

Town of Mt. Desert
Broadband Committee Meeting Minutes
April 8, 2021 @ 4:00 pm via Zoom

Members Present: Pete Cuffari, Kathy Miller, Scott McFarland; Bob Bickmore, Matt Hart and Durlin Lunt (ex officio); Kendra Jo (Island Institute guest).

1. Approval of Minutes

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

2. Tilson Technologies report update

Kathy reported on her conversation with Tilson about their proposal, focusing on their stakeholder coordination. They did expect a good deal of involvement by the Town or this committee to identify key stakeholders and engage participants in the meetings they would organize. They also provided samples of the website hub they would set up for us to collect and share information along the process. Matt expressed concern that the price tag seems high, and it would be some time before committing to that amount. Durlin noted the Town will be getting \$210,000 from the federal stimulus funds, and there may be more coming from federal infrastructure funding in the future, but the timing of either is uncertain. There were questions about how and to whom the funds might be directed – to towns or to providers. It was suggested that it might come from the state in the form of block grants, and that the Board of Selectmen will most likely be the body to decide use, rather than via Town Meeting votes. Kendra Jo recommended that town inform the Counties they'd be interested in any funding available via the American Rescue Plan funding, and she would be happy to see it dispersed via block grants to communities. Scott noted we will want to be prepared for any funding available.

3. VETRO Cares for ME update

Kathy reported on the initial meeting with VETRO FiberMap. This is a six-month arrangement and future interactions will be one-on-one with their staff. Two others will help with the process, Tasha Johnson who works at the Mount Desert Water District and has training in GIS mapping, and Gordon Longworth, who teaches GIS mapping at COA. Neither are residents of the Town, but each have a connection through work or family. With their program, the Town should be able to map existing assets, find gaps in coverage, and plan for future construction. This is the same firm and program employed by Casco Bay Advisors for the planning for fiber from the Town Hall to the high school for municipal/police services.

4. Community Engagement Planning with Island Institute

Kendra Jo has some sample surveys to share and asked what our goals for the survey were. She recommends keeping the number of questions under 17, taking about five minutes to complete. Island Institute has a Survey Monkey account to use if needed.

There was a conversation about past efforts and surveys. There had been 5-6 questions asked via a postcard, and it became clear there were lots of uninformed residents on the topic. Early meetings had a large turnout from the Pretty Marsh area, so it was clear where the greatest need was. There was a question about how best to determine where current gaps exist, and a note that the Spectrum coverage maps are unreliable, as they include future planning on existing maps.

Kendra Jo noted that we can do asset mapping for existing services, but it requires real footwork. We could have community info sessions to gather input on how people are using services, gathering stories and preparing people for a future survey. Bob noted there is a big range of use patterns, with people working from home, children in school, or just watching movies and sending emails. It will be important to have a community conversation about what's adequate coverage, and to include both year-round and seasonal residents. There was a conversation about the usual live meetings of the Summer Residents Association (SRA) and whether they will be held this year at all. That will most likely depend on CDC guidelines at the time for in-person gatherings.

It was noted that Spectrum, the local incumbent cable provider, doesn't update or share their maps with towns generally, and we couldn't really rely on their info regarding quality of service over distances in any case. There was a suggestion that at the April meeting regarding the Fire Dept. construction project, there may be some information put out about broadband efforts as well.

Kendra Jo suggested we get a small group together to do more planning around community engagement prior to the next regular meeting. Pete, Kathy and Scott all stepped up to form that group. They will meet separately at a date and time to be determined.

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 meet with a subgroup, provide some sample questions for a poll/survey from other communities, and help us plan our community engagement process.

Future Meetings

The next meeting will be Thursday, May 13, 2021 @ 4 pm via Zoom.

Motion and second to adjourn the meeting. All approved. The meeting ended at 4:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Kathleen W. Miller