

Minutes of the Plainfield Broadband Committee of Meeting March 27, 2017

The meeting began at 6:30 p.m. at the Plainfield Town Hall. Present were Broadband Committee members Kimberly Longey, Michal Lumsden, Brian Hawthorne, Sally Silberberg, Lesley Rule, David Kramer, as well as Howard Bronstein, from the Select Board, and Bob Handsaker, from the Charlemont broadband committee. Also present were invited guests Aaron Bean and John Leary, of Westfield Gas and Electric (WG&E).

Absent: Committee member Rebecca Coletta.

Lew Robbins, from the Finance Committee, arrived at 6:42 p.m..

The Plainfield Broadband Committee, anticipating the release of funds appropriated by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for the design and construction of a last-mile fiber-optic broadband network, has begun to draft a contract to engage WG&E for the design and construction of the network ([posted](#) on the Plainfield website).

Aaron Bean and John Leary, of Westfield Gas and Electric (WG&E), were invited to attend this meeting to describe the work of their Whip City Fiber division and how they propose to help Plainfield design, build, market, and manage a last-mile fiber-optic broadband network. Messrs. Bean and Leary spoke of their experience in broadband implementation in Westfield and noted their familiarity with all aspects of the process, including pricing, contracts, design, construction, marketing, and billing. They stated that since they are beholden only to the rate-payers, not corporations, their costs are low compared to companies in the private sector. They offer an “à la carte” menu of services, providing only what the contracting party wants from them.

They stressed that while it is important to have a good contract, it is the establishment of good relationships between the parties that is most important to the success of a project. They expressed the hope that they would be able to provide services to several towns, which would lower costs for all parties and allow for the possibility of placing a technician permanently in the hilltown area to answer service calls, which would alleviate the problem of the distance, a one-hour drive, from Westfield to Plainfield.

Asked what WG&E’s interest in expanding to other towns was, they replied that it would allow them economies of scale in many areas, and also that they would enjoy the challenge.

Kimberly Longey noted that while Plainfield is interested in regional approaches and maximizing collaboration wherever possible, the town is committed to moving forward and working with other towns as they catch up to us, but that we will not wait for towns that are lagging behind.

Also discussed was the need to verify our three-year-old cost data to get a sense of the requisite budget. To do so will necessitate completing a pole survey, which would provide information for the design and materials costs.

Asked about an approximate time frame, Messrs. Bean and Leary offered the following estimate: after project sign-off, one month until the pole survey, then one month for the survey. Design: two more months. Pole applications, about two more months to present them, and one month or more to process them. Then six months for make-ready. Construction: four months. Connections inside the premises: three months, for a total of about twenty months.

The WG&E presentation part of the meeting ended at around 7:50 p.m. The meeting was reconvened at 8:06.

Present were members Kimberly Longey, Michal Lumsden, Brian Hawthorne, Sally Silberberg, Lesley Rule, David Kramer. Also present was Lew Robbins, from the Plainfield Finance Committee.

As the first order of business, David Kramer was nominated for permanent secretary. Upon his election, he at once made a note of the fact.

Then the minutes of the meeting of March 13, 2017, as amended by Brian Hawthorne, were approved.

Brian reviewed the proposal sent by the Broadband Committee to the Select Board following the meeting of March 13, in which the committee recommended adoption of a job description for the MLP manager, the appointment of Kimberly Longey to that position, and the appointment of an assistant manager. In response, the Select Board, expressing concern that the task was too great for one or two individuals, suggested that the committee modify its proposal to include more support, whether in the form of an advisory board, an expanded municipal light board, or some other structure. Brian, Lesley, and Kimberly then drafted a [proposal](#), which is available on the Town of Plainfield website.

A motion was made and passed to submit that proposal to the Select Board.

The meeting adjourned at 8:49 p.m.

Minutes prepared by David Kramer, secretary