

Plainfield Broadband Committee
Meeting Minutes July 11, 2016

Committee Members Present: Kimberly Longey, Howard Bronstein, Michal Lumsden, Lew Robbins, Sally Silberberg. Leslie Rule attended for the last 15 minutes of the meeting. Also attending: Hillary Reale, Plainfield resident

Kimberly called the meeting to order at 7:04PM at Town Hall.

A motion was made and seconded to appoint Kimberly Longey acting chair. Motion passed unanimously.

A motion was made and seconded to appoint Sally Silberberg acting secretary. Motion passed unanimously.

Minutes:

The committee agreed to delay the reading of the June 26 Meeting minutes until next meeting.

MBI:

The committee discussed the pending "readiness assessment process". A motion was made and seconded to schedule the first meeting with MBI project manager Cornell Robinson Monday for August 1st 2016 at 7PM. The motion passed unanimously. This will be a special meeting of the broadband committee and will start an anticipated 21 day process. The group discussed additional town officials desired at this meeting and agreed to invite Town Secretary Paula King, Town Treasurer Allan Kidman and members of the Finance Committee. Kimberly agreed to follow up with meeting invitations.

Committee members reviewed the MBI "Last Mile Program Readiness Packet" that was sent by Cornell Robinson and agreed to concentrate this meeting discussion on the "Decision Tree".

1. Network Technology: We will need more information to make a final decision on this. Kimberly reported that capital costs of Active Ethernet may be high, but operating costs, including depreciation may be lower. GPON may cost less, but there is more equipment involved (increasing depreciation reserve costs). Most neighboring towns are choosing to use GPON (Global Passive Optical Network).

Lew provided a general overview of how these two technologies work.

It was noted that some areas of town may require a hybrid system of fiber and wireless. An example could be if our town is requested by the Town of Windsor to serve the homes on Windsor Pond. Kimberly reported that there are two wireless pilot projects going on now in

Royalston and Middlefield. The committee wondered if we find ourselves with 95% fiber --- 5% wireless what network what do we choose from the checklist offered by MBI?

Lew Robbins offered to research differences between GPON and AEN.

2. Network Availability + Redundancy

We also need more information from MBI to make decisions on this area. Plainfield one of the few towns that already have an existing "hut", located at the Hathaway Hall. We need to study edge cases (drive shared huts) in town, which will affect our ability to participate in a regional network.

3. Hut / Base Station Location

This decision will be engineering driven, with the town needed to pay attention to issues pertaining to utility rights of way or lease of private land.

4. Make Ready, Pole Leasing, Base Station

The committee agreed on importance of hiring MBI as our agent for Design and Construction, this is primarily to access the funding from the state, which for our town is \$650K of which approx. \$300K is for make ready and design/engineering phase.

It was noted that the town of Mount Washington has chosen to forgo State funding, and hire an outside firm. The committee felt this would not be acceptable to Plainfield, for obvious financial reasons.

Another reason to work with MBI is their expertise in construction of the middle mile, and also the fact that they have stated any cost overruns in the make ready phase would be covered by MBI funds, not town funds.

5. Service Drops

This is a decision that is local policy. In context of a network paid for largely with local tax dollar, what is the level of service coverage we seek to achieve through this project? This is a core value.

Kimberly noted that MBI's new guidelines are 96% of a town's premises. Under the Patrick Administration the program was striving for 100% coverage. 96% is what the cable and phone companies consider "ubiquitous".

Discussed a 100% goal for Plainfield. And that all residents and businesses should have a right of right of access to service. This does not mean they need to take service.

Howard asked if we planned to offer service to seasonal properties, (e.g. could there be ability to turn on/turn off during months when seasonal residents are not in town. the committee felt this would be a decision for the network provider. And that we could indicate our preference for service offerings in the RFP we issue for Network Operator and ISP.

Discussed local policies related to premise hook ups. The current basic model is for a network builder (in our case this will be the Town) to pay for some basic benchmark, such as 300 feet from the road to the residence or business. This could require a signup fee, or could be rolled in the capital costs for the construction of the network. Most then require the homeowner or business to pay the network build costs that exceed that threshold. We will need to decide if and how to structure an additional fee for longer distances. There is a possibility of creating a formula to average distance that would reverse engineer what the town pays vs. the subscriber is charged. Could also offer a financing option for people to pay the additional costs overtime with interest.

Our decisions on these things need to be made with eye toward incentivizing take rates. The more homes and businesses that sign up for service before or while the network is built the better off our overall network operational sustainability will be. We need to make sure we incentivize subscriptions while network is being built, to avoid going back after MBI construction crew leaves town.

6. Services Offered

Services: The committee felt that initially only DATA and VOICE (either or both) should be offered. Television (aka video) shouldn't be promised in the beginning, as it's difficult to foresee what TV technology will be like in 2019, when the service is finally in place.

Take Rate/Speed Tiers: discuss a wide range of options. One package possibility would be to offer customers two choices. Slowest Speed 25/m or Fastest Speed. 1G, with a price spread of (hypothetically) \$70 for low tier and \$110 for upper tier. Or, we could offer three choices of speed/price. We likely would need to more demographic research and polling to determine what kind of service subscribers would sign on for, and modeled with data.

At the end of this decision tree discussion, the committee agreed to the following core concepts in our approach to the project:

- MBI would act as the Design Agent
- Town will provide 100% service to existing residences and developable lots
- Town wants to offer coverage to the most homes, as an incentive for a high Take Rate

- This project is primarily about providing broadband, but we should offer products (like telephone) that citizens may wish to purchase. Especially because Verizon phone service is degrading.
- Too soon to plan on offering television – we can cross that bridge once network is in construction phase and the time to “light up” homes and businesses is closer.
- Data and Voice as minimum service and multi speed options.
- Deferred decisions on technical choices until more info is in hand.

Regionalization:

a. Wired West Update: Leslie reported that the organization seems to be in flux, and WiredWest plans to make some major decisions about purpose and structure and leadership at its next board meeting

b. Consortium: Kimberly has been in touch with Doug McNally, of Windsor who informed her that Cummington and Windsor are pursuing a regional partnership. Goshen and Chesterfield are talking. Ashfield is going it alone now but could be interested in a small regional cluster approach once construction is complete. While we are now leaning toward independent town network, this does not mean that Plainfield cannot eventually join with other towns down the road.

Community Compact:

Howard has talked with a representative from the state and was informed that the Community Compact Funds have been expended for 2016 and it's unclear if there will be any funding in 2017.

Outreach and Communications:

It was noted that our network might need a name. We could think about what the Plainfield “net” will be called. It was suggested that there could be a contest to involve the community.

The group agreed that after the upcoming August 1st meeting with Cornell Robinson from MBI, there must be an update in the Plainfield Post. Michal and Lew agreed to write it and forward it to Ann Irvine for edition and submission.

Financial:

Kimberly will represent the committee at the USDA meeting in Ashfield later in the month.

It was noted that our town's 2015 \$1.13M appropriation coupled with the state's \$650K funding results in a potential \$20K surplus over currently estimated broadband network construction costs. This is not much cushion for such a large project. It may be unrealistic to cover

contingencies or inflation or other overages. We may need to establish additional revenue sources to build a “nest egg “. To be discussed at a future meetings.

Technology:

Tabled additional discussion on this topic until Brian returns from vacation.

New Business:

Michal informed the board that the Hilltown CDC is also investigating infrastructure and broadband issues. This issue seems to be on the “table” of other community organizations, and it's the hope of board members that this may help to get additional monies flowing and help with affordability issues.

Howard noted that he planned to attend a small town summit in the coming weeks.

Committee members thanked Hillary Reale for attending and entertained her questions.

The meeting adjourned at 9PM

Minutes above as approved at the 2016-07-25 meeting.