

Mahoosuc Community Broadband Committee

Meeting Minutes

10-27-2021 – 1300 a.m.

Committee members present:

Art Marshall (Albany)
Steve Smith (Albany)
Sarah Vedella (Milton Plantation)
Mike Muir (Bethel)
Michele Varuolo Cole (Bethel)
Jeff Martin (Bethel)
Per Nygren (Bethel)
Kim Sparks (Greenwood)
Steve Wight (Newry)
Marcel Polak (Woodstock)

Others in attendance: Mia Purcell (CCFC), Mike Wilson (NFC) and Jamie Ritter (SAD72 towns)

Update on communications with FirstLight and Spectrum

- Brian Lippold has spoken with both providers. FirstLight has plans for building out its fiber network in the area but no specific schedule for doing this. The most densely populated areas are being targeted for service first.
- FirstLight's Chief Development Officer wants to highlight expansion in the Mahoosuc area. FirstLight is developing a proposal for the Committee and the towns.
- Spectrum appears to be "eager" and "responsive." Fiber, not coax cable, to the home is what Spectrum would build out.

Update on towns committing their American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds as local match for an anticipated broadband project

- Gilead has indicated that it isn't able to commit its ARPA funds for broadband.
- The status of Newry's commitment of ARPA funds and commitment to the proposed charter statement is unknown.
- Bethel selectmen have discussed the charter statement and allocating some or all of its ARPA funds for broadband, but there has not been a vote yet.
- Greenwood and Woodstock selectmen have voted in support of allocating ARPA funds as match for a broadband grant and will be signing a resolution at their November meetings.
- Greenwood and Woodstock will share "support language" with other participating towns.
- When we know the status of the towns' willingness to participate in and commit ARPA funds for a project we will contact the County on behalf of Milton Plantation and Albany. The County is circulating a survey to towns to learn about projects they are working on and plans to follow that up with an application for towns to apply for ARPA

funds. Albany is part of County Commissioner Steve Merrill's District and Milton is in County Commissioner Dave Duguay's District.

Discussion of community engagement and development of a plan/strategy in support of community engagement with funding from a Maine Community Foundation Broadband grant (\$11,200).

- There was discussion about the possible goals of a community engagement campaign – building public awareness of the need for and benefits of better broadband, encouraging residents to vote for funding for a project at a town meeting or by referendum.
- The Committee agreed that the strategic focus of community engagement efforts is to build public support for broadband investment that leverages public funds and moves the region toward achievement of its goal.
- Mike Muir, Michelle Conroy, Michele Varuolo Cole and Per Nygren volunteered to serve on a subcommittee to help develop a community engagement strategy and make suggestions for implementing it.

Scheduling future meetings

- A survey will be sent to Committee members soliciting their input on dates, days of the week, time of day and the length of time of future meetings.

Update on SAD72 towns

- Jamie Ritter reported that the Town of Denmark is submitting a planning grant application to ConnectMaine to expand its RFP to include the other SAD72 towns.