

Town of Mt. Desert
Broadband Committee Meeting Minutes
January 13, 2022 @ 4:00 pm via Zoom

Members Present: Frank Baltzell, Scott McFarland, Kathy Miller, Wendell Oppewall, Matt Hart (ex officio), Kendra Jo Grindle – Island Institute

Kendra Jo informed the group this would be her last meeting with us for a while, but she will connect other Island Institute staff to join us in her absence.

1. Approval of Minutes

There were not enough committee members present from the Dec 9 meeting to approve the minutes. They will be held until the next meeting.

2. Community Engagement

Kathy raised the question of planning for future public events to bring other residents into the conversation and generate support needed for any future Town investments in broadband. Wendell reminded the group that access outside the schools can be boosted for people to test high speed services, and he thought if the Annual Town Meeting is held again at the high school in 2022 it might be a good time to promote that. The group also discussed digital literacy programs available via adult ed, the library, Axiom Technologies/National Digital Literacy Center and other outlets. Scott suggested there are so many resources available, perhaps the role for this committee should be to let people know via our page on the Town website about all those resources. There was general agreement that once we have more data and possible plans to consider – after getting report info from Casco Bay Advisors – that a public forum would be an appropriate next step. It should be informative and help build consensus on the next best steps. Any public forums will be on hold until we have more details/data.

3. Update on VETRO Care for ME Program

Kathy reported the VETRO cohort 3 has started and will be a combination of training on the use of the platform and well as meetings with professionals to help advance planning efforts. Kathy is the administrator for the Town's access to the platform and can give access to others. Kendra Jo suggested we explore what other services VETRO might offer, such as their survey platform – which the Town has already used. She also noted that the State will use VETRO as the State's platform

4. Update on consultant engagement with Casco Bay Advisors

The proposal is on the agenda for the BOS meeting Tuesday, January 18 for final approval. Scott and Kathy will attend, and Brian Lippold of Casco Bay has also offered to attend to answer any questions. It should be a simple matter for approval since the funds are available.

5. Next Steps

There was general agreement that until the Casco Bay work is done per their proposal, the next steps will be difficult to define. Data first, to be followed by decisions and public engagement. Kathy will send Casco Bay the link to the BOS meeting to facilitate proposal approval.

6. Other Business

Wendell noted that Bar Harbor is not ready to start their municipal fiber installation. The bids they received came in above expectation. There was a question about the amount of fiber cable already on MDI, who owned it, and was it available to access. At least some of it is owned by Spectrum, which could lease it out, but it could be expensive. The schools already access it.

There was a question of how other towns get funding, and Kendra Jo gave some examples of investment and bonding arrangements, depending on the business model the town would follow to expand services. The creation of the Maine Connectivity Authority could change how grant funding or infrastructure develops in the future compared to recent years. They will have much more money and authority to own, lend, etc., rather than just grant funds.

7. Future Meetings

The next committee meeting will be Thursday, February 10 @ 4 pm via Zoom.

The meeting adjourned at 4:35 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Kathleen W. Miller