

Plainfield Broadband Committee
Meeting Minutes October 24, 2016

Committee Members Present: Brian Hawthorne, Kimberly Longey, Lew Robbins, Michal Lumsden,

Brian called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. at Town Hall.

Kimberly agreed to take minutes.

Lew made a motion to approve the minutes from the October 10 meeting. Praise was offered to Michal for the quality and comprehensiveness of the minutes. The motion passed unanimously.

MBI Readiness Process

We are waiting for the bond counsel letter. Allan Kidston requested that in early October and estimated 45 days.

Kimberly will head up the finalization of all documents, with Lew's help. There will be three documents: MBI's readiness questionnaire (and all embedded attachments) the financial sustainability spreadsheet, and a short business plan. Kimberly suggested it is in Plainfield's interest to use the readiness process to fully document Plainfield's vision, values, assumptions and needs for this project. Leaving a paper trail in case of changes in staffing at either town level or MBI level.

Discussed the financial sustainability spreadsheet and noted need to continue to tweak the info (e.g. number of jointly owned poles affects annual cost of pole insurance). Agreed to use worse-case scenarios on that.

Discussed our effort to ascertain the costs that Plainfield residents pay for various telecommunications services now. Brian reported on status of our internal survey. Lew and Leslie are working on a town-wide survey and aim to have that for review and release in a few weeks.

MBI Technology Meeting Report Back

Lew reported back on the MBI Fiber to the Home presentation held in Worthington on in mid October. The meeting served as a forum for information exchange between towns, and also for MBI to discuss its approach to the design, engineering and construction of the town networks. Discussion centered on technology and evolutions in the technology that will allow the network to respond to future needs within the towns, to ensure redundancy, and to allow regionalism after the fact.

One of the major recommendations made by MBI staff was that towns configure a "home run" network so as to preserve future flexibility.

WiredWest Board Meeting Report Back

Kimberly provided a summary of the WiredWest board meeting held in Plainfield on October 22nd. Key takeaways:

WiredWest is likely to request financial support from its member towns in the coming town meeting season. This will impact the FY2018 budget. If needed, Plainfield could do what it did in prior year, which is privately fundraise. Brian suggested that the best way to approach this would be to ask finance committee to recommend establishing a budget item to fund our Municipal Light Plant (MLP). This would allow the MLP board and director to have resources to use for necessary expenditures.

WiredWest has amended the bylaws to allow for a swifter process to remove inactive member towns. The anticipated result is clearer "coalition of the willing" moving forward on re-building a regional approach. Another result will be to eliminate the quorum problems that have been challenging in past several months. WiredWest currently has 44 member towns. It is estimated that only 15-20 will remain active.

WiredWest recently issued an Request for Information (RFI) for network operations and internet services for a regional network to serve its member towns. 13 responses were received. WiredWest executive committee will review the responses and determine which are viable for pursuit of additional conversation and info gathering.

The Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) recently issued an update to its last mile policy that reverses an earlier policy decision made in July 2015. The MBI is now NOT requiring towns to own their own broadband network infrastructure. This, presumably, would enable towns to partner with private partners to build, own and operate a broadband network in their towns. It remains unclear if this new MBI policy will support or thwart town efforts to build municipally-controlled broadband networks if they so choose.

MBI is going to issue a request for proposals from private sector companies for a "last mile solution" for all 44 un/underserved towns. Presumably this will provide an alternative to the municipal broadband/build it ourselves approach. Though it will almost certainly result in a monopoly. While this may bring broadband to our region faster, there will be little ability for communities to control price, quality or service offerings if faced with a monopoly service provider.

WiredWest has made major updates and improvements to its website. Meeting minutes and notices can be found there at www.wiredwest.net

Lew expressed concerns that with MBI changes in policy and glacial pace that we could easily be faced with significant delays such that a year from now we could be having the same conversations and not be any further along in bringing broadband to our town. This is a huge implication for the long term health of our community. Committee members agreed.

Continued committee consensus is to keep all options open and to explore every possible way to meet our mandate. In the end, we are advisors to the selectboard and will need to make clear recommendation based on deep research to ensure whatever choice we make serves our community's near and long term needs.

Committee Membership

An article seeking volunteers for our committee was published. No response as yet. Committee members brainstormed ideas for potential recruits. Committee agreed that technology experience is less important than knowledge of our community, public policy making, or willingness to work to advance the committee's purpose.

New Business

The next Broadband Committee meeting will be Monday, November 14, at 7 p.m.

Kimberly made a motion to adjourn; Leslie seconded. The motion was passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 8:18 p.m.

Minutes above as approved at the November 14, 2016 meeting.