

Town of Auburn
Citizen Fiber Broadband Advisory Committee
July 19, 2021
Minutes
7:00 PM

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

Others Present: Todd Bedard, Town Administrator William Herman and Nancy Hoijer, Recording Secretary

Call to Order

Mr. Leclair called the meeting to order at 7:04 PM.

Report on Contacts with Other Municipalities – Chris Rolfe

Mr. Rolfe reported on his consultations with John Snowden, a representative of the Town of Westmoreland who served on their broadband committee. Westmoreland chose Consolidated Communications (“CCI”) as their provider. Mr. Rolfe provided bullet point notes from his discussions.

Mr. Rolfe reported Westmoreland started from scratch and spent about 800 hours of time. Under “What went well” Mr. Snowden reported to Mr. Rolfe that CCI was great to work with and their explanations were found to be truthful throughout the process.

Mr. Rolfe noted there were some issues with charging to run fiber to a hilly road. In the winter when cable could not be run underground, they offered to run it above and come back.

Mr. Edwards asked about bullet point #4 and customer service with the newness of broadband service and the rates offered. Mr. Rolfe noted they appeared satisfied with CCI but outside contractors were often used for the installations and customer service representatives not initially well informed. Rates were promotional which is in line with what Rob Koester had indicated during his meeting with this Committee. Mr. Leclair agreed Mr. Koester stated rates could change, they would start with a couple of years contract. Mr. Bedard noted CCI has phased out their mid-range tier because it was not being used much.

This Committee had discussed at an earlier meeting asking the question of what happens if bankruptcy is considered. Mr. Rolfe reported Westmoreland took the leap of faith approach that if the provider went out of business the nearest provider could take over with little cost. Mr. Leclair noted this would be an issue if the Town were still paying for the bonding and there was no income coming from the vendor.

Mr. Rolfe asked about data caps and was informed CCI currently has no data caps and Westmoreland was told they have no plans to have them. Their partner providers have no caps, but this is not something they have control over. He is assuming this means companies like internet hubs.

Discussion of Broadband Review Process & Vendor Information

Mr. Edwards noted he was on vacation and doesn't know the status of the infrastructure bill. Mr. Herman noted there is a \$1.2 trillion bipartisan bill but all of it is still under discussion. His understanding was the initial voting was scheduled on July 21st.

Mr. Finegan discussed the RFI provided by Comcast. They did not provide the criteria the RFI requested but stated it was not required to be provided by RSA. They did not indicate the number of surveyed respondents. Mr. Edwards noted Comcast is suggesting that none of Auburn is underserved. Mr. Herman indicated Comcast believes their answer takes bonding off the table. Mr. Olivera noted the map Comcast provided is not a response; the Town asked for something address specific, and they did not provide that.

Mr. Edwards questioned whether there may be federal funds without involving bonding.

Mr. Leclair asked the Committee to consider if Comcast should be invited to come in and asked if the Committee had any questions for them. Mr. Olivera noted Comcast did not provide what the Town asked them for. Mr. Leclair noted legislation may be changing soon to eliminate the "underserved" requirement in the bonding process, within the next 12-18 months. Mr. Herman agreed and noted Senator Bradley has indicated to another community he was willing to sponsor the bill to remove that language. Mr. Leclair recommended running Comcast's response letter by Town Counsel.

Mr. Edwards asked when the Town would vote, and Mr. Herman indicated at Town Meeting in March however this Committee needs to have everything ready to go before late December. There are steps prior to voting such as public hearings and review with the Budget Committee. The Warrant Article must be written first and reviewed by counsel.

Mr. Edwards asked if a Warrant Article could have conditional language in it. Mr. Herman said it could be checked, but he has the feeling it would not be acceptable to bond counsel. Mr. Leclair disagreed with presenting it one way to the public and then going a different way.

Mr. Bedard noted there were main fibers run on NH Route 121, Manchester Road, Old Candia Road and 28 By-Pass already that he knew of.

Mr. Finegan questioned whether the increased valuation from the new infrastructure would be of concern to taxpayers.

Next Steps

Mr. Rolfe recommended the next step be to find out whether the Town can use this bond.

Mr. Edwards noted Comcast could be invited in and everything they didn't answer could be a question.

Mr. Edwards will follow up with Senator Bradley. Mr. Herman noted the Town of Bedford is waiting until the law changes and working with Senator Bradley.

Mr. Herman will send a copy of Comcast's response to Town Counsel.

Review Meeting Minutes of June 28th Meeting

Mr. Edwards motioned to accept the minutes of the June 28, 2021 meeting, seconded by Mr. Finegan. With all in favor, the motion passed unanimously.

Next Meeting/Events

The next meeting will be August 9, 2021 at 7:00 PM.

Adjourn

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

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy Hoijer
Recording Secretary