

Economic Development Advisory Committee Minutes 09/15/2014

Economic Development Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes/Broadband Info Meeting

Recorded by Sharon Rossi

September 15, 2014

Attendees: PRenaud, NNickerson, AWood

Sue Corcoran, Project Manager, NH Broadband Mapping & Planning Program

Henry Underwood, Southwest Region Planning Commission

Jerry Hunter, CMRC, Vice President of Information Technology

Carol Miller, DRED, Director of Broadband Technology

Andre Garron, UNH Cooperative Extension Specialist, Regional Economic Development

7:07 p.m. Meeting Opened

PRenaud offered the following early synopsis of the broadband surveys received as of 9/15/2014:

40 on-line surveys have been received as of Monday, 9/15.

Breakdown as follows:

- 64% telecommute (CMiller is extremely pleased with that percentage.)

- 53% are dissatisfied or somewhat dissatisfied with the level of internet service; 42% somewhat satisfied; 0 very satisfied

- 55% are somewhat dissatisfied or dissatisfied with the value of their internet; 29% satisfied or somewhat satisfied

- 12% would be willing to increase the cost of their internet up to \$50 per mo; 12% would not be willing to spend anymore on internet

- 82% say FairPoint is their main provider

- 76% say having internet service will be a factor in selling or buying a home

There are 4 locations for the paper surveys in town: town offices, library, post office and Harvester Market, plus a link on the town website. On Friday, 9/12 an e-mail blast was done by town administration. PRenaud will be putting up posters around town and will put a message on the town sign on the common. He said October 10 is the return date for the survey. At the next EDAC meeting, October 20, the final results and analysis will be available.

CMiller will be leaving maps for the EDAC to look at other internet service options. TDS is an option which shows one location is towards Wilton and the other is toward Dublin. FairPoint owns the poles and have a central office in Greenfield so trying to get a TDS exchange would be extremely costly from a legal standpoint. She also said the town could perhaps do their own physical building of lines. JHunter asked, "Why wouldn't you do the build out with Comcast?" PRenaud responded, "\$2.5 million dollars is the reason. That is the unofficial cost estimate that has been offered by Comcast when I met with a representative. The town would have to come up with half the cost. We would need to come up with \$2,000 to have a complete town survey done by Precision Valley. They would survey the roads, poles, and building locations to get us a firm cost for build-out."

CMiller said there is a new business director for Comcast and it appears they are working hard to get small businesses good service. She also advised of a broadband feasibility matrix that she will send to PRenaud as well as information on grants that could help the board make a decision on how to proceed. She'll e-mail the info to PRenaud and will gladly help in filling the forms out. This info will help you identify all solutions and will help in determining which one will work for the town.

PRenaud commented that funding and grants are fairly non-existent for cable companies. CMiller said there can be a number of solutions in getting broadband in the town: grants or loans, float a bond, allocate, raise, or appropriate funds from town meeting.

Phases would be a good way of presenting a plan to the residents of the town. For this town, there has to be a total plan in place before grants, loans or appropriations of funds could be applied for. NNickerson said if we have a plan in place, and could get Comcast to make a presentation at town meeting that would be a good way to inform and sell the broadband to the town.

CMiller said USDA has loosened up many of their rules, so that is an avenue that can be pursued.

AGarron said that there is a 7.2% population below poverty level in Greenfield which may or may not help with the USDA grant. PRenaud mentioned that JMoran attended a webinar done by USDA and concluded that we don't have enough below poverty level. NNickerson asked "How do we prove that FairPoint is providing inadequate service?" CMiller replied "The survey results could be used as evidence of inadequate service."

AWood asked if we engage them for an estimate, is there an obligation to proceed further with Comcast? CMiller said it is important to get an agreement detailing exactly what we want from this estimate.

PRenaud said the EDAC needs to meet with the Select Board soon to inform them of broadband options for the town. CMiller said perhaps a conference call with BChristansen. (Comcast) for specific answers on what items need to be met for the Comcast survey. A written agreement is absolutely needed. CMiller is going to set up the conference call for early October. PRenaud will hold off on meeting with the Select Board until after the conference call and the results are in for the internet usage survey. NNickerson, AWood and PRenaud will participate in the conference call when CMiller sets it up. PRenaud said this may not be allowed under RSA 91-A.

Items to be addressed during conference call: timeline will be needed, costs, written agreement, any questions to be ready for the conference call.

CMiller also said she could also set up a conference call with Brian Foucher of WiValley. PRenaud said let's do the Comcast call first, and then see where we stand.

CMiller checked out the economic development section of the Vision Statement in the Master Plan. She feels broadband should be added to the paragraph. She also checked out the telecommunications regulation. She said it seems comprehensive compared to many other towns.

PRenaud asked JHunter his opinion on pursuing the Comcast option in relation to CMRC. JHunter responded, "I could certainly come up with the number of people who live on the Mountain and who could be served up there. There are 50-60 homes at the Mountain and on the business side, I could certainly use it."

CMiller said everyone pays for right-of-way and perhaps this could be a negotiation point with Comcast. Another idea is perhaps a tax credit for Comcast to bring service to unserved areas. These are legal type issues that will have to be worked out.

PRenaud said another concern is that FairPoint is financially unstable and who would pick them up if they go under? Right now, the town has no other competitive options. CMiller assured everyone that if that happened someone would pick up FairPoint's service and assets.

8:37 p.m. Broadband discussion ended.

8:42 p.m. Approval of August Meeting Minutes

NNickerson motioned to accept as is. AWood seconded. Vote unanimous in favor.

8:50 P.M. Adjournment

AWood needed to leave; a quorum would no longer be present. AWood motioned to adjourn. NNickerson seconded. Vote unanimous in favor.