

# Mahoosuc Community Broadband Committee

## Meeting Minutes

1-14-22 – 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)  
Kim Sparks (Greenwood)  
Sarah Vedella (Milton)  
Steve Wight (Newry)  
Vern Maxfield (Woodstock)  
Marcel Polak (Woodstock)

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

FirstLight has provided a second proposal for expanding its internet service in the Mahoosuc region. Brian Lippold advised that the proposal needs work and is not ready for review and discussion.

Outline the Committee's report to the towns:

- What have we done in the last month?
  - The Committee's work has focused on outreach, including
    - A second broadband update in the Bethel Citizen
    - Information added to and updated in the web portal for the Committee's work
    - Short videos are being created to help brand the Committee and its goal to provide everyone in the Mahoosuc region with universal, reliable, affordable, high-speed, future-ready internet service.
- Assessing the four strategies for expanding broadband that are outlined in the Casco Bay Advisors report
  - Evaluating Strategies A and B – Partner with incumbent providers
    - A preliminary proposal from Charter has been reviewed.
    - The Committee is waiting to receive and review a proposal from FirstLight.
    - So far expanding with an incumbent provider does not appear to be a promising option.
  - Considering wireless internet service
    - The Committee will be hearing a presentation from Redzone Owner, Jim McKenna, on January 28.
  - Evaluating Strategy D -- a municipal owned and operated network or broadband utility

- Brian Lippold presented a broadband utility model, including estimated costs for constructing and operating a municipal network.
- Dedicating American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds as local match
  - Bethel, Greenwood, Newry and Woodstock have pledged their ARPA funds as local match for broadband.
  - Conversations with the County about dedicating some of its ARPA funds as match on behalf of Albany and Milton have not been encouraging.
  - A follow up memo was sent to the County Commissioners and Administrator asking them to consider allocating \$60,000 in ARPA funds for Albany and Milton.
- Next steps for the Committee and for the towns from February through May
  - The towns should be encouraged to bank additional funds through their budget process so that they are ready to apply for grants.
  - Continue implementing the outreach and engagement strategy
  - Track funding opportunities and how they align with the Committee's priorities

Committee members expressed disappointment in the responses from Charter and FirstLight. Brian Lippold responded that the entire industry is overloaded because of increased demand for expanded broadband at the local level and significant infusion of federal funds for broadband. Internet service providers are expecting towns to fund a larger share of projects. He also explained that FirstLight's growth strategy is to expand service to businesses, not residents. Brian expects that the Committee will receive firm proposals from Charter, FirstLight, Redzone and GWI.

OTELCO was mentioned and Brian said it is expanding fiber to the home in more densely populated areas and competing with Charter.

The Committee asked if it should consider adopting a formal RFP process that would provide consistency in comparing responses. Brian expects that the Committee will receive more formal proposals from Charter, FirstLight and GWI. Redzone will not respond to an RFP. Brian does not anticipate that any other internet service providers will be interested in expanding in this area.

The Committee also wondered if it is unrealistic in expecting providers to be more responsive to its requests for proposals and if the Mahoosuc region is in the queue, so to speak, with any of the internet service providers. Brian said the Mahoosuc region is in the queue with Charter, FirstLight and Redzone and potentially with GWI.

**Next meeting – January 28, noon -2:00 PM.**