

MINUTES

BROADBAND COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 24, 2022

WILLIAM L. PULLEN MUNICIPAL BUILDING MEETING ROOM

ONLINE NON-INTERACTIVE AT TOWN HALL STREAMS

6:30 p.m.

Committee members present: Adam Fuller, John Gibbons, Michael Ross, Renee Flanders

Others present: None.

1. Call the meeting to order: 6:30 p.m. by Adam Fuller

2. Approve minutes of May 11, 2022:

Motion by: Renee Flanders

2nd by: Michael Ross

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3. Status with LCI re: MCA Grant Application:

John said they had a good productive session with Alan last Thursday. At MCA (who is administering the grant), the schedule has slipped just a little bit – expecting applications open October 5 and closing a month later with the awards in July. There will be one more grant cycle starting in March, and it looks like additional grant cycles after that until the funding coming out of Washington runs out.

The last round was \$10 million total; now they're dealing with \$100 million. John said \$100 million is just the first chunk. They expect to get \$100 million to \$300 million, and there could be additional funding after that. They are encouraging applicants to rethink expansively.

John said there has been a change in the unserved criteria. It was 25 down 3 up for the ConnectME grant – anyone with less was considered unserved. The criteria for underserved is below 100-100. They won't give the grant if the network being built won't support at least 100-100 speed. Alan said several times they are aiming at offering gigabyte service. Adam echoed he's said that is their long-term goal, gigabyte both ways.

John can't see any changes Alan described having any impact on Union.

MCA has established a required local share of \$700 per address, with around 247 addresses. In the ConnectME grant application the required local share was 50% (50% from the grant and 50% from the required local share). LCI made up 75% of that local

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share, but with this \$700 per address is a lot lower; the ConnectME ground rules worked out to just under \$2,000 per address. This goes along with information Alan reported that, in all the states, there is pressure to spend the money productively. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to get as much done as we possibly can. They require a local share because of the amount of money that's being made available, and they are encouraging the ISPs, the applicants, to think expansively.

Union is at the top of their priority list. They seem to be doing all they need to do to be ready for the grant application. In all the states there is pressure from the political side to spend the money wisely but get it spent and do the best you can to expand service throughout the state.

John added the third phase will be to overbuild the Spectrum lines with fiber. They are seriously considering including the consolidated addresses in this current application, as a result of encouragement they have heard from the state. The only constraint at our end will be the amount of money we can provide for our local share.

Adam felt Alan was feeling out if that money was still there, after we lost the grant last time. Adam was adamant it's still there, let's put it to work, and that's when he started talking about engineering.

John said LCI is planning to conduct an advanced engineering study between now and October 5. The purpose is to have a completely defensible network design for their proposal and to have detailed cost estimates. We will be asked to pay half, but whatever we spend on this advanced study will count towards the local share.

Adam said his impression was they're speaking and meeting with the consulting groups that are advising the MCA, so they can make sure they are giving the application in the format with the data in the way that MCA is going to want to look at it. Obviously if it's already engineered, they're far more shovel-ready so to speak. Alan told us the larger awards from the last ConnectME grant, they didn't pull it off and are going to have to send that money back, like GWI, unable to meet the criteria. The fact that this counts towards our local share is huge. They are not waiting, going into it guns blazing. Union is at the top of their list. Adam felt that meeting on their end was to see if we're still committed, financially into it, or if maybe the momentum fizzled – to give us an update, and to feel us out as to how ready we are to move.

John said bottom line with LCI, the next step will be the advanced engineering study, our share of the cost, and expecting the application October 5.

4. Midcoast Internet Coalition update:

John doesn't have anything new. There is a potential change in direction related to difficulties financing their need to build in the core four towns: 1) they can't qualify for much in grant money in those towns; and 2) they face intense pressure from other ISPs

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moving into the area and building networks that cover the high-density portions of the towns, meaning their take rate would be very low.

The direction they're pursuing now is to build first in a group of smaller towns, with GWI as an advisor, and have a lot of smaller towns. They wanted to know if Union would be in that first group; it would take an interlocal agreement to join the group. John told them we committed to LCI through the grant application.

Adam said if we had to take it to a town vote, the first question would be I thought we were working with LCI. Renee thinks the next question is who's going to get there first. Adam is happy they're coming around but feels they were being told that nine months ago and didn't want to hear it. They are going to gather up a bunch of small towns with a board that's largely Camden and Rockport. People in Union, Warren, St. George do not want to be told what to do by people in Camden and Rockport.

John said the coalition is a real possibility of a backup if the LCI grants don't succeed.

Municipal broadband came up. Adam said many people love the idea of broadband but are not real thrilled about funding it. There are definitely people in town that don't want municipalities owning infrastructure. It would be a different kind of sell to voters than the partnership we're doing now.

The committee feels very comfortable where we are with LCI.

5. Discussion of Citizen Reactions to 2 ½-Year Schedule for Fiber Network Completion, and Potential Need for Interim Measures:

John said reaction was expressed in the email he sent around to everybody.

Renee feels 2 ½ years is not unreasonable. Adam added the actual physical infrastructure, plus supply shortages and tight labor market, means we are competing with every municipality in the country; partnering with an existing ISP like LCI/Tidewater comes with that advantage, boots on the ground. The reality is it's not going to be enough. There's that connection issue. That's a lot of handholding with people, and that's manpower, too – where the committee can help, and Jay has talked about getting an intern. If people *know* that it's coming, it's a different story.

Renee feels beefing up that webpage will be a step towards progress: showing we are taking action to make more information available will open up some doors, get more people talking, kind of spread the wave around a little.

Adam said we could use that webpage as a quarterly update, where the committee makes a quarterly post and maybe get LCI to contribute. Here's what we've accomplished; here's what we're targeting. Those sorts of things show something is happening.

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Renee suggested a place for people to make a comment or ask a question.

Adam suggested a specific email for the Broadband Committee. Someone would have to be appointed to manage it. His only concern is how busy it could get.

There was further discussion of alleviating office staff burden, different ways people interact with online information, etc.

John summarized we should build the webpage and use that as an initial way of communicating.

6. Discussion of Draft Broadband Committee Web Page, and Data Collection from other ISPs:

John went over printouts and discussed tone, format, references, grant info section, sidebars, contact information, committee agendas and minutes, service available with pros and cons.

Adam urged caution with corporate links.

John emphasized information for people who in the position of, “It’s great that fiber will be here in two-and-a-half years, but what can I get now?” The purpose again is to take this off the town office.

The next section involved a breakdown of addresses and services. Renee said this would be immensely helpful to people moving here. John again mentioned links on the website. Adam said he likes being counted; his physical address number is on the sheet, it’s important to know you’re on the list, somebody has physically counted your residence in this fiber rollout like “we know you’re there.” Renee said some will say they’re not there. Adam thinks we may run into people who don’t realize what categories they’re in. Renee said Kimberly offered to help with the setup.

John said Kim is working on the main section and expects a rough cut for discussion the beginning of next week. What else do we think? Adam thinks comments once it’s up will be interesting. Renee asked about tracking. Adam said Gusco does a lot of our IT work; he will ask Jay if we have a way to measure traffic. Adam also noted all the junk/spam hits with a municipality.

Consensus was the committee really likes this draft of the webpage.

Adam added with LCI, if we do some of that outreach help on hookups and so forth, having this webpage established is massive – lot of potential.

Renee is looking into data collection from other ISPs. Her contact is on vacation.

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7. Other business:

John suggested with the webpage it may be time to make the committee meetings regular so people can tune in. They have been meeting every three months since the beginning of 2022, driven by what others are doing. Consensus was once the website is live, within the next couple months, and hopefully heavy engineering from LCI and grant application info will be available; then we will probably go back to a monthly meeting.

Adam said if the grant proposal is accepted and funding's coming, we also start to look at growing the committee: actively recruiting for specific roles, what we can do to help LCI, man the email, prep committee, etc. Adam said at that point you're talking a million dollar investment into town which gets people motivated. We can also get involved with Chamber of Commerce as a resource at that point, reach out through the library, etc.

John brought up people willing to help with conduits. Adam said there are two aspects: talking to small excavation companies to see if they would be willing to be a contact point, sending business their way and free advertising but they may have to handhold; and some electricians but they are in such high demand. The big thing will be the conduit thing. LCI's techs do a lot at the house. Renee said the biggest thing is the drop; if underground you've got to have the conduit, and they don't do that. Adam discussed specs. John suggested finding someone to think about this; people will want to know how much it costs, and what kind of disruption there will be. More discussion followed about conduits. A potential contact list will be key, keeping it to local outfits.

John said at select board meetings he usually submits a one-page status report in writing. He hasn't sent them around to the committee. Consensus was the committee would like to see them.

John said they will go ahead with a rough build of the webpage. Next meeting will be after hearing back about the advanced engineering, within the next month and a half.

8. Adjourn:

Motion by: Michael Ross

2nd by: Renee Flanders

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Meeting adjourned at 8:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sherry Abaldo
Secretary