

GRAFTON COUNTY BROADBAND COMMITTEE MEETING  
3855 Dartmouth College Highway  
North Haverhill, NH 03774  
September 29<sup>th</sup> 2021

MEMBERS PRESENT: Nik Coates, Andrew Dorsett, Carina Park, Samantha Norcross

OTHERS PRESENT: John Adams - Orford Broadband Committee, Bill Darcy – Benton Selectman, Katelyn Robinson – NCIC

N. Coates called the meeting to order at 10:02am.

N. Coates asked if anyone had any corrections to the minutes from the August 25<sup>th</sup> meeting. N. Coates stated that he had sent his edits to the committee.

**MOTION:** C. Park moved to approve the minutes from August 25<sup>th</sup>. A. Dorsett seconded the motion and all were in favor.

**ARPA Requests** – A. Dorsett stated that the Executive Committee approved the \$250,000 ARPA request for Broadband, unanimously. N Coates stated that this is to be used for the start of engineering, match for high-level design, legal services and grant writing. The Committee agreed to use \$10,000 to start for legal services.

**High Level Design** – K. Robinson stated that the committee had applied for CDBG and Tillotson funds, noting that the Tillotson funds were not accepted. She explained that if the funds were still needed, the Committee could go back to the large funding round. If they ask for \$25,000, they go through a more stringent process that may be better for this committee's application. She noted that she thinks they have a good chance with the CDBG funds and they should know in the next month or so. It would then need to go to Governor and Council and, if approved, she would guess December timeframe as to when they could spend the funds.

The Committee agreed to use \$25,000 from ARPA for the high-level design. N. Coates noted that he is comfortable with waiting the month or two for CDBG funds then working on the higher level Tillotson application.

K. Robinson noted that the NTIA grant application seems to be going well and sounds as though it has made it through the first round of reviews and is onto the second. They are expecting to make the announcement November 15<sup>th</sup>.

**Grants & Fundraising** – N. Coates asked the Committee their feelings on using \$20,000 for K. Robinson's time to keep going. He stated that he would like to have her through next year to assist them in the grant process. A. Dorsett stated that they do not have to commit to the \$20,000 but he would suggest reserving it.

**Broadband Website** - N. Coates asked the Committee their thoughts on using a few thousand dollars of the ARPA funding for broadband website. He stated that he receives many calls and there is no place to put the information. The county has what they need legally to post but he

thought about creating a small website that has basic information. The Committee agreed to discuss this further.

**Engineering** – N. Coates stated that they have a good high-level design in place that takes the lines to every town hall in Grafton County. He noted that most grants look at shovel readiness. He explained that the final engineering is the last step and if they spend the money on engineering, it would open up further opportunities. If they do receive the NTIA grant, this is a quick turnaround. eX2 had said that anything the committee could accomplish ahead of time would speed the process along. If they are awarded the NTIA grant, they have already accomplished a couple months' worth of work. They have a good sense of where everyone is in the county in terms of customer bases and where companies are. He questioned if they spend the remaining \$195,000 on advancing the engineering work with focusing on where the providers are scattered or lacking. He stated that this would get them shovel ready in those areas. CA Dorsett agreed. C. Park stated at spending it on engineering costs is smart, rather than waiting to hear about the NTIA grant.

The Committee agreed to spend the remaining \$195,000 on engineering and reach out to potential providers to collaborate with.

**eX2 Master Services Agreement** - N. Coates stated that they have already completed the RFP process. The next step is to sign the Master Services Agreement with eX2. He asked the committee if they want to use some of the legal money they have allotted on having the Master Services Agreement reviewed by Atty. Shawn Tanguay. The committee agreed to have it reviewed. N. Coates stated that he will send the MSA to Primex and K. Robinson first and then send it to Shawn Tanguay and have him review it for up two (2) hours.

**USDA Reconnect Grant** – K. Robinson noted that this is the next large grant opportunity at \$25 million. This would be available come March if they are still in need of planning money. She stated that the Tilliotson funds are the next top opportunities. A. Dorsett asked if they were awarded the NTIA grant, if they could still apply for the USDA Reconnect Grant to then help towns connect to the individuals. K. Robinson stated that they would be able to do that.

N. Coates noted that eX2 has secured the fiber for the project. He stated that they are planning on the committee receiving the NTIA grant but if the grant were not awarded, they would be able to sell the fiber elsewhere.

### **Municipal Items**

- Outreach to Help Get Started – One on One? Another Set of Meetings? – N. Coates stated that he was encouraged by the meetings as they had good attendance. He asked if the committee would like to do another series of meetings, or meet one on one. A. Dorsett stated that they are at a point where they need to make some progress before they meet with the communities again. C. Park noted that there are towns who would like more information regarding their specific towns. She suggested that they to look into going to the individual Selectboard meetings in the future. The Committee further discussed a website and agreed to get quote to have their own basic website that can be linked to the county website and provide information to the public.

### **Other Collaborations & Partnerships**

- Coos County – K. Robinson stated that they need to have an initial conversation with them to try to create a partnership.
- Vermont – N. Coates stated that Kevin had a meeting with the new Executive Director of the Northeast Kingdom Broadband to discuss how to collaborate with the State of Vermont. They received a letter of support from the State of Vermont Broadband Department.
- Northern Grafton County Communication District – N. Coates stated that they met and threw out the idea of a short-term solution from a wireless provider until the next step of the project can take place.
- N. Coates asked the committee's opinion on reaching back out to all providers that submitted their information during the RFI process. Let the providers know that they are continuing to move forward with engineering on the project, see if they would be interested in working on partnership opportunities in the region and could possibly identify priority areas where they could be first onto the network. N. Coates stated that a task for the next meeting could be to identify preliminary interests.

A. Dorsett stated that he has been receiving comments about certain town halls being abandoned, or not suitable for the broadband to connect. He stated that he has explained that town halls were used for the design but that other options are available.

### **Member & Public Comments**

- John Adams stated that he agrees with the idea of sending a letter back to the companies who submitted their information during the RFI process to see if they were interested in working on a partnership. He then asked how often or how many people are on the notice to these meetings. J. Adams strongly recommend putting out an agenda as it is a good step for publicity. C. Park that could be included on the website as well. J. Adams noted that the Town of Orford did an analysis on the data provided from the survey and created PowerPoint presentation with that information. N. Coates asked J. Adams if the person who made the presentation could come to the next meeting to present it to them. J. Adams stated that he would see if they are available.
- B. Darcy stated that as long as he knows where an agenda for the meeting is posted he could make a decision as to whether or not to come. He noted that from Benton's perspective, whoever is first to provide broadband they would sign up with. They need to assess who is most likely to get service to their town. He explained that they have not supported the committee's grant application for two (2) reasons. The first being they want to see the application and because they are covered by an RDoC area which has an obligation to provide service to individual members. They want to make sure that what the committee is doing does not conflict with that.

11:52 AM with no further business the meeting adjourned