

**Town of Auburn
Broadband Committee
May 3, 2021
Minutes
7:00 PM**

Members Present: Beth Thomerson, Chris Rolfe, David Oliveira, Jan Gonsalves, Jess Edwards, and Sean Finegan

Others Present: Town Clerk Kathy Sylvia, Selectmen Todd Bedard and Michael Rolfe, Town Administrator William Herman and Nancy Hoijer, Recording Secretary

Call to Order

Mr. Bedard called the meeting to order at 7:02 PM.

Committee Organization/Introduction of Members

Town Clerk Kathy Sylvia provided each of the members with an Oath of Office which they read out loud and signed. Mr. Edwards took his oath earlier. Mr. Gonsalves took his oath with Selectman Bedard.

After the members were sworn in, each member introduced themselves. Ms. Thomerson moved to Auburn from Derry in 1999 with her husband and is a technical writing manager at Medidata Solutions (a Dassault Systemes Company). She hopes her experience in research, analysis and writing will be helpful to the committee. Mr. Edwards has been a resident of Auburn for eight years and has an IT planning and project management background. Mr. Rolfe works with cellular systems, towers and mapping. Mr. Gonsalves has been a software development manager for 10 years developing network maintenance software. Mr. Finegan has 35-years' experience troubleshooting electronic technology and is frustrated with the lack of choice. Mr. Oliveira works in high tech, aerospace/defense and cybersecurity. Selectman Bedard noted that he works for Consolidated, one of the companies who would be putting a bid in should things move in that direction, but his interest in attending the Committee meeting is as a citizen who experiences Comcast's service as spotty at best. Selectman Rolfe agreed the Town pays a premium for service that could be better. He noted with broadband service would not be lost if customers have a generator.

Committee Purpose and Effort – Todd Bedard, Selectman

Mr. Chris Rolfe noted FairPoint had installed some fiber infrastructure in Town. Mr. Bedard indicated they had, to his knowledge, installed along Route 28 and Candia Road which is fairly new.

Mr. Bedard noted approximately 20 NH Towns have gone through this process. The Committee has the opportunity to meet with other people who have already gone through this process.

Most are in the western part of the State. Auburn would be among the first towns in the central southern NH area.

Review of RSA 33:3-g – Broadband Infrastructure Bonds and RSA 38:38 through 38:41 – Broadband Access

Mr. Herman provided copies of RSA 33:3-g Broadband Infrastructure Bonds and RSA 38:38 Broadband Access, RSA 38:39 Broadband Access Tariffs, RSA 38:40 Broadband Fund and RSA 38:41 Broadband Fund Report.

Mr. Herman acknowledged the Board of Selectmen has heard citizens are not happy overall with the current level of service provided, but the municipality can only do what State law allows them to do. The RSA allows municipalities to look at that and RSA 33:3-g allows the Town to float a note to bring infrastructure into place for the cost, estimated for Auburn to be \$1.5 million dollars. The Board of Selectmen are looking for citizen input.

Review of Model – Request for Information on Broadband Coverage

Mr. Herman included a copy of a Model Template he requested from NH Department of Business & Economic Affairs to address and send to current broadband providers to request coverage information for served locations in Town as defined by RSA 38:38, I (c). Per RSA 33-3g, III the current providers would have 60 days to respond.

Mr. Herman explained he felt the first step in the process is to prepare a Request for Information (RFI) to send to providers requesting information, such as a map, speed, velocity and coverage. Should things move forward to the point the Committee recommends the Town move to advance a bond question to the voters in March 2022, the Selectmen would have to hold a public hearing in January 2022. For that to happen, the Committee would have to reach a decision in November or December 2021.

Mr. Edwards questioned the definition in the template of “underserved” and loaded or unloaded bandwidth. The template states “An unserved location is defined as a location that does not have access to at least 25 Mbps download/3 Mbps upload speeds (25 Mbps/3 Mbps).” “The location does not have to be subscribing to this service if available, but the service must be available at the street location to qualify as served.” Mr. Oliveira indicated per the Monadnock Guide the FCC indicates it doesn’t need to be that specific.

Mr. Edwards questioned if customers had at least 25 Mbps but did not like the price. Mr. Herman noted he believes the intent of the Legislature was that they don’t want municipalities to provide competition to private vendors. Mr. Edwards agreed that sentiment exists in the Legislature.

Mr. Oliveira noted according to the FCC Broadband Map Auburn has 3-4 choices if you include satellite servers. Mr. Bedard noted a member of the Rindge Committee who is an attorney indicated he could make the argument either way. Mr. M-Rolfe referenced the requirement that the service must be available at the street location to qualify as served. Mr. Bedard noted it

must “go by” the address, not to. It must be available at the street location. Mr. Edwards recommended getting the information anyway from all available carriers. Mr. Finegan noted .9% have access to one or fewer. Auburn is 95% connected, one of the highest communities in New Hampshire behind Derry and Manchester.

Mr. Herman noted the RFI would go to Comcast to get the base information and if they don’t respond you would assume there is no service.

Mr. Finegan asked about the Town’s negotiations with Comcast and contracts to provide service to the community. Mr. Herman explained the Town has issued a franchise agreement to Comcast to provide cable TV service only with approximately five years left of a 10-year agreement. But he stressed it does not involve phone or internet as municipalities have no regulatory authority in those areas. Auburn receives a franchise fee of three percent of Comcast’s billings, which he estimated was approximately \$60,000 a year in revenue. In addition, the Town receives an additional \$3,000 annually as a technology grant which is used for technology in the Town offices. He said the franchise agreement is posted on the Town’s website, and he would forward the link to the committee members.

Mr. Oliveira asked about DSL and Mr. Bedard indicated he did not believe DSL was hitting 25 Mbps. Mr. Edwards noted there is nothing wrong with asking, it may support that they aren’t providing service and the need to bring in more.

Mr. Oliveira asked the outcome of the 20 NH Towns that switched, and Mr. Bedard noted all but one went with Consolidated and the one that went with another provider did not get the timeline provided by Consolidated. Rindge voted at Town meeting and the first customer went up in April. It may take longer than that if more Towns are vying for connections.

Mr. Gonsalves asked how long until the last customer and Mr. Bedard noted Rindge had 2,500 residents so 900 houses were wired. Connections were installed as requested. Once the infrastructure is laid out, it is just a matter of connecting the copper to the house. Mr. Chris Rolfe noted the connection cost could be high, approximately \$600 for houses with longer driveways like his.

Mr. Bedard reminded the Committee will have the opportunity to reach out to other communities to share experiences. Some went together as a group and others on their own.

Mr. Oliveira motioned to send the Request for Information to Comcast. Mr. Gonsalves seconded the motion.

Ms. Thomerson noted she didn’t see a downside to sending to Consolidated as well. And Mr. Edwards suggested Granite State Communications as well.

Mr. Oliveira and Mr. Gonsalves accepted the suggestion as a friendly amendment. A vote was taken, all were in favor, the motion passed unanimously.

Review of RSA 91-A/Right to Know Law Standards – Bill Herman

Mr. Herman explained the Committee is appointed as a government board and is therefore subject to RSA 91-A, the Right to Know Law. Meetings will be posted at Town Hall, Post Office and the Town website. All committee meetings are open to the public, and meeting minutes will be kept which are also available to the public. Mr. Herman discouraged members from discussing things outside of the meetings and not hitting “reply all” during email exchanges so that those emails won’t become a meeting.

Next Meeting/Events:

Monday, May 17, 2021 – 7:00 PM – Town Hall. Mr. Herman noted a representative from Consolidated would come to the meeting on the 17th.

Adjourn

Mr. Edwards motioned to adjourn at 7:57 PM. Mr. Rolfe seconded the motion. A vote was taken, all were in favor, the motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy Hoijer
Recording Secretary