

MINUTES

BROADBAND COMMITTEE

Tuesday, March 30, 2021

6:30 p.m.

Online Interactive

Committee members present: Adam Fuller, Renee Flanders, John Gibbons, Kimberly Grindle, Holly Savage, and Michael Ross

Others present: Jay Feyler, plus others not identified

1. On a motion by Kim Grindle, seconded by Mike Ross, the minutes of the March 9 Committee meeting were approved.
2. The Committee elected Adam Fuller to succeed Christine Norris as committee chair.
3. The committee briefly reviewed the results of the survey that was launched on January 20 of this year. There were 139 responses to date, and additional responses have recently slowed to a trickle. The committee members agreed to close the survey at this point and remove it from the town website. Responses to the survey are available on the shared drive. Key takeaways:
 - Most of the respondents have either cable (Spectrum) or DSL (Tidewater).
 - Only a few reported having wireless (Redzone or cellular) or fiber (LCI).
 - Hardly anyone is satisfied with what they have. Principle complaints are slow speeds, unreliability, and high cost for what they get.
 - There appears to be strong demand for something better.

Holly will be our focal point for developing a follow-up survey aimed at the business community.

4. Most of the remaining discussion was focused on the pros and cons of either working with LCI to build out its fiber net town-wide or working with the Midcoast Internet Coalition to develop a regional municipally owned fiber network, to be operated as an open-access network with one or more service providers offering services over the network.

There seemed to be a consensus among the members that the goal should be a town-wide fiber network with connections to all premises (FTTP or “fiber to the premises”), offering high-speed access to all premises at reasonable cost. Anything less than this was considered a “partial solution” that does not meet the town’s needs.

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There was some discussion of practical constraints on including fiber to the premises. In cases where there is a house at the end of a 3,000 ft driveway, maybe the cost of the connection should fall more on the homeowner, as would the cost of electric power service. This was raised as a concern but was not settled.

5. The members initially discussed the LCI option. Key discussion points:
 - LCI might offer a faster solution than the municipal network. LCI has a presence, with “boots on the ground.” The municipal network is currently only on paper.
 - On the other hand, LCI appears to be interested primarily in stringing fiber on poles, but with very few connections. Their response to requests for connections has been abysmally slow, and status requests get no response (“poor customer service”).
 - LCI requires fiber customers to pay for a land line also, whether they want one or not. And a lot of younger customers don’t want a land line.
 - LCI will build its network only where it sees clusters of potential customers or where it can obtain grants.
 - If we work with LCI, either to help get grants or by providing town funds to assist with a build-out, we are helping to build a monopoly that we have no leverage over on subsequent service or cost. LCI will own the portion of the network built with grants or town funds.
 - If we go the LCI route, we need to try to work out some terms for subsequent service levels, like a response time for connection requests. But we will have no leverage.
6. The committee members next discussed the municipal option. Key discussion points:
 - On the one hand, the Coalition appears to be moving slowly. They are at the very beginning of the process of developing a regional network. This could take years.
 - On the other hand, they are much further along than we are. They are planning to conduct an initial engineering study this summer, and they want to know which towns are in and which are not in before commissioning the study. We aren’t far enough along to be able to make a responsible recommendation to the Selectmen yet.
 - We need to tell the Selectmen that we should pursue both alternatives for the current time and seek more information before making a recommendation. We need cost and schedule information on both options. There seemed to be a general consensus among the committee members on this. And from LCI we need to know what arrangements we can work out regarding town-wide coverage, faster connections, and improved customer service.
7. The Coalition has asked participating towns to approve its “Guiding Principles” as a statement of its objectives. Approving this statement does not commit the towns to a particular course of action, or a funding commitment, but it does constitute an agreement on the target objective of the Coalition’s activities. After brief discussion, the members agreed to ask the Selectmen to approve the Guiding Principles.
8. The members agreed that a followup meeting with LCI was needed, to address the question of how to initiate a town-wide buildout of LCI’s network with FTTP connections. The date for the Committee’s next meeting was left open, pending coordination with LCI.

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Respectfully submitted,

John Gibbons
Secretary