

Grafton County, New Hampshire
Grafton County Broadband Committee Meeting
MINUTES
Thursday, April 8, 2021
12:30 PM

Call to Order at 12:45 PM by Nik Coates.

ATTENDANCE: Carina Park (Town Administrator, Campton), Brigitte Codling (Town Manager, Haverhill; absent), Mike Samson (Town Administrator, Canaan), Andrew Dorsett (Grafton County Administrator, absent), Nik Coates (Town Administrator, Bristol). A quorum was met.

Members of the Public:

Bill Darcy (NHEC, Benton)
Alasdair Dunlap-Smith (Orange)
Bonnie Labrie (Canaan)

MINUTES REVIEW

MOTION #1: Samson made a motion and Park seconded the motion to approve the meeting minutes from **January 14, 2021**, and **February 24, 2021**.

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

GRAFTON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS' MEETING

Coates summarized his meeting with the Grafton County Commissioners. Coates provided a slide presentation for the Commissioners, which included the Committee's budget request of \$15,000 for FY21 and \$50,000 for FY22. Coates presented a *draft* broadband backbone map for discussion purposes only.

- Samson brought up the colors of the map (yellow is the conceptual backbone, red is Bristol's project, and green outlines the districts of the Commissioners). Samson submitted to the Committee and executive summary of the goals of the Committee for their review.
- Park suggested the map go on the website if the Committee approved. Coates reiterated that on the website, it is important to note the map is for discussion purposes only.
- Coates suggested obtaining survey and mapping work towns may have completed to be shared with the Committee.

DEFINING SUCCESS

Review Demographic Data / Review Draft Route Map and Cost Estimate / Initial Comments of Locations / Validation with Survey / RFI

- Coates stated that data will be needed to fill in this map. Park will be sending out an email to all county town administrators to encourage discussion of broadband and the Committee at their select board meetings. Park stated that she has received 130 responses to the Committee's survey, respondents asked to have the result shared, and Coates suggested posting results on the website.
- Samson asked to have the public express their thoughts about the survey. Samson gave the members of the public online an overview of the survey contents and rationale.
- Codling reported to Coates that there have been no responses on the request for information (RFI) that were sent to providers.
- Coates noted that if the RFIs generated information, then the survey data could be matched.
- Coates noted that with Rescue Act dollars, an Infrastructure bill, and State money, now is the time to develop and price out the backbone map. The members were in agreement. Samson suggested that North Country Council, other regional planning commissions, and firms like Vertro FiberMaps (Portland, ME; <https://www.vetrofibermap.com/about/>) and eX² (Omaha, NE; <https://www.ex2technology.com/bristol-pr>) be contacted for information about help with mapping and cost estimating.

BUSINESS MODELS AND PLANNING

What Needs to be Done / What Happens Next / Who Can Help

- Samson noted that the Committee needs outreach and suggested a brochure or flyer with what we are doing, why we are doing it, and the county-wide impact of the Broadband Committee for the public and for the County Commissioners.
- In Samson's business model review circulated this morning, he envisions a series of documents explaining the economics, roles for private vs public sectors, explanation of ROI in this model, and levels of service -- all in simple language, illustrations, and a sample business plan.
- Coates asked the members if such a business plan would be useful, and Park responded "Yes, it would be useful to me to articulate to [others]." Park felt it would encourage support in the community.
- Darcy stated that such a document would help towns know the process.
- Alasdair Dunlap-Smith stated that town will find it useful, including Orange and, he continued, that the simple flyer would be helpful and reassuring to the residents.
- Bonnie Labrie encouraged the Committee to include pictures in the documents or flyer, and with these illustrations the difference between DSL and fiber are easily understood.
- Coates noted that he heard a consensus from the members for the business model presented by Samson.
- Samson continued that there are many issues involved for towns to hook up to providers, including how many trunk cables go through the town, how does service work, which provider to select, whether to implement public or private service, negotiating a contract (reflecting the protection of consumers/towns and the providers ROI), and costs. Samson noted that a business plan addressing these issues and creative solutions of issues for all stakeholders are the next steps for functionality. Samson stated that the functionality test, especially in the face of changing technologies, is asking "Will the process be functional in 10 years?"

- Samson recommended a CHECKLIST for the business modeling process. Samson introduced examples of leverage for the contract process -- helping private companies get customers, helping with credit ratings of private companies for borrowing, making sure payments are made, and working together. Samson concluded saying that the goal is to have a cost-effective process that is sustainable for up to 10 years.
- Park stated that seeing the business model on paper will help to see the direction.
- Samson suggested getting a consultant to review the draft document when complete. Coates mentioned Brad Roscoe (Select Board, Chesterfield, NH) as a contract reviewer.

FUNDING

- Coates stated that the Commissioners approved the \$5,000 for 2021, and they offered a fund-raising plan. Coates spoke with Katelyn Robinson, Project Manager at Northern Community Investment Corporation, and discovered that they have technical assistance funds (\$6,000 to \$8,000) available. Coates mentioned that some federal funds are available now and some upcoming. Coates noted that writing grants and seeking appropriations will be important first steps.
- Coates noted that the Committee is still in planning phase, but with funding information and a business plan can go out to county municipalities. Park expressed agreement and explained that the Committee needs someone who can match projects to grants and create quarterly reports. Samson noted some grants sponsor government projects and others private projects, and the Committee should be aware of both.
- Darcy noted that federal money from the Rescue Plan is soon to be available to the State, which will pay for construction costs and upgrades. Darcy said that NH Electric Cooperative is hiring a full-time grant writer and lobbying organizations. NHEC will be building a backbone to their customers, but there are gaps, and Darcy stated that the company has data to fill in the information in grants. Darcy invited the Committee to work together to serve all areas in the County.
- Samson noted tasks ahead in the next few months, include developing a protocol for providers and looking at projects in place or needed, as well as, providing close communication among parties. Discussion continued. Coates suggested subcommittee to assess how the players can work together towards solutions for the County.
- Darcy noted that to finance the backbone, a revenue source is needed, which may come from municipalities. Samson stated that multiparty provider/committee discussions are critical to provide broadband service, including last-mile residences.

TASKS and FOLLOW UP

- Coates provided a list of the tasks (mapping, design and cost estimate, overview of project, business models, and project coordination) for which the Committee would need help from Regional Planning Commissions, Vetro FiberMaps, or eX².
- Coates stated that funding includes: \$5,000 from Grafton County, and \$5,000 from NCIC for scope of work.

MOTION #2: Samson made a motion to approve moving forward with planning design and scope of work utilizing funding from Grafton County (\$5,000) and NCIC (\$5,000), and Park seconded the motion.

- Coates will prepare notes from this meeting for the members' review.
- Samson asked for a subcommittee schedule. Coates will follow up.

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

MOTION #3: Samson made a motion to enter an agreement with NCIC to seek their assistance with fund raising (planning and construction) and grant writing, and Park seconded the motion.

- Samson noted that both confidentiality and transparency will be important aspects of the Committee's work.

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

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

- Dunlap-Smith commented that the Committee's work is ambitious, and he will distribute the Committee's survey in his town. Dunlap-Smith noted that there is much interest in his town, and many are willing to actively participate.

NEXT MEETING: April 28, 2021, at 10:00 AM

(Coates noted that the Zoom link is always the same for the meetings.)

MOTION #4: Park made a motion to adjourn, and Samson seconded the motion.

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

The meeting ADJOURNED at 2:10 PM.

Transcribed by Joanna Bligh