

## GRAFTON COUNTY BROADBAND COMMITTEE MEETING

Plymouth State University

Centre Lodge

Plymouth, NH

February 16<sup>th</sup> 2022

MEMBERS PRESENT: Nik Coates, Carina Park, Ed Morris, Brigitte Codling, Austin Albro

OTHERS PRESENT: Julie Libby, Samantha Norcross, John Adams, Katelyn Robinson, Kevin Glynn.

N. Coates called the meeting to order at 2:37 PM

N. Coates introduced the newest member of the Broadband Committee, Austin Albro, Town Administrator in Warren.

**MOTION:** C. Park moved to approve the minutes from January 26<sup>th</sup>. E. Morris seconded the motion and all were in favor. A. Albro abstained.

ISP Selections Workgroup – N. Coates stated that this is a workgroup that E. Morris, B. Codling and K. Glynn are a part of to discuss ISP selections. He asked E. Morris if there were any updates. E. Morris stated that they had not discussed this yet. K. Glynn stated that the first step would be to get an example of what is seen nationwide. He explained that they can then set up samples and look at pathways to then report back. E. Morris stated that they would likely look to have a couple of different packages with pros and cons to the different options for each community to review and decide what would work best for them. J. Adams stated that outlining the options with pros and cons would be helpful. He explained that from a small town standpoint there is no understanding as to what the potential business models are. E. Morris said the first step need to be easy to respond too. Then they can go back with a supplemental submittal for more information. K. Robinson asked if once they get to the point of selecting ISPs, could the County put out an RFP saying they are going out to bid and give any towns the option to opt in if they do not want to be a part of it. The Committee discussed the question. N. Coates asked K. Robinson if she would sit in with this group to discuss timelines for grants and what the expectations are. K. Robinson stated that she would do that.

N. Coates stated that they met with Haverhill's committee last night. A couple members are in favor of what Wentworth is doing, which is a CCI model. Wentworth would front the money for a bond. C. Park stated that less than half a dozen towns did not give letters of support for the County's project. Many towns do not want to wrap their heads around the final mile because it is either too complicated or time consuming. If the County were to commit ARPA funds for the final mile and they were able to go to the towns with a ready package, they may have more support. The committee discussed the possibility of the towns being able to apply for more funds through nonprofits as well. E. Morris stated that they need to get the towns as close as possible or they will have built this middle mile and towns will not take advantage of it because they will not know how. K. Robinson stated that the county has committed ARPA funds to the project management portion. She explained that there would be an opportunity for a nonprofit to apply

for those funds that NCIC has right now specifically to work with Grafton County communities on this broadband project. She noted that she is not volunteering NCIC because these funds require hiring additional staff and NCIC is not in that position to do this right now.

#### Update on Engineering for Middle Mile – K. Glynn

K. Glynn stated that they are working on the final detail design and are looking to finish up in the next few weeks. They will have the packages for the 17 town halls in this first phase ready by mid-march. He stated that they are looking to be shovel ready if they are to receive the NTIA Grant.

#### Last Mile Update – K. Glynn

K. Glynn stated that the high-level design for all 39 towns are complete. They are taking the backbone data and making adjustments and will then make a cost estimate.

Request to the county –N. Coates reported that what they have remaining on the middle mile is 230 miles which roughly \$400,000. He asked if they should, they make another request to the county. This would make the whole project shovel ready no matter what the outcome is with the grants. K. Robinson stated that they should be hearing from NTIA any minute now. She feels like the request should wait until they hear from NTIA, which would allow the county to use the \$400,000 for something else. J. Libby stated that she thinks the committee should put the request together and hope they hear from NTIA by the end of the month. She explained that they could pull the request any time before mid-march. If they get the approval on the ARPA request and then hear from NTIA the money can sit there, it does not need to be spent. The committee agreed to put together a request.

N. Coates asked the Committee if they want to put in an ARPA request for last mile portion of the project and if so do they want to break the request up or request the total amount. J. Libby stated that if the committee were going to request the ARPA funds she would recommend requesting it in one lump sum and then it is committed and the amount is known. She stated that this is a good use of county ARPA money, it helps all the communities and is one of the primary uses of the funds is broadband. She thinks it is a great idea. N. Coates stated that his sense when they went to the Executive Committee in the beginning, they wanted the ARPA funds to benefit, as much of the communities as possible and this would be doing so.

J. Adams thinks that idea is a highly defensible decision, splitting it up into separate requests could create the issue of towns questioning why they were not selected in the first round. He stated that it also gives the community positive feedback in interacting with Grafton County Government. The County can get some good publicity by supporting the towns.

#### Grant Update – K. Robinson

K. Robinson stated that she participated in a call for the middle mile. NTIA had a 4<sup>th</sup> public listening session for the middle mile infrastructure. Right now NTIA is reaching out to people with three (3) key questions and they opened the floor for participants. There were Co-ops, utility companies and counties and each took their turns speaking. C. Park asked if they could

use the application for the next round if they are not awarded this round. K. Robinson stated that she was not sure but the key documents are there so it would not take as long to put together the application a second time around.

USDA – K. Robinson stated that the committee had talked about potentially applying to the UDDA Reconnect Grant. She stated that the county would have to provide match funds and ARPA funds are not eligible to use as a match. Therefore, they were not able to apply for the grant.

Strategy Check In – N. Coates stated that the committee is following a couple of different tracks. He asked if the NTIA grant is their main priority. The committee agreed that the NTIA grant is their main priority. C. park stated that she thinks they are on the right track and have forward motion. E. Morris stated that things are happening and being able to provide this to the towns is a good thing. C. Park stated that they have incorporated the final mile into the project. She thinks they will still get a tangible product at the end even if they do not receive all funds for the middle mile. The communities still are receiving something tangible to use themselves.

February/March Newsletter – C. Park stated that she feels that they got further meeting one on one with Selectboards and could gain more momentum individually. She can put it in the newsletter that they are available to meet one on one with the Selectboards or broadband committees. N. Coates suggested sending out a mass email to everyone on their contact and share stories he has received. It would let people know why they are doing what they are doing.

**MOTION: \* 3:55 PM** C. Park moved to enter into non-public session for the purposes of, matters which, if discussed in public, would likely affect adversely the reputation of any person, other than a member of the public body itself, unless such person requests an open meeting. This exemption shall extend to any application for assistance or tax abatement or waiver of a fee, fine, or other levy, if based on inability to pay or poverty of the applicant per RSA 91-A: 3, II (c) E. Morris seconded the motion. This motion requires a roll call vote. N. Coates called the roll. C. Park “yes”, E. Morris “yes”, A. Albro “yes”, N. Coates “yes”.

**\* 4:18 PM** N. Coates declared the meeting back in public session.

**MOTION:** C. Park moved to permanently seal the minutes from the just completed non-public session. E. Morris seconded the motion. N. Coates called the roll. C. Park “yes”, E. Morris “yes”, A. Albro “yes”, N. Coates “yes”. With the vote being four (4) in favor and none in opposition the motion passes.

4:18 PM with no further business the meeting adjourned