

**Town of Mt. Desert**  
**Broadband Committee Meeting Minutes**  
**February 11, 2021 @ 4:00 pm via Zoom**

**Members Present:** Pete Cuffari, Scott McFarland, Kathy Miller, Wendell Oppewall, Lili Pew; Matt Hart (ex officio); Kendra Jo (Island Institute guest)

**1. Approval of Minutes**

A motion was made and seconded (Oppewall/Cuffari) to approve the minutes as presented for the January 14, 2021 meeting. The vote was unanimous for approval.

**2. Update from Police Chief Willis re: fiber connection from MDIHS to the Town office in NEH**

Police Chief Willis requested funding from the Board of Selectmen for an engineering study needed to connect fiber from the Town Hall in NEH to the High School to allow the Mount Desert and Bar Harbor police departments to connect more efficiently. The work would be done by Casco Bay Advisors and the cost would be \$6,000. The study would provide an estimate of the cost to construct the fiber connection. His request was approved.

**3. Island Institute and Community Engagement**

Kendra Jo Grindle from the Island Institute reported that she had followed up with Tilson Technologies about updating their 2015 report to the Town. Tilson is willing to have a conversation about that, and Kendra Jo will connect Kathy Miller with Adam Quinlan at Tilson.

Kendra Jo suggested there were two main questions to answer about expanding broadband:

- What is the capacity to move forward?
- What is the political will or tolerance to move forward?

There was a general discussion about this, with a suggestion of doing a community survey. It was noted that the Town Meeting style of government means planning well ahead to authorize funding and plans, which can slow things down a bit. This year there is also discussion about constructing a new Fire Dept. building, so there may be reluctance to take on further debt. It was suggested that with some people satisfied with their current service, but some areas having gaps in service, perhaps work could be done in phases. It was noted that participating in the VETRO program can help answer questions on gaps and the possibility of working in phases.

There was a discussion about speed of service, and it was noted that the ME Broadband Coalition's map of speed test is live, so we can see where test have been done. There was a suggestion that we should define the info we would need to develop any plans – such as coverage, gaps, and speed. If there were fiber going to the Town office, that could be an easy expansion to the village commercial district nearby, though there would be many hurdles to overcome, decisions to make and costs involved. There was a suggestion of using the annual Town Meeting as a chance for a straw poll, but the one question to ask should be carefully considered.

There was a discussion about Consolidated Communications, which recently got funding for ME Strategic Investment to do some fiber upgrades. They already have fiber everywhere in Maine. There are 3-4 businesses in NEH that have Consolidated fiber to their business. Kendra Jo said she is keeping an eye on Consolidated's 5-year plan to expand town by town starting in 2022, which has not yet been made public. Also, there are three local Starlink connections that just started in town, and some on Swans Island. It was mentioned that some have already turned the Starlink system off.

There was a discussion about the Main Street project with conduits buried under the road to connect the east to the west sides with electricity and tel/data lines. There was agreement that the Town should look into the option for fiber connections along Main Street as part of the project – not just proving coax cable conduits.

There was a discussion about promoting the Maine Broadband Coalition speed test and getting more people to take it for a better mapping data. It was suggested a notice in the SRA newsletter could help get the message out. Lili suggested staff at Knowles Real Estate might help with getting info from rental properties. There had been a 5% response rate on a broadcast email that went out through the school encouraging people to do it.

There was a discussion about putting information out in the public before taking a straw poll vote at the Town Meeting in May. It was suggested that we have a community conversation starting with the 2015 Tilson report, and then about what may have changed since then. Having that conversation in April would be a good time. Another idea was the possibility of letting people try out access to high-speed fiber at the high school. That could be available via WIFI outside the school building, and best on a weekend. Wendell will look into that possibility.

There was a discussion about businesses or consultants to engage with to develop a plan. Kendra Jo suggested several names, that some do just planning, and some do planning plus providing services. But the Town needs to determine which model we want and what we would be asking of any planner before we engage.

### **Next Steps**

- Scott will connect with Tony Smith about fiber conduits as part of the Main St project.
- Kendra Jo will connect Tilson Technologies with Kathy.
- Kathy will reach out to George Grohs about speed testing with clients.

### **Future Meetings**

The next meeting will be March 11, 2021 @ 4 pm via Zoom.

Motion and second to adjourn the meeting. All approved. The meeting ended at 5:12 pm

Respectfully submitted,



Kathleen W. Miller