

Enhanced Broadband Committee Meeting 11/2/15

Attending: Jeanne Dietsch, Pete Throop, Adam Hamilton, George Sterling, Hope Taylor, Jerry Galus, Barbara Miller, Ron McIntire, Joel Huberman, James Kelly, Carole Monroe, Sandy Bibace, Chris Mann, Frank Manley, Jeff Crocker

Jeanne Dietsch, Chair of the Enhanced Broadband Committee, opened the meeting and asked for nominations for Vice-Chair. No nominations were made at this time, so the issue is postponed to a future meeting.

Jeanne provided preliminary results from the Peterborough Internet Survey. As of Friday there were about 600 respondents, with 450 from Peterborough and the others from neighboring towns, primarily Hancock and Greenfield, with a few from Dublin.

The survey will be held open for a few more days. Jeanne pointed out that the response so far has been sufficient for statistical significance, but she emphasized that the sample is not random. It's heavily weighted toward older, more educated people. The young and the poor are underrepresented, and people lacking Internet access weren't able to participate.

The survey is being handled for us by Harry Wolhandler, the President of Accelera Publishing Research.

Barbara Miller is on the Select Board Advisory Committee for all ConVal towns. She reported that the Select Board members who are on this committee from the other towns are enthusiastic about bringing faster Internet to our region, and they have encouraged people in their towns to take the survey.

We considered whether a visit to nearby towns (Leverett, MA, and Sanford, ME) that have recently brought in (or are in the process of bringing in) high-speed Internet could be done with Skype conferencing to save driving time, or would best be done with a physical visit to those towns. The strong consensus was that a physical visit would be better than a Skype visit.

Several people volunteered to participate in visits to these two towns: Jerry Galus, Frank Manley, Joel Huberman, Jeanne Dietsch and possibly Carole Monroe. Pete Throop will contact the two towns to find times when we might be able to visit. The volunteers visiting other towns should meet with each other ahead of time to discuss the questions to be asked. Carole suggested that we include representatives from Hancock and Greenfield when we visit other towns.

There was discussion of possible funding mechanisms for construction of a fiber network in Peterborough. Carole recalled that there are currently five bills relevant to the possibility of towns funding Internet expansion that are now at various stages of consideration by the NH legislature. She emphasized that we need to show up in force, in Concord, when these bills are being discussed. Otherwise only lobbyists for Comcast and Fairpoint will be there.

Carole pointed out that, unfortunately, the Business and Industry Association ("NH's Statewide Chamber of Commerce") supports the Comcast/Fairpoint view that NH is already well served by these two companies, and no improvements are needed. Jeanne volunteered to find out more about these five bills and let us know when our presence in Concord will be needed.

There was discussion of alternative funding mechanisms if Peter Leishman's bill permitting communities to bond for Internet expansion is not approved. Could an Internet expansion area (presumably a large portion of a town, a whole town, or several adjoining towns) be rebranded as a lighting district, a fire district, a water-sewer district or other special assessment district, and then sell bonds?

Pete Throop pointed out that it's premature to become too immersed in funding questions until our development strategy is further worked out. Will Peterborough attempt only to string dark fiber (optical fiber alone, without the additional equipment that would make it operational), leaving fiber activation to Internet Service Providers (ISPs), or will Peterborough become an ISP itself? Will Peterborough become a partner with one or more private entities?

For example, Comcast's network currently covers only a portion of Peterborough. Carole suggested that we ask Comcast how much it would cost for them to extend coverage to 100% of Peterborough. Perhaps Peterborough could help with the funding. Comcast's network is capable of maximum speeds of 100 Mbps down and 20 Mbps up, which is much better than most of us are getting now.

Another model was suggested by Carole, who is currently working for the East Central Vermont Community Optic-Fiber Network (<http://ecfiber.net>; <http://muninetworks.org/tags-39>). This community network is funded by private investment. It was started in 2010 and now has received over \$6 million in investments, through promissory notes of \$2500 each. According to Carole, it has been cash-flow positive since last year and intends to pay 5-6% annual interest on investments. It offers 400 Mbps, symmetrical, via its fiber-optic (to the premises) network.

The question of which model might be optimal for Peterborough can best be answered after we have a map available of the current locations of optical fiber and other forms of Internet wiring in Peterborough. We can't obtain this information from Fairpoint or Comcast, because both companies consider the locations of their wires to be trade secrets. However, the responses to the survey will give us a reasonably good picture of the portions of Town covered by both companies, and we can learn more by visual inspection of wires on poles.

Our next meeting will be Monday, November 30th, at 7:30 am in the Select Board Room.

Joel Huberman
Informal (unelected) secretary