

Town of Mount Desert
Economic Development Committee Meeting
July 8, 2020
Minutes

Attending: Martha Dudman, Dan McKay, Matt Hart, Seth Singleton, Wendy Wood, Averi Wilson (Zoom), Jamie Blaine (Zoom), Durlin Lunt, Rick Wheeler, Heather Jones, Stephanie Reece, Kathy Miller, Nancy Ho

Absent: Don Graves, Micki Sumpter, Tony Smith, Minot Weld

Others in Attendance: Brian Lippold, Jeff Burnham, Ben Meiklejohn, Mollie Seyffer, John Fehlauer, Lili Pew, Wendell Oppewall

The meeting was convened at 4:04 p.m.

Minutes of the May 27, 2020 meeting were approved without comment.

Broadband Presentation

- Brian Lippold of Casco Bay Advisors was introduced and made a brief presentation followed by an extended question and answer period. Brian has worked as a consultant for a number of communities in Maine at various stages of exploring or implementing community broadband systems. He has worked locally with the towns of Bar Harbor and Swan's Island on their respective broadband plans and was also involved in the Pretty Marsh broadband project.
- Bar Harbor Project
 - The goal of the Bar Harbor project is limited to connecting 26 community nodes. It is not designed, at least in its initial stage, to provide general fiber-to-premises connections for the community at large.
 - Public funding is being utilized.
- Swan's Island Project
 - Designed to provide fiber-to-premises service on the island through use of a microwave relay system.
 - Seeking grant funding for 75% of the cost. Remainder will be publicly funded.
- Much available government grant funding is reserved for areas designated as "unserved" or "underserved." At least most of Mount Desert Island would not fit within that designation.
- There are a variety of views as to what constitutes "high speed internet." The FCC and ConnectMe use a standard of 25Mbps/3Mbps. Existing high speed cable service through Spectrum theoretically meets this standard and is generally sufficient for basic home use.
- In contrast, fiber-to-premises service is symmetrical (i.e., download and upload speeds are similar) with typical speeds in the range of 100Mbps/100Mbps.
- Fiber-to-premises connections are typically more stable and reliable than are local cable connections which rely on a patchwork of relay equipment to achieve desired speeds.
- Commercial providers typically will fund construction of fiber-to-premises high speed systems only in densely populated areas. More rural communities sometimes overcome this reality by subsidizing service (e.g., Cranberry Isles).

- Before embarking on a plan, Brian recommended that the Town take a step back in order to (1) define a vision (what objectives are we trying to achieve); (2) build a foundation of data (so that we will have a better sense of what would be required to achieve our objectives); and (3) build community support for a project that will require significant public funding.
- The Broadband Committee will meet and will take the lead in developing recommendations to address community needs. It will keep the EDC and the selectmen informed.

Maine Community Foundation Broadband Grant Program

- Given the timing (application deadline of August 1) and the grant size (maximum of \$10,000), it was decided not to apply for a MCF grant at this time.

Updates

- Businesses in town are “limping along.” Business volumes are definitely down significantly from historical levels. The SRA grant program has provided important help and has been greatly appreciated.
- A new physician has moved into the Northeast Harbor Medical Center and is attempting to build a practice.
- The Main Street project has been in a scheduled lull this summer but will resume in the fall. New poles on the east side of Main Street were installed in June to mixed reviews. Underground lines connecting the west side of Main Street with the wires on the east side will be installed this fall and the sidewalk will be completed. There are a couple of lingering easement issues, but the project is otherwise on schedule.

Committee Leadership

- Dan McKay has agreed to serve as chair for another year and Wendy Wood has agreed to continue as vice chair.

Meeting Dates

- Quarterly meeting dates for the coming year were set for the second Wednesday of October, January, April and July at 4:00 p.m. Additional special meetings will be scheduled as needed.
- Next meeting: October 14, 2020 at 4:00 p.m. at the Town Office (or via Zoom if dictated by health concerns).

Meeting adjourned at 5:39 p.m.

Submitted by:

Dan McKay, Acting Secretary