

Town of Auburn
Citizen Fiber Broadband Advisory Committee
May 17, 2021
Minutes
7:00 PM

Members Present: Keith Leclair, Beth Thomerson, Chris Rolfe, Sean Finegan and Jess Edwards

Others Present: Selectmen Todd Bedard and Michael Rolfe, Rob Koester, Consolidated Communications; Town Administrator William Herman and Nancy Hoijer, Recording Secretary

Call to Order

Mr. Leclair called the meeting to order at 7:06 PM.

Old Business

Mr. Herman reported the Request for Information (RFI) went out to the three providers (Comcast, Consolidated Communications and Granite State) on May 5th but no responses have been received yet. The providers have 60 days to respond. Rob Koester, who is an Auburn resident who works for Consolidated Communications, reported Consolidated received the RFI a few days ago and typically sends those out in 48 hours.

Discussion of Broadband Review Process

Rob Koester of Consolidated Communications presented an overview of the process the Town should undergo to implement a Warrant Article for Town Meeting to bond broadband infrastructure and, if that passes, a bond to provide the infrastructure to residents would be issued through the Town.

Mr. Koester noted Consolidated has worked with other communities such as Chesterfield, Walpole, Rindge, Dublin, Harrisville and Westmoreland and offered to provide additional references. There are 16 more towns coming through now. Chesterfield had 2,000 homes, Harrisville/Rindge had 3,500 and Greenfield 675. Multi-family residences are counted differently by the ISP than the town's assessing method. Mr. Herman estimated Auburn had 2,200-2,300 homes. Density of homes is another factor. Urban is considered to be 20 homes per square mile and the cost is roughly \$1,000-\$1,500 per home in those situations where suburban is 15 homes per square mile which increases the cost to \$1,700-\$2,000 per home. Rural would be less than 15 homes per square mile with an increase to \$2,500-\$3,000 per home. The super-rural category is about \$1,600 per home.

Mr. Koester explained how he arrived at the estimated bond amount of \$1.8 million dollars by comparing infrastructure improvements with other Towns the size, population and configuration of Auburn. The bond bank required the Town to own the asset so in 20 years when the bond is

paid off the Town would have three options: to start its own internet service; to have a new revenue source by extending the contract of the current vendor or contract with a new service provider to manage the system. The biggest factor for the overall project cost is what the ISP has for infrastructure in place right now. FairPoint laid fiber in recent years along two of the larger state roads in Auburn. The cost of the bond is captured in the monthly bill at about \$6-\$10/mo. and this is passed onto the town to use toward their bond payments. Every two years the infrastructure fee would be readjusted with the Town so at mid-point you might expect it to be lower, \$4-\$6 per month. That would be dependent on how the Town structures the bond with the NH Municipal Bond Bank – with either level payments for the life of the bond or a decreasing payment schedule with greater principal paid in the early years.

Mr. Finegan asked about when the bond was done and multiple ISPs. Mr. Koester noted it would be like the process to deregulate electricity. There would be an additional expense to set up multiple internet service providers.

Mr. Finegan asked about the connection from pole to house. Mr. Koester noted different ISPs will treat that cost differently. Consolidated does not charge the homeowner for additional installation unless a conduit is needed because it is private property or a private right of way or Class VI road the homeowner would be responsible for the conduit. Trailer parks would be one example. Some neighborhoods who are newer developments with underground utilities may already have those conduits.

Mr. Koester cautioned to watch out for ISPs who overstate their coverage in town. Providers must provide address level specifics. Also, the town wants to make sure it gets paid regardless of the number of subscribers and should ask ISPs if there is a minimum number of subscribers. 40% is the general rule. The town should request a cost average statewide.

Mr. Leclair asked the goal for subscription and Mr. Koester expected to see upwards of 62% in Auburn.

Mr. Edwards arrived at 8:00 PM.

Mr. Rolfe asked about the lifespan of the fiber. Mr. Koester noted the financial lifespan is about 30 years. 1G service will grow to 5-10 G over time and on speed will be determined by the consumer's available technology inside the home. Speed will not likely increase if consumers are using aged out technology inside the home. Mr. Edwards cautioned not to oversell the service being promised due to those factors. Mr. Koester noted prices would range from \$35/mo. for 50mg, \$55/mo. for 250mg.

New Business

Mr. Leclair recommended each member reach out to one of the contacts from Chesterfield, Westmoreland and Walpole. Mr. Herman will assign one to each member tonight and provide the contact information.

Mr. Herman noted the NH Office of Strategic Initiatives (OSI) is holding a webinar on Thursday regarding broadband experience with the Town of Bristol on Thursday from noon to 1 PM. Mr. Koester noted Bristol utilized federal Cares Act funding made available by the State of New Hampshire.

Mr. Leclair noted the Monadnock Guide is posted on the Auburn's webpage and is a good resource document.

Review May 3rd Meeting Minutes

Mrs. Thomerson motioned to approve the May 3, 2021 meeting minutes. Mr. Finegan seconded the motion. A vote was taken, Mr. Leclair abstained, Mrs. Thomerson voted aye, Mr. Finegan voted aye, Mr. Rolfe voted aye, Mr. Edwards voted aye. The motion passed 4-0-1.

Next Meeting/Events

Monday, June 14, 2021 – 7:00 PM – Town Hall

Adjourn

Mr. Finegan motioned to adjourn at 8:15 PM. Mrs. Thomerson seconded the motion. A vote was taken, all were in favor, the motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy Hoijer
Recording Secretary