

Grafton County, New Hampshire
Grafton County Broadband Committee Meeting
MINUTES
Wednesday, September 30, 2020
10:00 AM
At the
R. E. Clifford Memorial Building
65 South Court St.
Woodsville, NH 03785

DRAFT subject to review by the Committee.

Preliminary discussion

Nicholas “Nik” Coates, Town Administrator, Bristol, NH, discussed fiber service to the North Country using Cares Act funding with a goal to drive costs down and connect fiber networks as close as possible to residences and businesses.

Bonnie Labrie stated that expanding out increases the speed to DSL and to everybody.

Call to Order at 10:10 AM by Coates.

ROLL CALL ATTENDANCE: Carina Park (Town Administrator, Campton), Brigitte Codling (Town Manager, Haverhill), Bonnie Labrie (resident of Canaan), Mike Samson (Town Administrator, Canaan), Nik Coates (Town Administration, Bristol), Andrew Dorsett (Town Manager, Littleton).

MINUTES APPROVAL

Coates stated that the Minutes to the previous meeting on September 1, 2020, were not available. Approval of the Minutes was tabled until the next meeting.

CURRENT BROADBAND LANDSCAPE IN GRAFTON COUNTY

Coates presented a framework for accomplishments for the Committee to discuss—

- What we do and don't know
- What does success look like?
- Level of service that is reasonable
- Timeline
- Where do gaps exist, funding, business models
- Each member will take on a topic and become a subject matter expert

Discussion by Members

Coates asked each member to talk about their town's work relating to broadband service.

Canaan

Samson stated that in Canaan there is Comcast or Consolidated and that 15% to 20% of the residents have viable service. Now with COVID and people working from home, there is more need for internet service. A broadband survey went out in the town and he has contacted surrounding towns for input on

their service speeds, which vary enormously. Results of the survey showed that two-thirds of the residents indicated that their service was terrible in terms of speed and reliability. The goal is to have a map of the town to indicate service areas.

Compton

Park stated that in Compton things are about the same as in Canaan with 10% to 20% of residents who have no access. The provider is Consolidated, and the town has reached out to them with no response. Park has reached out to surrounding towns for their concerns, and she is interested in mapping the town for service areas. She stated that the town needs to know where the providers' wires are running.

Coates stated that the state approved bonding authority for broadband services in towns and the first step is information retrieval.

Labrie asked if their Committee could get the Town Administrator from Westmoreland to come to a future meeting because they issued a bond and had to retrieve all the information needed by the state.

Samson asked about a Request for Information form for the providers.

Haverhill

Codling stated that the town spent the last year evaluating cell and broadband service in Haverhill. Speed tests we done with the public. The FCC says that 95% of Haverhill is supposed to have 25 mbs or better, and it was found that 95% were getting less than that and only 5% reported good broadband. The town has all the major service providers, but not all over town. Residents have made cellular and broadband important issues for the town to address. Mosedale Integrated Solutions recently gave a presentation to the Select Board about a Mesh network in localized areas of town.

SUCCESS

What Does Success Look Like? Optimal vs Reasonable Service

Labrie stated that expanding fiber drops will help everyone have a faster speed. It's important to find out where the fiber is in all towns.

In Bristol, Coates set a goal of 1 g service, which is the most businesses would need.

Samson stated that his goal is to get fiber everywhere even if a bond is necessary. It must be affordable. How do we find out about other towns in the county? We need to have a county-wide organization.

Coates asked the members: What is needed for service for businesses?

Labrie stated that fiber is the premium, but can anyone afford it?

Dorsett asked what are the costs of service?

Coates noted that he is looking at the rate sheets of Argent, GSC, and First Light, which only serve businesses or are just an administrative service.

Labrie noted that ECFiber just got approval to work in NH.

PURPOSE, GOALS, AND OBJECTIVES

Gap Analysis

Coates listed the goals as: filling gaps of no service, technology options, and how to expand existing systems, including fiber networks.

Coates asked members to consider gaps in their service.

Samson stated that a Request for Information can be matched with the survey coverage.

Codling stated that the Mesh network is available free to anyone in the service area, and the location was determined by density of residents and businesses. Codling noted that with 8 antennas, the service will be provided for three-quarters of a mile. The Test-It app is for internet speed tests.

Funding

Coates opened a discussion about funding of broadband service for towns.

Codling stated that at the Town Meeting \$500,000 was voted to put towards broadband expansion.

Dorsett stated that it's a great infrastructure project, and the NRBC (Next-Generation Residential Broadband Challenges) or county funding might be suitable.

Labrie noted having broadband service affects property values.

Park stated that the town could get support for infrastructure projects, but in smaller communities a bond would have too much impact on the tax rate.

Coates stated that towns have the ability to bond for broadband, but county-wide, what is needed is the buying authority of a larger entity.

Codling stated that with a county bond, the towns' costs would be paid through their county taxes and no local bond would be required.

Samson noted that the build-out costs are unknown.

Business Models

Coates noted that with Consolidated or a co-op, Bristol is working as a public/private partnership.

Samson stated that private businesses make money for their shareholders, and that model may not work for infrastructure. It could create a conflict between profit-taking and public service.

Coates stated that the county is the backbone, and the providers can come in to provide the service to drive costs down for infrastructure.

Park stated that every town will have to put forth funds or, otherwise, it's unrealistic.

Coates noted that big grant funders may find this model attractive.

Legislative Needs

Samson stated that he is anticipating a bond vote for next year.

Coates noted that the bonding authority wording needs to be removed from the legislation.

Dorsett will find a legislator to sponsor Coates' LSR.

Bob Giuda has a desire to work on local broadband with the committee.

Park stated legislators need to be kept in the loop.

Dorsett noted that David Star is a legislator in the county.

Park said that Griffin is working with Star.

STAKEHOLDERS TO ENGAGE

- Carol Miller, State Director of Broadband
- NCC (North Country Council) for Grafton County
- NCIC, John Freeman
- FNS; Mountain Top Wireless
- A committee in Lyme has hired ECFiber supported by private investors to wire the entire town
- Plymouth State College, Dartmouth College
- SAUs or Cardigan Mtn. School
- Doug Green, UNH (I-Beam network)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS' ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Coates listed 5 areas of project work:

1. What does success look like?
2. Gaps analysis / Request of information 91-A (Codling)
3. Funding (Coates)
4. Business model (Samson)
5. Legislative actions LSRs (Dorsett)
6. Customer relations / public outreach / PR (Park)

SCHEDULING

Next Steps for Monthly Meetings

The committee will meet the last Wednesday of each month.

The meetings will be over Zoom and will rotate from one location to another.

Monthly Zoom Link:

<https://zoom.us/meeting/tJ0uc-6sqjopHNeHDHXb8ixemXLKkp1zezgr/ics?icsToken=98tyKuChrT8tHtCUsx-ERox5A4-gKOjwiH5ego1YtDvNOylLaxvzO9puGblvQcLV>

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/99347441363>

Meeting ID: 993 4744 1363

One tap mobile

+13126266799,,99347441363# US (Chicago)

+19294362866,,99347441363# US (New York)

FUTURE MEETINGS

Meeting #2: Request for Information, legislative action, and what does success look like. Coordinator for technical information (Labrie)

Meeting #3 focus: Draft survey (Park)

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Alastair Dunlap-Smith, Orange, NH, stated that there is an ad hoc broadband committee in Orange and they are following the Committee's activities with interest. The town has limited DSL service.

NONPUBLIC SESSION PER NH RSA91-A, II: None

ADJOURN

MOTION: Codling made the motion to adjourn the meeting and Dorsett seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote: Carina Park (Yes), Brigitte Codling (Yes), Mike Samson (Aye), Andrew Dorsett (Yes), Nik Coates (Aye).

The meeting was ADJOURNED at 11:30 AM.

Date of Next Meeting: **Wednesday, October 28, 2020, at Canaan EOC at 11:00 AM.**

Transcribed by Joanna Bligh