

**JOINT MEETING OF  
THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY  
AND  
THE GREATER DOWNTOWN TAX INCREMENT FINANCE DISTRICT  
ADVISORY BOARD**

**February 17, 2015**

**MINUTES**

**GDTIF and EDA Members Present:** George Sterling, Adam Harrington, Jerry Galus, Michael Henry and Peter Robinson.

**Also Present:** Peter Throop, Director and Laura Norton, Administrative Assistant, Office of Community Development

Chair Sterling called the meeting to order at 7:30 a.m. noting the first order of business was approval of the Minutes from January. A motion was made/seconded (Henry/Galus) to approve the Minutes of January 20, 2015 as written with all in favor.

Chair Sterling then introduced and welcomed guest speaker Carole Monroe Executive Director of New Hampshire FastRoads to the meeting. “We are going to hear more about enhanced broadband so I will hand it over to Carole” he said.

Ms. Monroe thanked the members adding “before we get started I want to say that although I am a consultant, I am no longer Executive Director of FastRoads.” She explained the company, owned by Monadnock Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) is dedicated to the enhancement of the industrial and business base to improve the standard of living, quality of life and economic vitality of the region. “And FastRoads is very close to a transition to another entity.”

Ms. Monroe noted FastRoads had completed a 161 middle-mile fiber optics broadband network and owns 86 miles of last-mile connections in western New Hampshire, connecting 19 towns. “But they are a start-up and outsource all operations which adds incredible overhead to the company.” She noted they were looking for a company with its own operations, ticketing system, engineers, fiber splicers and trucks hitting the ground “and they are very close to doing just that” she said adding “with the goal of keeping it operational.” Ms. Monroe told the

members while they are adding residential and commercial customers every day, “it takes time. But they are going in the right direction.”

Back to broadband, Ms. Monroe noted she would like to make her presentation more of a conversation. She asked the members to give her a brief indication of who made up the Board. “That will help us determine what your needs are and we can walk through the process should you decide to go through with it” she said. After introductions she went on to give a brief review of the current broadband environment in Peterborough. She noted the town was primarily served by the incumbent telecommunications carrier, Fairpoint Communications as well as Comcast Cable. She told the members that FastRoads is an open access network (controlled by the NTIA) with a UCC holding on all the equipment and fiber lines. “All of the assets, forever” she said.

Ms. Monroe went on to tell the members a good group to talk to would be the Town of Rockport Maine. “They have fiber to the biggest tenants, including the town.” She noted “it is all about putting the pieces together, an open access network that is dropping to residences.” She noted the town had forged a good partnership with one ISP only. Mr. Galus asked “who is it?” with Ms. Monroe replying “GWI. They are small but they are there.” She noted Peterborough’s providers (Comcast and Fairpoint) adding “it does not allow for a very competitive environment” adding “Fairpoint internet is not aggressive in delivering service to residences and businesses.” After noting the cost of fiber optic was approximately \$40,000.00 a mile she went to briefly discuss Dial Tone. T1, T3 and DSL noting “all services are based on copper lines.” She told the members “DSL is sufficient for small business and home owners in their thought” adding “it does not seem like they are in that mode of operation right now.”

Ms. Monroe told the members “it started in Hollis, with their high per capita income (\$80,000.00) with an incumbent carrier. She went on to briefly mentioned systems in New London, Hillsborough and Antrim, New Hampshire as well.

Mr. Throop asked “has Fairpoint worked with other resources?” “They did in Temple” replied Ms. Monroe adding “every household in Temple got DSL but they are interested in towns with big business. That is where (fiber) is desired.” Ms. Monroe also noted the *triple play* advantage (phone, internet and television) Comcast has “but it makes it tough for them to find their niche and where they want to be.”

Ms. Monroe went on to describe the work of identifying and documenting checklist items that would assist the town and any provider in building a new

network. She noted while Fairpoint owns about half the (telephone) poles in town with PSNH owning the other half “the town is the gatekeeper of the poles” adding “and the town must know and use the policies and processes relating to the utility poles in the right-of-way.” Ms. Monroe also noted additional research on the town’s current provider, sites connected, access to conduits and Zoning and Planning Board policies was necessary. She told the members “it is important to get this information on the table *before* spending tax dollars.” She encouraged working with developers to identify any opportunities for entrepreneurial zones, where enhanced broadband, affordable leases and mentors come together and “to document what you have and what makes you attractive.” Mr. Galus interjected “so it is the build the field and they will come” which segued into a brief discussion about looking for partners to fund construction of an enhanced broadband network.

Ms. Monroe noted a *needs analysis* and recommended one-on-one interviews with larger businesses in the area not only about their needs but the needs of their employees and customers. “Look for champions” she said adding “it is important to clearly articulate the need to ensure all stakeholders are on board.” She noted outreach to the Chamber of Commerce and services groups such as the Lions Club and Rotary. She went on to say “we are frugal here in New Hampshire, we tend to live within on our means. That is the way it is.” She also noted “we are not casual with our money “but babysitting the upload of your backup files is all lost productivity.”

Ms. Monroe told the members “the FCC has become a strong proponent for an open internet and municipal broadband” and that sources of federal funding for the development of broadband infrastructure were being developed. She reviewed the potential of state funds, Community Grants, the use of TIF Funds and public/private partnerships. She told the members the (currently) Peterborough does not qualify for municipal bonding as it is not classified as *unserved* or *underserved* by broadband. “The current information is that New Hampshire is 90% broadband covered” she said. She reiterated the necessity of a needs assessment as every municipal network is different and has a system configured to *their* needs, operated uniquely. She told the members “there are many models to learn and borrow from and many communities are quite open to sharing best practices.”

Ms. Monroe noted some of the challenges and barriers to broadband mapping work. “Pole access can be a long and costly process” she said adding “and as a municipality it may not be in your best interest to create another entity to own and manage the process.” She reviewed language of the current RSAs that prohibit

bonding for telecommunications infrastructure “unless a municipality is *unserved* or *underserved*” (and) if the town were to bond “the language also prohibits the municipality from being the service provider.” Ms. Monroe told the members “it is important to know where Comcast *is* and where it *is not*. What is served and unserved territory and get that through to Washington.”

Ms. Monroe spoke briefly about return on investment of development of a broadband infrastructure. “What does it look like” she asked adding “it is not a money maker in the short run.” She noted “it is a long time, a horizon of six years and it is a challenge.” She also noted every funding and business model is different, everyone learning from one another, “so go out and visit or have other towns come here to discuss open access and primary services providers.” Ms. Monroe looked around and said “funding will become a strategy in itself: adding “that and setting a vision for what you want to see in town will result in the most efficient results.” She spoke briefly about the geography of the town (noting a potential loop for the down town are to West Peterborough). Mr. Galus interjected “it is a compressed area where we could get a lot of bang for our buck” and added “that is the low-hanging fruit. Ms. Monroe noted the broadband mapping work had begun in 2010 when the definition of broadband was an access of at least 768 kbps upstream and 200 kbps downstream. She noted the current definition is 25 mbps downstream and 3 mbps upstream. “”That definition eliminates 90% of the DSL technology delivered in New Hampshire and drops our “*served*” rate to about 75% She noted their struggle to push through legislation to get an RSA to allow broadband “but there are heavy lobbyist” she said. She also noted a new bill co-written by herself and State Representative Peter Leishman was to be introduced soon. “The important thing is that when we go to Washington for funding we need to be sure they are looking at the current New Hampshire status.”

Chair Sterling interjected “so we need champions.” Ms. Monroe replied “yes, we know what our communities need.” She also noted an open meeting on local control in Washington D.C. on February 26<sup>th</sup>.

John Vance introduced himself and noted “I am grateful you have raised the issue. Economic development is going nowhere in this state.” He explained the Economic Development Authority was originally created to take advantage of Tax Increment Financing (a public financing method used as a subsidy for re-development, infrastructure and community-improvement projects). “You would not have a TIF without it” he said adding “but with the issue of economic development the most important users have not been involved in the planning.”

Mr. Vance told the members his retirement community was very involved with technology “and we have come to realize how vitally important it is for us to build this communication system.” He noted his community may not be able to market their product without the right kind of communication systems. “Be it television or otherwise we may have a hard time getting people to sign on” he said adding “it may be later than we think and we are going to be left behind without aggressive action. The no bonding thing is a huge issue.”

Chari Sterling thanked all for attending the informative session. Mr. Throop suggested a regular committee be formed and meet on a regular basis to go through the items on the checklist. He also suggested reaching out through the Chamber of Commerce. Ms. Miller suggested researching grant opportunities to be able to hire a consultant. “New Hampshire Charitable Foundation may pay for a needs assessment” she said.

Mr. Robinson announced that Con-Val Principal Brian Pickering was sponsoring a session on branding the community at 7:45 (at Con-Val) tomorrow morning.

The meeting adjourned at 9:10 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Norton  
Administrative Assistant