

Grafton County, New Hampshire
Grafton County Broadband Committee Meeting MINUTES
Wednesday, April 28, 2021
10:00 AM

Call to Order at 10:05 AM by Nik Coates.

ATTENDANCE: Carina Park (Town Administrator, Campton), Brigitte Codling (Town Manager, Haverhill), Mike Samson (Town Administrator, Canaan), Andrew Dorsett (Grafton County Administrator), Nik Coates (Town Administrator, Bristol). A quorum was met. Kevin Glynn (eX²), Kaitlyn Robinson (NCIC), Mike Calvert (NCIC).

Members of the Public:

Bill Darcy (NH Electric Coop and Town of Benton)
Bonnie Labrie (Town of Canaan)
John Adams (Town of Orford)
John Wright (Town of Landaff)
Alasdair Dunlap-Smith (Town of Orange)

MINUTES REVIEW

MOTION #1: Samson made a motion and Codling seconded the motion to approve the meeting minutes from **Thursday, April 8th.**

Roll Call Vote: Mike Samson (Yes), Carina Park (Yes), Nik Coates (Yes), Andrew Dorsett (Yes). The motion passed unanimously.

BUSINESS MODELS & PLANNING

Samson presented an update on his findings, recommendations, and next steps. He sent the committee members a copy of a couple of documents including public partnerships and commented that he wanted to use these articles as a framework for an article about pure public and private public to include specific components of NH state law. In light of that, he has asked Sean to give some help. Discussed topics are to include poll access, bonds, franchising, exclusive franchising, economic subsidies, and tax increment finance. The plan is to first understand the risks and the role of municipality, then to take a look at community investment to meet the private sector, what the options would be, and what options were generally for money to support the project including grants and loans. The Committee affirmed they were confident in Samson's assessment.

Samson then presented the documents in question and spoke about combining the two entities, including a tax increment financing approach to support the backbone and function of economics similar to a private company, but as a solution that is not too aggressive of an overlay.

Coates pointed out that communities are looking closely at the communication district approach and that it may make sense to reach out to Carol Monroe (author of communication districts approach) in order to discuss this approach as a business model. Samson agreed that he would reach out to Carol and present his progress at the next meeting, but that he would also like someone professional to look over the document.

Codling asked if the Committee had hired a consultant. Coates confirmed that they had, and that the contract was produced and money allocated. Dorsett confirmed that the contract had been signed, and asked about the contract with NCIC. Coates then gave a quick update about the progress with NCIC. NCIC is providing funding for at least \$5K towards grant writing and would be joining the meeting around 10:50 AM, along with eX² to talk about the next steps. The County, NCIC, and eX² would all be involved in the planning, and eX² had been chosen as they could perform the entire scope of work including the scope and mapping.

GAPS ANALYSIS

Survey Update: Park reported that they had solicited 560 responses from the survey, and that when started, responses were initially from Campton and Haverhill but they were now seeing a more diverse community including Canaan. She started making phone calls to individual towns (Warren, Wentworth, Woodstock) to put the survey on their website and commented that there has been a decent response so far. She had received a number of questions regarding when the survey would be closed, and if the Committee could share the data. The Committee agreed that the survey would remain open for the foreseeable future, but Coates suggested that maybe after 1,000 responses had been received, the data could be distributed to the towns.

Samson commented that a larger geographic spread was needed. Park stated that she would download the current data which could be sorted by community and location, so that members of the Committee could identify which communities needed more outreach. Samson agreed to reach out to Orange, Bristol and Lancaster counties, Park agreed to focus her efforts towards Lincoln and the North, and Dorsett stated he will also bring it up with the Commissioners to reach out to their districts. Coates commented that keeping the survey open is a good public relations tool.

RFI Update and Next Steps: Codling reported that HUB66 had more questions and will be reaching out to Coates. She received confirmation from the list the Committee put together for broadband providers in Grafton County and only one was undeliverable so she assumes the rest received them. She has not received anything back but the deadline is May 17th. Coates mentioned that the next agenda item should be to look at who they heard from, and how to reach out to those who did not respond. Codling replied that they should do this before the deadline so

that her office can start making phonecalls to see if they received it, if they forwarded it and to whom, etc.

The Committee discussed the possibility of having communities more involved with the Committee's task-work, agreeing that it may be beneficial to reach out for help and solicit advice from people in the private sector and members of the public, but that they would like to keep the Committee at five members.

Committee Member Updates

Dorsett asked if anyone knew about the liquidation of the WiFi towers. He had spoken with Peter Corey and Kevin Low and confirmed that the owners of these towers wanted someone to take over the lease, and that some of the places the towers serviced would likely be covered by Starlink. The tower furthest South is Franconia and Sugar Hill, which showed the highest potential for profitability as they were taken over by Mountaintop Wireless (Kevin Low), but there was also one in Bath, Lyman, and Coos (line of sight towers). Dorsett said he would send Coates the list. Coates agreed that per his conversation with Kevin Low and HUB66, these would be worth looking into.

10:50 AM - KEVIN GLYNN, KAITLYN ROBINSON, and MIKE CALVERT joined the meeting.

Project Kickoff: Grantwriting and Technical Services

Coates provided a recap about the two scopes of work: 1) grant writing (NCIC will be providing assistance to the Committee for planning and administration); 2) Mapping, business plan, and cost estimation (Kevin Glynn and eX²).

NCIC - Grantwriting

Kaitlyn Robinson gave an overview of the scope, explaining that NCIC has existing grant funds to provide grant writing services to the Committee. The scope of work is to go through the preliminary list of potential grant resources. NCIC will go through these, match timeline requirements, etc. and put together a comprehensive strategy. They will be assisting with putting together the grant applications and getting them to the planner. For the May Broadband Committee meeting, NCIC will present a strategy and initial grant opportunities that make sense from the planning perspective.

eX² - Technical Services

Kevin Glynn with eX² Technology joined the conversation and explained that he has been involved in the build of the Bristol network through phases 1 and 2). The company is headquartered in Omaha, NE with projects nationwide and are a full service communication and broadband design firm that has been involved in different applications from carrier networks to

rural broadband and projects. eX² is looking to develop a relationship and support the growth of Grafton County broadband.

- **Task 1: Route Map**

Glynn had some initial concepts shared via past meetings that would integrate into the existing network in the Bristol and Plymouth area. The next step is to look at current carriers in the area and see about connecting to those routes.

Codling commented that RFI looks at underserved locations in communities and asked if the mapping would include down to that granularity for the community? Glynn replied that they were looking to develop a regional highway that could develop more exit points and that the current effort is based on the County, so while it would not happen granularly, the data could be used in future efforts to do so.

- **Task 2: High Level Design and Cost Estimation**

Coates explained that once mapping is created, they would need to investigate what it looks like from a design perspective, how many fiber counts, what equipment, etc.

Glynn explained that this would be a step process against the mapping. Once there is an idea of the routing, they would then have discussion with the County on fiber count size, what services are running on that, and putting idea into capacity and future growth, including: dark fiber versus network equipment, and construction costs. Loop designation would be laid out between the different towns and estimates would be segmented so they can detail out to the level which includes material estimates, construction, engineering, and management.

- **Task 3: Selling Documents (explaining private ROI and public benefits)**

Samson stated that the Committee needed to put together some type of simple story on why they are doing this whole effort in order to explain the private sector component of work already being done and how it relates to public sector goals. The goals should be simply to ensure every community has access to broadband in their county. He suggested this should be done as a graphics piece, and to have communities put it on their social media to explain the project. Samson recommended that the Committee needs to take an initial stab at it, then give to Kevin Glynn for feedback.

Glynn confirmed that eX² would be doing an Executive Summary (approximately 1-2 pages) to take to legislature, congress, towns, etc. eX² can provide comment from their background having been involved in this type of product and can support what that would look like via their marketing group. They worked on some recent powerpoints that were on a webinar, and can add some value to what they're looking for.

Dorsett added that from a municipal perspective, the Committee could talk to Andy Smith about valuation differences for properties that have access to broadband versus those who don't so they can make a case for communities that are underserved, and show the appraised tax value increase. The DRA website has all the data that could be used to make some statements.

Samson recommended that the Committee put together a list of bullet points to communicate to the public that could be available for social media and town meeting, outlining points such as education benefits, training benefits, tax benefits, etc. while reinforcing that this is an effort combining both private models and public responsibility. Coates agreed to solicit this information from the Committee next week.

- **Task 4 - Business Model Review**

Samson reiterated from earlier in the meeting that he is using a few articles combined with personal experience to put together an analysis of business models. He would like Glynn to look at it and suggest some changes. Glynn agreed with this approach and that he would provide additional details after receiving Samson's documents.

The Committee agreed that the information exchange will flow through Coates to Glynn and back through Coates to the Committee. Glynn agreed to give an update and monthly review on each task as completed. Coates invited the members of the public to engage with the conversation.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

- **John Adams** expressed concern about the minutia as Orford is a small town on the granular level. They have a small group going, and all want their systems as of yesterday or last week. The community is stable in terms of the market, and there is a lot of support for community broadband. He explained that informed people understand the business side, but it is not economical to have a private organization responsible for broadband. They have a meeting coming up and are planning a presentation about broadband though he realizes the project is at a high level and until it comes down a few levels, the town of Orford would not be included in the effort.

Samson stated that there should be three pieces of literature:

- 1. A document listing a node in every town for broadband*
- 2. A list of strategies to implement a drop system for every town while making sure there are some ideas on how to do it.*
- 3. A document to communicate the business plan/strategy effectively to the towns.*

Coates recommended that a series of webinars might accomplish this. Samson agreed, but thought something more comprehensive would be needed.

- **Charlie Smith**, also from the town of Orford suggested the use of a systematic marketing tool at three different levels. Executive, business, and private. He stated that it is crucial to the municipality to know what the exact need is, and is looking at it as a town, business, and legislation-wise.

Coates asked about how to effectively distribute information to the communities? Samson commented that the hard data they have isn't necessarily accurate and that the point of the survey is to try to get more of this information.

Recap and Agenda Planning: Samson asked if there had been any movement about sponsoring the grant application for HUB66. The Committee members confirmed that they had not heard anything about this as of yet.

Coates outlined the next meeting agenda:

- RFI update and gameplan from Brigitte Codling.
- Update from the grant writing scope and what the plan is.
- Update from Kevin Glynn on the technical aspects.
- Talk more deeply about public outreach plan.
- Rough draft from Mike Samson to Kevin Glynn.

Park commented that she thinks everyone on the Committee has some documents they have presented to their communities, and that they should send these to Coates for the creation of the Executive Summary (Kevin). Park also mentioned she has some maps about the infrastructure in communities that she will forward to Coates.

John Adams requested access to the documents Samson had referenced earlier and mentioned that with regards to the survey, they are getting a biased sample in Orford but that they are using traditional door-to-door mechanisms and the Neighborhood Watch to garner a broader outreach.

Coates mentioned that libraries and town meetings would be a good way to reach residents. Samson added that churches were also a good resource.

NEXT MEETING: May 26th, 2021, at 10:00 AM

MOTION #2: Samson made a motion to adjourn, and Park seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote: Brigitte Codling (Yes), Mike Samson (Yes), Carina Park (Yes), Nik Coates (Yes). The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting ADJOURNED at 11:56 AM.