

MINUTES

BROADBAND COMMITTEE TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2021 6:30 p.m. ONLINE INTERACTIVE

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

Others present: Jay Feyler

1. Chairman Adam Fuller called the meeting to order at 6:30 P.M.
2. The members deferred action on the draft minutes of the August 10th Committee meeting until the next meeting.
3. The first order of business was an update on the discussions with LCI regarding the potential for a complete town-wide buildout of LCI's fiber network, with connections to all premises. Key takeaways:
 - We have the complete engineering report prepared for LCI by Brian Lippold. Nothing has been held back.
 - The street-address spreadsheet and the graphics (fiber and cable maps) provide a basis for planning a complete fiber buildout throughout the town, with a few addresses omitted as being "too remote" to include in the completed network. The spreadsheet indicates that there are 247 addresses in Union that meet ConnectME's new criterion for "unserved" addresses, thereby qualifying for grant support.
 - The cost spreadsheet provides an initial planning basis for estimating the cost of a complete buildout. A grant to expand the network into "unserved" areas would help significantly, but there would still be a substantial amount to be funded by some combination of LCI and the town.
 - Alan Hinsey had informed the committee before the meeting that LCI couldn't discuss cost sharing between LCI and the town without Randal Manning being present. Randal Manning is expected to be available for a follow-on meeting in October.
 - Jay suggested that if the Selectmen decided to pursue a cost-sharing arrangement with LCI, it might be better to fund the Town's portion by a budget line item over a period of several years, rather than by a revenue bond. The reason is that under current accounting regulations, even a revenue bond would count toward the Town's total indebtedness, and that would raise the interest rate that we would face on future road bond issues.

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- Alan Hinsey suggested that we start thinking about what the Town would want from LCI in return for contributing part of the cost of building out the network.

4. The next order of business was an update on the status of the Midcoast Internet Coalition.

The Coalition held its regular monthly meeting on September 8th. Key takeaways:

- The Coalition's strategic focus continues to be the threat from OTELCO in Camden, Rockland, and Thomaston. The Coalition's primary internal activity continues to be seeking financing to begin an initial network build as quickly as possible.

- The Union segment of Axiom's feasibility study, originally expected by the end of August, has been delayed by shifting priorities, and is now expected by the end of September. The Axiom study is expected to establish a planning basis for extending the initial regional network to other towns, including Union.

5. The Committee discussed at some length the advantages and disadvantages of the two alternative approaches: providing financial support for an LCI buildout, vs participating in the development of the Coalition's regional network. Schedule and cost are key issues, and we don't have good data on either of them . . . especially the Coalition . . . at this stage.

As a result of the discussion, the committee decided on the following course of action:

- Request a follow-on meeting with LCI, to include Randal Manning, as early as possible in October, to discuss cost and schedule matters, and to secure LCI's commitment to pursue a grant from ConnectME in the November cycle

- Obtain the feasibility study from Axiom, and try to obtain from the Coalition whatever information might be available from which cost and schedule estimates could be formulated regarding extending the initial build of the regional network to include Union.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 p.m..

Respectfully submitted,

John Gibbons
Secretary