

Town of Mount Desert
Economic Development Committee Meeting
October 14, 2020
Minutes

Attending: Martha Dudman, Dan McKay, Matt Hart, Seth Singleton, Jamie Blaine, Durlin Lunt, Rick Wheeler, Stephanie Reece, Kathy Miller, Nancy Ho, M. Weld

Absent: Don Graves, Micki Sumpter, Tony Smith, Minot Weld, Averel Wilson, Heather Jones

Others in Attendance: Kendra Jo Grindle, Mollie Seyffer, John Fehlauer, Lili Pew, Wendell Oppewall, Eloise Schultz

All attendees attended via Zoom.

The meeting was convened at 4:05 p.m. Dan McKay welcomed the group and noted that the Committee was meeting jointly with the Broadband Committee for the purpose of hearing a presentation from Kendra Jo Grindle from the Island Institute.

Minutes

The first item on the agenda was consideration of the minutes of the July 8, 2020 meeting. As a quorum was not present, consideration was deferred until the next meeting.

Broadband Presentation

Kathy Miller introduced Kendra Jo Grindle from the Island Institute who delivered a presentation introducing the services and approach offered by the Institute to assist municipalities in developing and implementing strategies for improving local broadband access. She reviewed in some detail a matrix developed by the Institute for use by Maine communities for this purpose. The matrix would lead the Town through a four stage process:

1. Community Engagement: In this stage, the Town would form a working group (in our case the Broadband Committee), identify stakeholders and priorities and identify strategies to build support through community engagement.
2. Assess Options: In this stage, the Town would develop and refine its proposed strategy, conduct (or in our case, update) a feasibility study and request information from prospective providers.
3. Funding: In this stage, the Town would address cost considerations, choose a financing model and seek funding for the project.
4. Realize Benefits: In this final stage, the project would be implemented, and the priorities developed earlier in the process would be realized (or at least advanced). These might include, as examples, expanded access for education and healthcare,

facilitation of telecommuting, achieving business efficiencies and generally improving digital literacy and access.

The time it takes to work through these stages varies widely by community. It can be as short as a year and in some cases has taken as long as seven years. Much depends on local circumstances, the level of community engagement and the contours of the local political landscape generally.

Ms. Grindle next described how the Island Institute can work with a community to facilitate the process. The Institute would provide its services at no cost to the Town, and there is no formalized contractual relationship. The Institute views its role as providing support to a community driven process and linking communities with others to provide peer-to-peer information sharing. Among the services typically provided are assistance with the development of a community engagement strategy, assistance with philanthropic case design (but not grant-writing), potential availability of a modest level of Island Institute grant funding (\$5,000-\$10,000) to facilitate planning, and assistance to access government resources. The services provided are intended to facilitate the effort but do not supplant the need for other paid consulting services to help with planning and funding.

An extended Question & Answer session followed addressing such questions as typical funding models, advantages and disadvantages of inter-local cooperation in developing a project and potential sources of grant funding.

Following Ms. Grindle's presentation, those still present agreed that the Broadband Committee would get together to begin the development of priorities and would engage with the Island Institute to assist with the process, beginning with community engagement.

The next meeting of the Economic Development Committee is scheduled for January 13, 2021 at 4:00 p.m. either at the Town Office or via Zoom if dictated by health concerns.

Meeting adjourned at 5:29 p.m.

Submitted by:

Dan McKay, Acting Secretary