

Mahoosuc Community Broadband Committee

Meeting Minutes

9-29-2021 – 11:00 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)
Kim Sparks (Greenwood)
Steve Wight (Newry)
Vern Maxfield (Woodstock)
Marcel Polak (Woodstock)

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

Results of select board feedback and high-level scenario recommendation from the committee

- Committee recommendation of high-level scenario to guide further work
 - The Committee acknowledges that the scenarios outlined in the Casco Bay Advisors report are hypothetical and useful for informing the Committee's process for achieving its goal of universal, reliable, affordable, high-speed broadband but unlikely to be implemented as presented.
 - The majority of Mahoosuc town select boards and members of the Broadband Committee in attendance at the September 29 meeting expressed a strong preference for Scenario B (build out with FirstLight excluding existing fiber to the home).
 - A concern was raised by a member of the Committee regarding the current language of Scenario B as it is larger in scope and more expensive than Scenario A and excludes engaging with Spectrum. It would be helpful to obtain further details of exactly how Scenario B differs from Scenario A and how existing served parts of the community including current Spectrum customers are addressed.
 - With an understood preference for Scenario B, the committee will actively engage conversations with First Light and with Spectrum to further develop and refine realistic (non-hypothetical) implementation options.
 - The following Committee members will develop a process and criteria for fulfilling Scenario B with support from Casco Bay Advisors (see below):
 - Steve Wight (Newry)
 - Mike Muir (Bethel)
 - Vern Maxfield (Woodstock)
 - Kim Sparks (Greenwood)
 - Steve Smith (Albany)
 - Sarah Vedella (Milton Plantation)
 - As a back-up and alternative scenario Mike Wilson and Mia will investigate C (town-owned fiber to the home excluding existing fiber) and report back to the Committee.

Process for refining high-level scenario concept to best align with Mahoosuc area interests and capacity

- Committee structure and decision making
 - It was agreed that each town would have one vote and all voices present would be heard in discussion. Towns will have two named representatives who is designated to vote on behalf of the town.
 - Follow up with Gilead and the County is needed to ensure that they are represented on the Committee and in decision making. Mia Purcell will follow up with them.
 - Notes from Committee meetings will be posted on a webpage on the Maine West website.
 - The Committee will establish a schedule for meeting at the end of the month and report to select boards by early the following month.

- Technical assistance needs
 - There was agreement that outside expertise is needed to help facilitate negotiations with FirstLight and that we should continue working with Brian Lippold and Casco Bay Advisors for this assistance.

- Critical questions/issues to address through further strategy refinement
 - How empowered is the Committee to act on behalf of the towns?
 - What accountability should Committee members have to the towns?
 - It was agreed that the Committee would develop a recommended process and implementation strategy to be shared with select boards along with key decision points.

Working 6-month timeline and key decision-points for the towns.

- Mike Wilson shared a spreadsheet with actions/activities and anticipated grant deadlines over the next six months.
- The spreadsheet includes town meeting dates from 2021 and the County budget cycle.

Tasks & Deadlines	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June
Report next steps to community stakeholders – select boards and county	X								
Contract additional technical assistance		X	X	X	X	X			
Detail Scenario B - criteria for negotiation (team)		X	X						
Detail Scenario C - business model (CCFC/NFC)		X	X						
Community Engagement (team)		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Town Budget Processes			X	X	X				
Oxford County Budget		X							
Key Grant Deadlines									
ConnectMaine - Planning	X								
ConnectMaine - Implementation		X?							
Maine Connectivity Authority?					X	X			
Northern Border Regional Commission							X?		

