

## **Office of the Broadband Committee**

Town of Halifax  
PO Box 127  
West Halifax, Vermont 05358

### **Meeting Minutes**

Draft: February 19, 2021

Date: Monday, January 25, 2021, 7-8:30PM

Place: Conference Call

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

Notes By: David Jones

### **Call to Order**

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

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

None.

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

Cara Cheyette moved to accept the minutes of the December 14 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 January 20. The focus of the meeting was on questions and concerns of Governing Board members. In most previous meetings, the subject matter was procedural and organizational, little room for more open discussion. Most communication had been outward from the Committee leads to the Board rather than the reverse.

The summary was that the needs of the towns vary significantly. There is similarity between Phase One towns – they have no broadband in any areas. Other towns, in contrast, have broadband in some areas. Brattleboro and Guilford are examples. David reported he had driven around Guilford and had

determined that a large portion of the town is cabled. To not be cabled is the exception in Guilford is the exception, not the rule.

The most consistently expressed concerns were a) a desire to be connected most quickly and b) a desire to learn more about the details of what the Committees are doing. In many communities that are partially cabled, there is not the same political interest in getting service to underserved areas as there is here and in our neighboring towns. In particular, there was an interest in beginning a pilot program in order to show that there is forward motion.

After this discussion, the Board went into Executive Session to report what the Vendor Committee had learned from Consolidated under a non-disclosure agreement. There was a similar meeting a week later with Great Works Internet.

The District is reaching the point of releasing a Request for Proposals to select vendor partners. An RFP is mandatory. The process of getting vendor responses and evaluating these responses will take months of work.

Stephan Chait added that Laura Sibilgia attended the public meeting. She had much positive praise for the District. She explained how the House Energy and Technology (HET) Committee is focused on directing available state and federal funds to CUDs. David added that the legislation may include strengthening of a broadband loan program administered by the Vermont Economic Development Authority (VEDA). After Gov. Scott's address to the state on January 26, the HET Committee will introduce new draft legislation for discussion.

Stephan added that the comments of the town Representatives expressed a tension between demonstrating that DVFiber can provide service and working carefully to ensure that the service is provided in a reliable, sustainable way. There is also a catch-22 in that we can't gain financing until we have definite plan to work with specific vendors and we can't get the vendors' work started without the financing. David added that we don't want to move in a wrong direction, which would waste our resources. Stephan added that a strategic misfire would be harmful to our reputation. A pilot program would need to follow rather than precede a clear and agreed-upon strategy.

Edee Edwards said the competitive marketplace is not providing useful choices for our area. She can't get anything beyond DSL – no broadcast TV or cell service. We can't prove that we can support the profit aspirations of the commercial providers. The only practical way to get broadband service here will be to get it as a municipal utility that provides a public good. We need to make this work somehow without relying on individuals with deep pockets. David remarked that we would love to find someone with deep pockets to get us started most quickly. The CUD is learning there is an established market for debt financing.

Tristan asked why a commercial provider would want to cooperate with the CUD. David said that mobile service providers will offer a high-end iPhone if you switch. This is because this is the least expensive way to acquire customers. A commercial provider that we felt partnering with could count on us to generate demand most effectively. We could take the time to show our residents what the benefits of the service can be. This will enable us to bring customers to the partnership that commercial providers would not attract. The CUD also has an ability to issue tax-free debt to raise capital at a yield that is attractive to investors and most affordable for us.

Edee noted that the Covid-19 crisis has been a precipitating event that has expanded the need for broadband here. We have been talking about broadband here for 15 years. Now that there are new residents and new energy and a change in the federal administration, we can take advantage of this to make it happen. We should assume that more demand exists than existed before. She wondered whether it is time to reach out to town residents. Tristan said this direction is correct but the timing may be a bit premature.

Edee asked what citizens can do to affect the upcoming legislation. David said the first step would be to listen to the Governor's budget address and meetings of the House Energy and Technology committee. These can be found on YouTube. Stephan noted that the District welcomes volunteers on all committees and that these volunteers need not be members of the Governing Board. David said any citizen can tune in to any of the meetings to learn what is happening and determine how he or she might want to contribute. The meeting times are posted on the DVFiber.net website.

### **New Business**

None.

### **Oher Business**

None.

### **Hearing of Visitors**

Edee Edwards asked if the Broadband Committee had submitted a budget to be included in the town Budget. Tristan said the money the CUD will need to spend will exceed any amount the town might vote to allocate.

### **Adjournment**

Stephan Chait moved the meeting should adjourn. Tristan seconded the motion. All present agreed. The meeting was adjourned at 7:43PM.