

Office of the Broadband Committee

Town of Halifax
PO Box 127
West Halifax, Vermont 05358

Meeting Minutes

Approved: November 16, 2020

Date: Monday, October 26, 2020, 7-8:30PM

Place: Conference Call

Attending: Committee members: Tristan Roberts, Bob Teree, Stephan Chait, and David Jones.
Visitor: Edee Edwards

Notes By: David Jones

Call to Order

Tristan Roberts called the meeting to order at 7:01PM.

Changes and Additions to Agenda

None. Tristan noted the agenda was generic for the last two meetings.

Review and Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Stephan Chait moved to accept the minutes of the September 21 meeting. Tristan Roberts seconded the motion. All present agreed. The minutes were approved.

Old Business

DVFiber Status

DVFiber held its monthly governing Board meeting last week. Weston was accepted as the sixteenth member. Since that meeting, Dummerston's Selectboard has voted to join. They will be accepted at the November meeting.

The Governing Board approved a draft 2020 Annual Report and distributed the report to Selectboards and Town Clerks. Selectboards will have the opportunity to present questions about the budget at a public meeting to be held on November 11. Our committee should be represented at the next Selectboard meeting to solicit input.

The 2021 budget contained in the Annual Report is taken from the recently published Business Plan. It will be further detailed by year-end to authorize specific expenditures.

DVFiber wrote a preliminary proposal asking to be considered for a grant from the Northern Borders Regional Commission. To our surprise and delight, we were asked to submit a full proposal. A task force is working on the grant proposal now. The proceeds would pay for half of a pole study for remaining towns and preliminary engineering. The grant proposal will be followed by a fundraising campaign to raise the matching funds. The fundraising plan is in development. Vice Chair Steven John and Communications Committee head Zon Estes are developing the fundraising plan.

David thanked Tristan for getting announcements of the Halifax pole study onto Front Porch Forum and the town's website.

Windham Regional Commission presented the Business Plan. We will build on this plan as we go forward.

DVFiber obtained a Certificate of Public Good from the Public Service Department that is required in order for us to provide service.

A new website is in development, a newsletter is now available, and a Facebook page has been set up.

Tristan asked if there is anything more that can be said qualitatively about the CUD's progress. David said we are moving forward as fast as possible. The timelines in the Business Plan are the best we have to go on now. We have engaged Carole Monroe, the lead consultant for the Business Plan, is advising us on a weekly basis. The prohibition on communication regarding RDOF will be removed when results are announced in a month or two.

David said Tristan will be contacted by Omar Smith (Readsboro) or Jeff Such (Londonderry) and asked to locate possible hub sites in town. This will require inquiries around town to get ideas to present to Omar and Jeff. We need to complete this task in weeks not months. Bob Teree asked for further information. David said we expect to have one hub in Halifax. The Business Plan describes the required characteristics. The hub can be an outdoor cabinet located on a concrete pad at a central location where there is access to electrical and generator.

The specific addresses to which the Public Service Department awarded subsidies to VTel to serve are now known. There are 38 locations on Hansen, Collins, Hatch School, and Wheeler Roads. There may be a need for volunteers to measure signal at these sites to verify service is actually provided, not unlike the mobile drive test. DVFiber made the policy choice of not standing in the way of any vendor providing service in the short term but wants to ensure that any subsidies achieve the actual goal of speeds in excess of 25/3.

New Business

Public Service Department Requests: CARES Act Grant Uses

The CUD is short of ideas for applying CARES Act funds. David had sent out a bullet point list of the types of projects that might qualify. Projects need to be completed when the CARES Act expires; the deadline is now December of this year but could be extended. One of the approved uses is setting up a

WiFi hotspot. We have discussed this previously. The key constraint for us is availability of signal at broadband speeds.

Edee Edwards said she had tried to use the WiFi hotspot at the Town Garage. It did not connect. She speculated this could be due to the town domain name change. Bob Teree said these two events were probably unrelated and the router probably needs a reboot. Edee said there used to be a message that mentioned the old town website. She used to be the site administrator but has no idea of who administrates it now. Tristan suggested Paul Blais may be the administrator. Edee will contact Robbin Gabriel to find out if Paul or someone else is the administrator.

Edee suggested that the Halifax Community Club would be an ideal location for a hotspot. The Community Hall was created originally to help the needy. David said he has been trying to learn from Consolidated and FirstLight whether there is any possibility of getting signal to that area.

Bob Teree asked whether we could ask a private citizen to open up their personal WiFi. David said the user would need to have adequate bandwidth to support multiple users and would need to be comfortable with allowing strangers access their personal system.

David said he had wondered if there was a way to set up a hotspot at the tower in Halifax Center but there was no parking area and this could be dangerous.

Bob asked whether we can get a VTel account and provide it at a public place. David said we would need to pay for an unknown volume of data, which VTel sells in 50GB chunks.

Tristan suggested that a good use of funds could be market research to do a post-Covid survey of distance learning and telehealth needs. David said this was a good idea to bring forward.

Public Service Department Requests: CARES Act Broadband Subsidies

The Public Service Department has set up a program for anyone who has suffered an economic challenge to get a \$40 monthly credit to pay a portion of their internet costs retroactive to March. Tristan said the process is simple and requires you to simply attest to your needs. There is no maximum income level. Independent contractors are eligible. Tristan will post on Front Purch Forum. He will ask to have it posted on the town website. Bob will post on the Facebook page.

Oher Business

David said the CUD has rescheduled its November and December Governing Board meetings to November 11 and December 9, both one week earlier than normal. We decided to change the date of the November meeting from November 23 to November 16 and the December meeting from December 21 to December 14.

Hearing of Visitors

No additional topics this month.

Adjournment

Stephan moved the meeting should adjourn. Tristan seconded the motion. All present agreed. The meeting was adjourned at 7:46PM. The next meeting is scheduled for Monday, November 16.