

Town of Mt. Desert
Broadband Committee Meeting Minutes
May 12, 2022 @ 4:00 pm via Zoom

Members Present: Pete Cuffari, John Fehlauser, Scott McFarland, Kathy Miller, Durlin Lunt (ex officio)

1. Approval of Minutes

The minutes from the April 14, 2022 meeting were moved for approval, seconded, and unanimously VOTED for approval.

2. Update re: VETRO Program

Kathy reported that the Town continues as part of Cohort 3 in the VETRO Cares for Me program, paid for by the ConnectME Authority. That cohort group will expire in the fall, though there is the possibility that ConnectME will extend the arrangement. There was a question of whether the Town already has its own instance on the VETRO platform for other purposes, and Durlin reported he didn't think so, but will find out. We are not doing much with the current instance so far, but it could be useful and necessary if we were to apply for grant funding, consider constructing a municipal network, or for other reasons. It also functions as the collection site for the surveys conducted last summer.

3. Proposal from Casco Bay Advisors re: Next Steps

Brian Lippold of Casco Bay Advisors had provided a proposal for our next steps. He recommended two major areas to work on – negotiating with incumbents to extend their services/network or to bring fiber to the Town, and he could do a pro forma to consider operating costs if the Town were to construct its own network. He provided an hourly rate, would bill monthly, and suggested we consider the overall cost could be \$5-10,000. Entering into this arrangement would require approval by the BOS. The committee won't have any funds available until the new fiscal year, starting July 1.

There was some discussion about what we want him to do, noting that only about 4% of the town is without cable coverage. The looming question is filling gaps with cable service vs FTTH for universal fiber coverage. There was discussion about what other towns had done getting FTTH, but they were often places with far less cable coverage, so not comparable to our town. There were often going with very limited service to full FTTH, where we have extensive coverage, though not as fast, reliable, or affordable as FTTH might be. There was a recommendation to look at more comparable modes and get real facts to support local engagement.

There was also discussion about working with other towns on MDI to a large impact. Durlin noted that Bar Harbor is working to connect municipal services only, with no residential services planned, and that the construction costs keep going up beyond their budget. But Durlin will follow up with them, offer to collaborate. Kathy will connect with Tremont, who had earlier expressed interest.

4. Discussion of next steps

Further discussion boiled down the options moving forward as follows:

- All incumbent investment to expand services
- A partnership between the Town and an incumbent provider
- A fully municipal-owned network, managed by an outside provider

Brian Lippold's proposed work would be to explore those options. We would then need to articulate to the residents the various options to determine interest and support. It was noted we are not ready to negotiate with any incumbent, but we do need to know what the possibilities are, and costs are for each option.

We will need BOS to approve a new agreement with Casco Bay Advisors to move forward starting in July. The committee will try to get on the BOS agenda for the June 20 meeting.

5. Other such business as may properly come before this meeting

None

6. Next Meeting – 2nd Thursday of each month

The next committee meeting will be Thursday, June 9 @ 4 pm via Zoom.

The meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,



Kathleen W. Miller