

MINUTES

BROADBAND COMMITTEE

Monday, November 16, 2020

6:30 p.m.

Online Interactive

Committee members present: Adam Fuller, John Gibbons, Christine Norris, and Holly Savage

Others present: Jay Feyler, Catherine Meyer, and Erik Durbas

1. The meeting came to order as a Zoom session at 6:30 P.M.
2. The first order of business was to select officers. Christine agreed to serve as chair (with the deep appreciation of the committee!) John offered to serve as secretary.
3. The next agenda item was the adoption of a mission statement that captures what the committee is setting out to accomplish. After brief discussion, the Committee agreed on the following statement: “The objective of the Union Broadband Committee is to develop a plan for ensuring adequate broadband Internet access to all residents and businesses in the town, and to present the plan to the Selectmen for approval.”
4. The members discussed possible targets for future network performance throughout the town. To this end, the committee looked first to the access-speed targets adopted by federal and state agencies that are concerned with ensuring that citizen access to the Internet meets emerging needs.

It was reported that the ConnectME authority in the Maine DECD, which is responsible for promoting broadband Internet access across the State, has had a goal since 2018 of 100/10 mbps for Internet access networks funded by its grants. Recently, in preparation for another funding round to be opened in January 2021, ConnectME has proposed a set of objectives that include equal uplink and downlink target speeds. There is reason to believe that the organization will formally change its goal from the current 100/10 to 100/100 mbps in the coming months.

The committee did not attempt to set a firm target for Internet access speeds in this meeting, pending outreach to the public regarding needs and expectations.

5. The members discussed the need for outreach to the citizens and to the business community, in order to make sure that we understand their needs and expectations. Holly volunteered to be the point of contact with the business community through her work with the Chamber. John took an action to provide a brief summary of what the Committee is trying to do, and what information is needed from the business community, that could be used to initiate a dialog with the members of the Chamber.

A similar dialog with the residents is also needed. The members agreed that the results of the 2018 survey that Jay forward to us was a good start. The survey results showed general dissatisfaction with DSL, and general satisfaction with Spectrum cable in the (limited) areas that Spectrum serves. We'll need another survey, seeking updated information needs and uses trans-pandemic, after we get a bit further along.

6. The committee discussed reaching out to current ISPs, including Spectrum, Tidewater, and Redzone, to gather information on their coverage areas in Union, their actual speeds under various conditions, and their plans for further expansion and upgrades. Adam volunteered to contact Spectrum. John will contact Tidewater and Redzone. Depending on what we come up with, the members expressed an interest in having representatives of the ISPs at a future committee meeting.
7. The committee discussed contacting other municipalities that have been through the same process that the committee is undertaking, in order to query them about their experiences and lessons learned. There was brief discussion of Islesboro, Monhegan, and Hope, as recent examples. Adam mentioned that Calais has also been through this. A number of towns have ended up building their own municipally-owned networks (Islesboro, Monhegan, Calais), and then contracting with an operator to run and maintain it, and provide user tech support. Others (Hope) have tried partnering with an existing ISP at the outset.

A suggestion was made that Jay might be able to help us identify other such municipalities, through his own channels.

8. The committee agreed to hold its next meeting in two weeks, on Nov 30 at 6:30 P.M. via Zoom.