

Select Board Sidelines

June 9, 2021

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in the Sidelines are the individual thoughts of the Select Board member.

Submitted by Adam Fuller

Broadband Committee: To my fellow Union residents, I very much want to tell you about the great work that the broadband committee is doing to work towards improving the availability of high-speed internet in town. We have been meeting since late last year and over all have been pursuing two separate avenues for broadband expansion in town. We have been meeting with LCI Tidewater who currently has some fiber infrastructure in town, to discuss working together to go after a ConnectMaine grant to build out fiber runs in town and increase fiber access. We have also been participating in discussions with the Midcoast Broadband Coalition that is in the process of forming over the coming weeks as a municipal broadband utility. At this time, the committee has felt the best course of action has been to pursue both options to see which can better benefit the people of Union. Both from a long-term perspective and from a more immediate solution. Internet access is such a part of our daily lives and such a driver of business we know it needs to be a priority, and good access and options need to be made available to our more rural residents.

Two weeks ago, the select board agreed based on the recommendations of the committee to commit five thousand dollars to cover half of the cost of network engineering plan with LCI, with LCI covering the remainder of the cost. Based on this study the committee will meet with LCI and try and work out an agreement on a ConnectMaine grant. We hope to have the engineering and begin to work on the application potentially by mid to late summer. Possibly sooner. This money will be paid for from the infrastructure funding that the town will be receiving from the most recent federal stimulus.

Over the next week we will be meeting again to discuss if we should recommend committing to a similar amount to be part of the initial engineering of the network for the Midcoast Broadband Coalition as well. Both of these projects would hopefully be out of the engineering phase by late summer and at that point we should have a clear picture of not just what our best option for expansion in town will be but also an idea of timeframes, how much of Union they would cover, and if needed what kinds of costs to the town to bring us to a complete coverage for everyone with high-speed internet access. At that point we hope to have something concrete to bring to the select board and the voters. In the meantime, please reach out and let us know your concerns and opinions. I know many of you want faster service and better pricing and just know that we are working to make sure that improvements are coming. Feel free to join our committee meetings by zoom and let us know your thoughts as well.

Submitted by Bill Lombardi

Live Meetings and Closed Captioning: Starting with our next Select Board meeting on Tuesday, June 15 we will be meeting in person. For those not able to attend in person the meeting will be on Town Hall Streams. Unfortunately, it doesn't appear that our technology will accommodate a combined Zoom and in person meeting.

This led to a discussion about "Closed Caption" service. Zoom provides closed captioning without an additional charge. Town Hall Streams has closed captioning available at \$20 per hour.

Committee meeting will still be held via Zoom so closed captioning will remain available for the time being. Once Committee meeting change to in person we will have to make a decision on this service. Estimated cost for all meetings to be carried with closed captioning by Town Hall Streams is \$7,200. The Select Board decided to defer making a decision on this expenditure. We want to check the functionality of this service. There may be third party closed captioning services available without charge for those people who desire this service.

Stone Road property: The town owns a 25-acre parcel on Stone Rd near Bump Hill Rd. (The site of the former sludge holding tank.) We discussed selling the property. The idea of a park was brought forward. The town also owns other property on Bump Hill. We decided to hold off on the sale and investigate the possibility of recreational use for these properties. More information will be available as we discuss possibilities.

Aging in Place Senior Luncheon: Last day to register is Thursday June 10. This "to go" lunch for the age 55+ people will take place June 24. Hamburgers, hot dog, watermelon, and more will be served. Pick up is behind the town office.

Town Meeting: Saturday, June 12 at 10 AM behind the Town office. Hope to see you then!

A Special Tip of the Hat to John Shepard: In recognition of the end of John's term on the Select Board and a grateful acknowledgement of his 30 years of volunteerism to the Town of Union we Thank You!