

2020 Annual Report from Plainfield Light and Telecommunications Department (aka Plainfield Broadband)

Plainfield Broadband has substantially completed a town-owned broadband network that provides Internet and telephone service to any residence or business located in our town. Whip City Fiber, a department of WG+E, provides Internet services (including telephone) and manages our network through an inter-governmental agreement between our two towns.

Residential Gigabit Internet service is offered at \$85 per month with optional VOIP phone service at \$12.95 per month plus approximately \$8 per month in mandatory state and federal taxes and fees. Most home-based businesses are covered under residential service rates. Costs for larger businesses, non-profits, and institutions are dependent on the number of users, the service level agreement needs of the business, and other factors. Business offerings range from \$100 per month to \$800 per month and we can provide custom service pricing.

As of January 2021, the Town Hall, Town Offices/Library, Public Safety Complex, Highway Department and Police Department buildings are connected to the network and to each other. Eight businesses and nonprofits are receiving service, along with 261 residential customers. Forty-one premises are "internet ready" with fiber run from the street to the outside of the premises. Forty-five premises in town did not respond to 18 months of outreach, and are not yet connected to the network, but can be in the future if they apply for service.

Accomplishments between January and December 2020 include:

- January - March 2020: we substantially completed the network distribution (43 miles of fiber, down every road and passing every premise. Residential connections were substantially completed in two of four Fiber Service Areas (FSAs) by March 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic temporarily halted construction.
- April 2020: Assistant MLP Manager Brian Hawthorne worked with Whip City Fiber to develop an interim "Team Box" exterior installation solution which allowed homes to be connected without any technicians accessing the interior of the house.
- May - September 2020: Interior installations resumed with new health and safety protocols and nearly all homes which had requested service were connected.
- June 2020: Plainfield secured an additional \$139,000 in state funding to offset network construction costs, bringing the Commonwealth's total contribution to \$789,000 for our \$2.26M project.
- June 2020: Broadband Enterprise Fund budget of \$406,843 passed at Town Meeting. All operating costs of the network (\$283,262) are covered by subscriber fees. Debt service, indirect building insurance and indirect town office staffing costs (\$123,581) are covered by appropriations from the general fund.
- June 2020: Completed FY 2020, the first year of operating the Broadband Enterprise Fund, with \$17,542 in retained earnings, which will be held in reserve to cover any future catastrophic costs, such as insurance deductibles, extraordinary network repairs or equipment replacement.
- July 2020: Long time volunteers Rebecca Coletta, Michal Lumsden, and Sally Silberberg wrapped up their work on the broadband project. We could not have accomplished all that we did without their help.
- July 2020: The MLP Manager Kimberly Longey provided an historic overview of the 14 year project history, along with a proposed streamlined department staffing plan and goals for the coming year for Selectboard approval.
- August - September 2020: The MLP issued recommended broadband network emergency response guidelines for input from the Police Chief, Fire Chief, and Highway Superintendent. Final guidelines were included in the Town's Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan.

- December 2020: Began promotion of the federal Lifeline program, which offers a \$9.25 subsidy to income eligible households, and is funded through the Universal Service Fund (USF) via small fees on phone bills nationwide.
- December 2020: After a last round of outreach, including personal visits to the 45 premises not yet connected to the network, Plainfield ended the construction cost subsidy on 12/31/2020. Construction crews have left town for work in other towns. Future premise connections can still occur, require an application for service, and will require the homeowner to pay the installation costs.
- The MLP Manager convenes periodic meetings of MLP Managers from the towns of Ashfield, Charlemont, Chesterfield, Cummington, Goshen and Windsor. This group meets periodically to share lessons learned and collaborate on solutions. Plainfield Broadband is recognized as the leader amongst neighboring towns in terms of our expertise, diligence, cooperation, information sharing and support as towns grapple with these highly complex projects.

We encourage you to visit the Whip City Fiber/Plainfield website (<https://www.whipcityfiber.com/plainfield>) or our page on the Town of Plainfield website for more information.

Respectfully,
Kimberly Longey, Manager
Brian Hawthorne, Assistant Manager