

Office of the Broadband Committee

Town of Halifax
PO Box 127
West Halifax, Vermont 05358

Meeting Minutes

Approved: January 25, 2021

Date: Monday, December 14, 2020, 7-8:30PM

Place: Conference Call

Attending: Committee members: Tristan Roberts, Bob Teree, Stephan Chait, Cara Cheyette, and David Jones.

Notes By: David Jones

Call to Order

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

Changes and Additions to Agenda

None.

Review and Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Bob Teree moved to accept the minutes of the November 11 meetings as written. Tristan Roberts seconded the motion. All present agreed. The minutes were approved.

Old Business

DVFiber Status Report

David Jones reported on the progress of DVFiber as reported at the Governing Board meeting of December 9.

Newfane joined DVFiber, bringing the total number of towns to twenty. One of our state representatives helped a Newfane citizen to urge the Selectboard to join. Bob said that Eric Lineback, the Representative from Dummerston, is an old friend. David said that Eric was instrumental in getting Dummerston to join the CUD and will be helpful on the Communications Committee. Townshend is the town that would fill in the most obvious gap in the CUD service area.

Ellen Seidman reported to the Governing Board that DVFiber has applied for a \$30,000 grant from the USDA.

Thomas Almeida presented the updated 2021 budget, which the Board approved. The budget is based on the amounts in the Business Plan prepared by the Windham Regional Commission. Specific expenditures to be authorized are broken out of larger, more general amounts from the business plan. Every expenditure must be specifically authorized by the Governing Board.

David reported to the Board that the Pole Study is complete. Matrix presented the pole study to the CUD Vendor Committee before this meeting and will make the complete database available to us.

Hub locations have been identified in all towns except one.

There are 18 Wi-Fi hotspots installed in the DVFiber service area now. None are in Halifax because the only usable signal is the fiber link to the School and the School Board did not want to share this with the general public. Close to Halifax, there are hotspots at the Whitingham Library, the Marlboro town office, the old school building in Wilmington, and somewhere in Guilford. DVFiber may install signs to show people where the hotspots are.

The Communications Committee has largely completed the communications infrastructure for external and internal communication and for fundraising. The next step will be organizing a pre-subscription campaign or some other program for identifying our potential customers.

David said that we had a discussion at the close of today's Vendor Committee meeting about how to reach out to our communities. One way is to use software tools but we will also need hands-on, grass-roots person-to-person outreach. The Communications Committee will now begin to focus on how to develop the customer base using both software and personal outreach. Understanding the potential customer base will be important for attracting vendor interest and for obtaining financing. The grass-roots organizing will be where local committees like ours will get engaged.

David said that In the RDOF auction, four firms won areas of Vermont. Consolidated won the largest areas. In our area, consolidated won about \$4 million of subsidies and Starlink got a little under \$500 thousand, both paid over a 10 year period. Both vendors must fulfill service obligations associated with the subsidies. They must provide service to all locations in the areas they won; customers don't have to take the service but the service must be made available. The \$4 million won by Consolidated is about 10% of the total cost to build in our area, as determined by the Business Plan so it is not such a large percentage as to determine which vendor(s) we must partner with. But now that all vendors have this information, they can provide informed responses to the RFP we will issue.

Tristan said he was not happy that the RDOF subsidy does not seem to help the CUD. David said the program is designed to favor the incumbent vendors. The award to Starlink is like the award to Viasat in the CAF-II auction – even worse because the satellite companies need to do nothing on the ground to earn the subsidies.

Looking at Halifax specifically, of the 600 buildings that are occupied (e.g., houses, not outbuildings), the FCC had identified 214 buildings that did not have good service. This is ridiculous because virtually no building in Halifax has good service. The FCC's counts of eligible locations seem to be constructed by

multiplying the actual number of unserved and underserved locations by a random fraction. The amount awarded to Consolidated for each of the identified locations was about half of the estimated average cost per location but this amount was awarded to only a fraction of the locations. Subsidies for Halifax were a higher percentage of the actual cost than in any other CUD town but the amount per location was still a fraction of the actual cost. The subsidy amounts are so low that it is not clear whether we should work with Consolidated or work around them. Before we issue the RFP, we will consult with Consolidated and other vendors. After vendors respond to our RFP, we will get a better idea of how to proceed.

David added that DV Fiber has submitted a report to be included in the Town Report. David circulated this to the Committee. The focus is on the need for volunteer action. Stephan noted that the report does not include a restatement of the CUD's mission. We may want to supplement this with a report from this Committee. Action: Stephan Chait will find out the deadline for submitting a contribution to the Town Report.

New Business

None.

Other Business

None.

Hearing of Visitors

None

Adjournment

Stephan Chait moved the meeting should adjourn. Tristan seconded the motion. All present agreed. The meeting was adjourned at 7:29PM.