and Milton Plantation

- Mia Purcell explained that she and Mike Wilson met with Donnie Durrah, Oxford County Administrator, to provide him with an update on the Committee's efforts and to get an update from him. The latest estimates for the County's top priority projects – replacing the emergency communications system across the County and replacing the HVAC system in the County jail – will leave little if any ARPA funds available for other projects. The County understands the Committee's concern about the Unorganized Territories not being treated equitably with regard to the allocation of ARPA funds.
- Multiplying the average ARPA value per location of \$120 by the number of potential subscriber locations in Milton and Albany equals \$60,000.
- *Michele Cole recommended that the Committee submit a formal request for \$60,000 to the County on behalf of Albany and Milton and inquire if funding is available from the State at the same time.*

4. Presentation on a Municipal Utility option by Brian Lippold

- The model Brian presented would involve contracting with an internet service provider to build the network and to operate it. An RFP would be issued to select a provider. It is not expected that the towns would operate it.
- The total cost to build the network would be \$18 million. The project could be financed by a combination of grants and bonds. Bond financing would increase taxes for each of the towns.
- The model presumes a month service fee of \$50 plus a \$500 installation charge after the first year.
- It also presumes a positive cash flow in year 2 if the subscriber goal is met.
- A municipal utility would be competing against Charter and FirstLight for subscribers.
- Potential internet service provider partners include GWI and Axiom Technologies.
- While this is not a model that the towns expressed an interest in exploring, Committee members agreed that it is important to report to the towns that all options are being considered, including creating a municipal utility.

The next meeting will be Friday, January 14 at noon.