

# MINUTES

## BROADBAND COMMITTEE

Tuesday, January 26, 2021

6:30 p.m.

Online Interactive

Committee members present: Rachel Burns, John Gibbons, Chris Norris, and Holly Savage

Others present: Jim Justice

1. The meeting came to order as a Zoom session at 6:30 P.M.
2. The members welcomed Rachel Burns, teacher and small business owner, to the Committee.
3. The members approved the minutes of the 12/29/20 committee meeting.
4. The next agenda item was the status of data requests from the principal Internet service providers in Union.

Tidewater: We received a map from Tidewater's Alan Hinsey in December, showing the location of fiber runs along roads in Union. It was noted that most of the fiber installations are north of Rt 17, with the exception of a small area in east Union, and another around Depot St and the Common.

Spectrum: We've received a map from Spectrum's Melinda Kinney, showing the location of cable runs along Union roads. It was noted that Spectrum appears to have very extensive installations in Union, including in areas south of Rt 17.

Redzone: Michael Forcillo has promised to provide a map, down to the level of individual addresses, showing where Redzone's signal can and cannot be received from its tower-mounted equipment on Coggins Hill. He is trying for the end of January. In the meantime, a map has recently emerged on the ConnectME website that appears to show Redzone "dark areas" (inadequate signal). It was noted that the existence of these dark areas may represent an opportunity, under current ConnectME ground rules, to seek ConnectME grant funding for limited network buildouts aimed at improving access to these "underserved" areas.

All three of the maps referenced above can be found on the shared drive under Coverage Maps.

We have also received from Union Assessor Jim Murphy a list of all roads and addresses in Union. There are 125 roads and 1275 addresses, including private roads and the addresses on these (private) roads. With the maps above and this roads list, we should be able to estimate how many miles of fiber / cable need to be laid in order to cover the entire town. This is a major step toward scoping the cost of a complete network buildout across the town.

It was noted that in planning a network buildout, private roads may need to be treated separately from public roads.

It was further noted that we are approaching the point where we have much of the data that we need, and the problem before us is shifting from data collecting (coverage maps) to data digesting (estimating buildout cost.)

5. The next agenda item was the status of communications with other municipal broadband committees.

It was reported that the town of Bremen is nearing completion of a fiber network buildout (additional 25 miles) by LCI/Tidewater. The buildout is funded partly by a ConnectME grant, provided as a supplement to LCI / Tidewater's capital. This is an example of one of our two models . . . teaming with a current provider . . .for extending high-speed access across all of Union. (The other is a town-owned network, funded by a bond issue, in the event that we are unable to work out a satisfactory partnership agreement with one or more of the current providers.) We are trying to reach the principals in Bremen and elsewhere to determine the specifics.

We expect to be discussing this and related teaming examples with Tidewater during our planned meeting in February.

6. The next agenda item was the status of our planned survey of Union residents to determine their current Internet access providers and current speeds, their level of satisfaction with the current service, and their interest in seeking an accelerated transition to town-wide high-speed service.

Our first survey was released on Jan 20<sup>th</sup>. We received 72 responses in the first two days. (Thanks to Holly and Chris!) Results are being posted on the shared drive as they come in.

Takeaways from the first set of responses to the survey:

- More than 40 percent of responders have Spectrum as their provider. Some responders indicated complete satisfaction with the Spectrum service, but there was also a lot of dissatisfaction with the cost, reliability, and sometimes slow speeds.
- About 30 percent of responders have Tidewater DSL. Comments indicated widespread dissatisfaction with speed, reliability, and high cost for what they get.

- There were only a handful of responders who have Redzone, and only one with HughesNet. Comments indicated general dissatisfaction with speed and reliability.

Holly has circulated to the committee for comment a draft of a second survey aimed specifically at the Union business community. We view this as a follow-on to the initial survey, focused sharply on surfacing business uses and business needs, with minimal duplication of questions asked in the first survey. Committee members were urged to review the draft, and provide their comments to Holly and Chris. We are aiming to send it out in the latter part of February.

7. The next agenda item was the prospect for grants to assist us in accelerating the buildout of high-speed Internet access across the town.

Chris has volunteered to take the lead in working with ConnectME to clarify certain issues involving potential grant opportunities. John will send her the background information. Chris reported that there has been a lot of activity at ConnectME recently, as preparations are made for the next grant cycle.

8. The next agenda item was the schedule for meetings with the Rockport / Camden Task Force and with LCI / Tidewater. The purpose of these meetings is to explore two alternative approaches for high-speed network buildout.

The meetings have not been scheduled yet, but we expect both to be pinned down soon.

The committee left open the schedule for the next committee meeting, pending the scheduling of the above two sessions.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:40 P.M.