

NEK Community Broadband

Executive Committee Meeting Minutes

December 4, 2020 3-4:30pm

Attendees: Christine Hallquist (Admin), Jami Jones (clerk), Michael Strait, Kristen Fountain (Vice-chair), Nic Anazole, Katherine Sims, William Piper, Noah Armstrong, Tom Lovett (non-voting), Evan Carlson (Chair - arrived at 4pm), Jonathan Baker (arrived at 4pm)

Agenda Review- 2 min

Updates-

- **Move Broadband Action plan to the front of the Agenda Motioned: Katherine, Seconded: Nick Anazole, Carried: (5-0)**
- Broadband Action Plan update from Katherine Sims - 15 minutes
 - In the middle of an update to hone in on more clear steps and resources needed. Tom and Katherine met with Rob Fisch to get his perspective. 3 Strategies introduced.
 - Strategy 1: was: install wifi hotspots, now: continued access.
 - Goal to have at least one wifi hotspot in every town that people can access. There is an ongoing cost with these hotspots (Some towns have 5 yr licenses or 1 yr licenses)
 - Going to take a while to reach all of the areas and would continue to support the ongoing costs of the wifi in the public hotspots.
 - Comments:
 - The hotspots are indeed useful (example Waterford).
 - The CUD may need to take into consideration wifi for emergency services
 - Signage and mapping are important. The licenses need to advertise it so that the public knows where the hotspots are.
 - There are still towns where the signals may not be strong, or have enough bandwidth to have others on the hotspot. The public need to have access.

- Encourage schools to serve the role of public hotspots().
 - Schools may be worried about used bandwidth or security issues.
 - There may be additional reasons why the network needs to be extended to places that are not reached.
 - The state could do the research to figure out if every town has wifi hotspots.
- What role does the CUD want to play?
 - There may be interest from other CUDs to provide support
 - However, our CUD does not have staffing capacity to be able to take on these responsibilities from the state.
 - The CUD could be helpful that as we start to own assets with the state assistance we could build the network at a lower end cost to the public.
 - The CUD helps to advocate for the funding.
 - The CUD could find other ways to help the public in the interim while we are building the network and delivering fiber to the public.
 - Originally the CUD had planned to be a management, rather than being involved in an ISP sort of way.
 - We do not want to be well intended, without any follow-through.
 - It is part of our mission to advocate for the public and communicate/follow through with the mission to make sure that it is completed.
 - We want to increase, support, and maintain the wifi hotspots, perhaps via VCUDA.
- The long-term conversation needs to continue with the governing board on what role the CUD can play in collusion with the state.
- Strategy 2: maintaining subsidies and providing access to low income Vermonters
 - Continue to advocate with the legislature to allocate money to this work and have someone else set up a lending program for the libraries.
- Strategy 3: Building out the Network for the CUD
 - The initial estimate for the region as it was designed in the past was approximately 77-100 mil
 - We need to raise 100 mil

- Our inability to borrow may cost the state more money because the companies that we are working with are raising the amount we need to borrow. If the state could “unblock” the amount that we could borrow.
 - Provide more funding to the VEDA program in terms of loan guarantees. There is not enough funding to provide for all of the CUD’s addresses, only part of them.
 - Ideally we would like a lower match, but the CUD realizes that they need to be able to match the funds.
 - Do the state-level priorities “mean” anything to the CUD?
 - Broadband Corp. may not be a possible partnership with the CUD, but could be more applied to the state-level.
 - The CUD needs people who do network development, not necessarily infrastructures at this point (more in the future) Field Technicians and Telecommunications Engineers.
- Is there expertise that our CUD needs and who would we like to provide it?
 - At DPS there should be a broadband specific person to help focus in on the CUDs
 - We need a higher-level Technical Engineering skilled person.
- We can connect with Tom via Katherine.

Administrative Update

- Writing an EDA grant 75-95K per year to help with Administrative costs.
- Kingdom Fiber: Optimism from Rob Fisch and the state for an extension on the grants. Should hear by December 10 or 11th.
 - Working with a group out of Montpelier on calls getting 40-50 people interested in installations/service.
- List of Priorities: mapping exercise on where are the CUDs pushing forward on the priorities from the Governing Board.

Finance Update

- Setting up another level of oversight, a board role. Looking to amend the charter for it to say “If the treasurer is also the district administrator a member of the executive committee will be appointed chair of the Finance Committee, appointed by the executive committee.”

- **Move to recommend that the governing board make an amendment to the Finance Committee Charter as described. Motioned: William, Seconded: Katherine, Carried: (5-0)**

Tech Update

- Had a discussion on fixed wireless
- Part of the business planning solution is to look at interim solutions because some of the regions are 10 years out.
- Create resolutions to be presented in documentation to the governing board. Formal recommendations can be made at the next tech committee meeting.

Meeting Round-Up

New Business-

- Public materials - what do we want to provide (meeting packets? Zoom recordings)? - 15 minutes
 - To be tabled. In what context are people approaching our information? Having people ask, gives us the opportunity to give context.
 - Reporters and others follow up with Christine.

Other Business-

Resolution recommendations (20 minutes)

- Charter change for Finance Committee (allow a separate facilitator from the Treasurer)
- Northern Enterprise MOU
- **Recommend to have the MOU approved by the governing board, with the change of section nine to complete and provide more description, Motioned: Nick, Seconded: William, (6-0)**
- Acceptance of Walden to the district (already have a resolution in the Consent Agenda for the governing board)
- 2021 Budget Approval
- **Motion to approve the 2021 Budget as unchanged from our previous draft. Motioned: Kristen, Seconded: Noah, Carried: (7-0)**

- Feasibility Study results discussion - 25 minutes
 - Shape files: do these poles actually exist, or are they poles that would be needed? They are poles that are preexisting. Estimated with 2.5 pole change outs per mile.
 - Mileage estimates should be good, ball park figure is in the spreadsheet (the recommended 8 project areas).
 - Their financial assumptions may not be the same ones that the CUD would make.
 - Could do some better modeling if you lower the cost and discerning what the payback would be. A VEDA requirement is to pay back within 3 years (which was the major funding source). The CUD will be able to address that from a more practical standpoint with the business plan.
 - There is a constraint about the CUD getting loans? Is there a way to remove the constraint? There may be some changes in the future, but that is a USDA issue.
 - There may be certain infrastructure assets that we could acquire from VTEL. poles that may be sitting there idle as a part of this program that we may be able to utilize temporarily. There may be others that we could acquire as well from other places that we could look into utilizing.
 - Are we going to meet with Tilson again? There is an identified conflict of interest and other outlying issues with Tilson. If we have any questions for Tilson we would like to have that information for the governing board.
 - Tilson did not fulfill the proposal to us. The proposal: A network that represents all of the RDOF blocks in the NEK. There is not a network design that encompasses all of the fiber routes for the whole region. The executive committee will look at the document and ask questions in preparation of the governing board meeting. Christine will initiate the call to Tilson.

Adjourn at 4:34

Motioned: Kristen, Seconded: Katherine, Carried: (7-0)

Action Items-

- Will email about the Governing Board Agenda

Respectfully submitted,

Jami Jones, NEK Community Broadband Clerk