

## Office of the Broadband Committee

Town of Halifax  
PO Box 127  
West Halifax, Vermont 05358

### **Meeting Minutes**

Approved: November 16, 2020

Date: Monday, September 21, 2020, 7-8:30PM

Place: Conference Call

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

Notes By: David Jones

### **Call to Order**

Tristan Roberts called the meeting to order at 7:02PM.

### **Changes and Additions to Agenda**

None.

### **Review and Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes**

Stephan Chait moved to accept the minutes of the August 24 meeting. Tristan Roberts seconded the motion. All present agreed except Cara Cheyette who abstained because she had not attended. The minutes were approved.

### **Old Business**

#### **DVFiber Status**

The DVFiber Governing Board met on Wednesday, September 16. We await receipt of two grants but are putting to use the Vermont Community Foundation grant.

The Business Plan is about to be published. In the September 16 Governing Board meeting, Steven John presented a flow chart and description of the work that needs to be done to establish a network. The description of work shows that this is a major undertaking. How fast we work though all the steps will depend on how much money we have to work with, which in turn will be driven by how much money we can raise.

The task force that is working on fundraising has members from each Committee – Vendor, Finance, and Communications. Ellen Seidman, the Londonderry Representative, is leading the Task Force. The Task Force has issued a letter of intent for the Northern Borders program. The letter was well done. Even if we don't succeed, we will benefit from the experience and will be able to engage in dialog with the Northern Borders staff about future opportunities.

We have applied for a Certificate of Public Good, which is required to provide service in Vermont.

We issued a comment on the second round of Connectivity Initiative proposals from incumbent vendors. We decided not to stand in the way if the incumbent vendors could indeed provide broadband speeds of 25/3 or better. We asked the Department to verify that service was actually delivered at these speeds. We also noted that these subsidies are making it more difficult for us to get a high take rate early on and therefore are reducing the attractiveness of our business case for providing universal service. The incumbents are aiming to serve the most attractive locations. We rely on having a mix of attractive and unattractive locations to make our non-profit business case work. We understand that none of the proposals offered in the second round were accepted by the Public Service Department.

Cara said she appreciated the logic of not standing in the way of anyone getting service and asked about the proposals that the Public Service Department rejected. David said the largest proposal was from VTel Wireless to support a large number of locations in Readsboro and Whitingham and a few in Halifax. DVCUD's comments to the Public Service Department focused on the need for verification that the proposed locations do not have the required speeds now and that the promised speeds are actually achieved when the subsidized work is completed. The Public Service Department is able to reject our input and, even if we express strong objections, does not need to tell us why they are accepting or rejecting our position. The Department is understaffed and does not have the luxury of communicating every element of their decision process. Although there were no grants for Halifax locations in Round 2, there were some in Round 1.

At the Governing Board meeting, Munson Hicks of Vernon asked whether Representatives or Broadband Committees should take the lead in publicizing the availability of subsidies that will pay for the customer portion of cable line extension costs. These subsidies are available from another program created for Covid-19 relief. Steven John said that in Marlboro, he gave the information to residents but left it to them to do the legwork.

We had expected to use most of a Community Resilience grant funded by CARES Act money to pay for consulting assistance but were unable to find qualified consultants that were available to help us. The Governing Board agreed to repurpose the funds to conduct a pole study of three towns. We were advised to conduct pole studies in adjacent towns and Readsboro had already completed a pole study so we focused on towns adjacent to Readsboro, of which Halifax is one. The pole study is the first step in the construction process. A study for the whole district would cost \$375-500,000. This initial study covers a fraction of the total scope.

In response to questions, David said that Halifax will always be close to the top of the list of underserved towns and will be among the first to be served but may not be the first because the CUD has to consider how much revenue can be generated in the initial build locations in order to be able to create a track record of financial responsibility. The take rate that we can achieve will be a factor in the order of construction.

Cara Cheyette said that, from her experience, the fact that we are among the most underserved towns is both bad news and good news because the case for getting us served is stronger than for other towns that are better off now.

Tristan asked what legwork we can do to build interest so that when the take rate is measured, our town is prepared to respond. David said the Communications strategy will come from the Communications Committee. They will develop the message and how it is delivered. Then “feet on the ground” will execute the strategy.

Zon Eastes of Guilford leads the Communications Committee. They hired a web developer to redevelop the website and will have a social outreach program. The name DVFiber will be used instead of “Deerfield Valley Communications Union District. They are seeking photos to use on the website. The photos should be of town landmarks or people using the internet. Photos should be sent to Ann Manwaring. Cara noted that showing people (or pets) using the internet might create cognitive dissonance because we don’t have broadband. Tristan said we should maybe show people in a parking lot using a hotspot.

The Communications Committee meets on Tuesdays at 5PM. This is one of many volunteer openings. The organization is developing well and has talented leaders in communications, fundraising, and other functions. The best choice of what to be involved in should be based on what you are most interested in. ACTION: David will send contact information for Ann Manwaring, Zon Eastes, and Ellen Seidman, who leads the fundraising task force.

Tristan noted that the District is growing and developing quickly and is appreciated.

**New Business**

None.

**Oher Business**

None.

**Hearing of Visitors**

No additional topics this month.

**Adjournment**

Cara moved the meeting should adjourn. Stephan Chait seconded the motion. All present agreed. The meeting was adjourned at 7:37PM. The next meeting is scheduled for Monday, October 26.