

Town of Mt. Desert
Broadband Committee Meeting Minutes
March 11, 2021 @ 4:00 pm via Zoom

Members Present: Pete Cuffari, John Fehlauser, Kathy Miller, Wendell Oppewall; Bob Bickmore and Durlin Lunt (ex officio); Kendra Jo (Island Institute guest). Matt Hart, Scott McFarland and Lili Pew were excused.

1. Approval of Minutes

A motion was made and seconded (Oppewall/Cuffari) to approve the minutes as presented for the February 11, 2021 meeting. The vote was unanimous for approval.

2. Update from Public Works Director re: fiber along Main Street

The message from Tony Smith was relayed that the conduits currently planned to run east-west under Main Street to carry electrical, telephone, data lines should be sufficient to carry fiber optic cables should they be desired. Bob Bickford was part of the conversation with the various parties and concurred that no plan changes would be recommended at this time.

3. Tilson Technologies report update

Tilson Technologies provided a proposal to review their earlier work for the Town from 2015 and then for hosting and leading at least three meetings with key stakeholders and maintaining close communication with the Town during analyses and planning. They also suggested use of their proprietary community hub web application, allowing the public and stakeholders to have visibility into the initiative and to collect information and feedback from the target region. The total for their proposal was \$56,000 and included: review of prior study, stakeholder coordination, demand analysis and community involvement, business model planning and financial forecasting, high level infrastructure design and associated cost estimate, and public/private investment strategy. Tilson suggested it would be a three-month process.

There was a discussion of their proposal and an observation that it seems to assume no Broadband Committee engagement. No one was familiar with their proprietary application, but there was general agreement that if residents (the committee) had the capacity to manage the engagement process it would be better. There was a suggestion that we do our own preliminary data gathering. It was noted the Town Meeting would not be a good time or place for such engagement, since there will be other large concerns to address there. There was discussion about methods of outreach, via simple poll or Facebook, collecting poll results via a shared document such as a Google doc, the value of the ME Broadband Coalition map showing speed tests, and more. From the speed test map, it was noted that where DSL was the connection the speeds were slow, but Spectrum cable lines were at adequate speed, and speed would depend on the plan opted by the user as well as distance from the central office for the system. It was also noted there could be sections of road without cable service.

It was suggested that the data to gather included: availability, speed, current satisfaction or interest in upgrading, reliability, and the current street structure of poles for attachments, or

underground line possibilities. There was a discussion on how best to gather data, asking the right questions, designed to gather information to act upon. It was noted that in the past a post card was sent out to gather information, but committee members felt they had asked the wrong questions. New plans should also include asking potential future residents for input, and also distinguishing between different needs for residential or business use. It was noted that it may be possible to access existing Spectrum service maps as a starting point for availability.

Some other suggestions coming out of the discussion included: holding a round table discussion with businesses to understand their issues and current experiences; conversations with other communities to see about working together; getting samples of questions for a poll or survey; have a short and direct survey to distribute via postcard, digitally, or printed copies in public places for easy access by those without digital access. There was a question about what a good rate of return on such surveys would be to determine the value of the input provided. There was also a suggestion that on a survey question regarding the cost for service to help determine affordability, better to ask: "What is the maximum amount you could pay for service?".

It was agreed that an earlier plan of a straw poll at the Town Meeting in May will be dropped, but that setting up and promoting an event to test high speed access from the high school parking lot would be pursued. It was also agreed that some way for this committee to have shared access to information would be helpful. Regarding Tilson, there was agreement to hold off for now on the larger pieces, but to see about the community engagement piece and how that might look if the Town/committee was involved, asking questions about what they would do beyond what we could do ourselves. In response to a question about interest through the League of Towns, it was noted that only Bar Harbor has expressed interest, starting with the police department connections, and that the Casco Bay Advisors report to connect the Town Hall to the high school seemed reasonable.

Next Steps

- Durlin will get a link to speed test on the Town Facebook page.
- Wendell will work with the high school to set a date for public access to very high-speed internet from the parking lot there this spring.
- Kendra Jo will provide some sample questions for a poll/survey from other communities.
- Kathy will set up a Dropbox folder to collect info to be shared by the committee.
- Kathy will follow up with Tilson about their proposal and community engagement.

Future Meetings

The next meeting will be Thursday, April 8, 2021 @ 4 pm via Zoom.

Motion and second to adjourn the meeting. All approved. The meeting ended at 5:20 pm

Respectfully submitted,



Kathleen W. Miller