

NEK Community Broadband

Organizational Board Meeting Minutes

May 11, 2021 - 5:30PM - 7:30PM

Attendees (see list)

Introduction

5:30 - Review agenda

5:35 - Review meeting procedure

5:40 - Record all present, primary and alternate board members

5:50 - Public Comment

- A thank you was given to the Chair, Vice- Chair and Executive Committee for leading the NEK.

5:55 - Acceptance of new member appointments

- 6 new member towns are being accepted today: Brunswick, Canaan, Charleston, Guildhall, Maidstone, Unincorporated Towns of Gores.
- appointees:
- **Motion to accept all new member towns and new appointments into NEK Community Broadband. Motioned: Jennifer Barone, Second: Mike Strait, Carried(30-0).**

6:00 - Review role of the board members

- The Governing Board member is the go between for the town and the CUD. They will be communicating back to the communities within the region.
- Carrie Glessner- Communications committee meet every 2 weeks, work on getting messages out into the communities. Looking for a variety of skills: social media, writing, editing, graphic design, web design, etc. (Tuesday every 2 weeks)
- Mike Strait- Finance Committee role is to oversee the finances, audits, and looking for grant tracking technology (First Thursday of the month)

- Shawn Burroughs- Tech Committee, standards of deployment. Looking for people to join in on the meetings, even though the committee is full. (Last Tuesday of the month)
- Evan Carlson- Executive Committee, works with Christine Hallquist to drive forward the mission of the NEK, looking forward to presenting the business plan next month with NRTC. (Bi-weekly)
- Policy Group- looking at developing policies to move business forward in an organized way.
- Christine Hallquist- Administrator
- Jami Jones- clerk

6:05 - Consent agenda

Motion to accept the consent agenda. Motioned: Mike Strait, Seconded: Jennifer Barone, Carried (30-0)

Bylaws & Appointments

6:10 - Review of bylaw amendments

- Looking at a change to special meetings- $\frac{1}{3}$ of the board to call the special meeting instead of $\frac{1}{2}$.
- Executive committee can increase from 7-9 members to allow for more members
- Executive Committee- recommendation to have representation from all of the counties within the NEK.

Motion to approve the proposed bylaw amendments. Motioned: Kathleen Monroe, Seconded: Kristen Fountain, Carried: (30-0)

6:15 - Elect Clerk

- Bylaws state to elect the clerk. But, because the NEK went through a competitive hiring process, we may want to go through a bylaw amendment at a future date.

Kristen nominated Jami Jones for clerk. Kathleen Monroe Seconded.

Motion to elect Jami Jones the clerk of NEK Broadband. Motioned: Shawn Tester, Second: Jonathan Baker, Carried (30-0).

6:20 - Elect chair and vice chair

- Floor was opened for nominations for Chair.

Evan was nominated by Kristen Fountain, Seconded: Mark Whitworth.

Motion to appoint Evan Carlson as Chair. Motioned: Jennifer Barone, Seconded: Mark Whitworth. Carried: (30-0).

- Floor was opened for nominations for Vice Chair.

Evan nominated Kristen Fountain for Vice Chair, Annie McLean seconded.

Motioned: Dale Urie, Seconded: Carrie Glessner, Carried: (30-0).

6:25 - Elect executive committee

- Chair and vice chair are put into the Executive Committee, Candidates: Caledonia: Jonathan Baker , Nick Anzalone, William Piper, Evan Carlson. Essex: Mike Strait , Morgan Wade. Orleans: Katherine Sims, Kristen Fountain.

Motion to approve the slate of EC members as listed. Motioned: Mark Whitworth, Seconded: Theresa Carron, Carried: (30-0).

New Business

6:45 - District Administrator Update

- Received the grant for Concord project, will be giving info to the Waterford board to be able to go farther, and applied for RDBG for the project.
- Started the make-ready process for GMP, incentives (\$112K) will help to extend farther.
- Kristen and Christine will be in contact with Dale about the project.
- Put together an RFP to find a partner that can grow with the NEK. Local partners may not have the "horsepower". Went out to 48 respondents. Have had 2 meetings with potential prospects, and 15 who will be going through the process.
- RFP had financial, technical standards.
- NRTC- to build the network in 5 years (aggressive schedule)
- Working with utilities to see who can do the make-ready work.
- Grant will be available this week for funds through July. Will need Project management help.
- Looking to apply for another million dollar grant, but will need an ISP Partner
- Question:
 - Partnership- we provide the backbone, the ISP provides the drops

- Discussion needed, should we build the entire network to the premise? Could give us better open access.
- Do we have the cooperation of the RDOF winners?
 - NEK is partnering with NRTC. Following up with CCI
- Does the routes include or exclude winners?
 - It includes, we are excluding areas that we know fiber is being constructed (center of Danville, Tilson). Don't want to compete until we get everyone served
 - Will have lots of complexity to try and build around the pockets
 - CCI is making similar requests and will be focusing on areas where they will profit first.
- There was a thank you to Christine for all of her hard work.

7:00 - Strategic Direction & Preparing for Vote in June

- Evan will send out the presentation deck on the Strategic Direction Decision for June
- Evan gave a presentation on the decision.
 - ARPA will be sending money for construction costs.
 - NEK may see up to 45M
 - NEK will spend total 136M
 - 5-10 year aggressive build, dependent upon human capacity. Assumption is to build 500mi/year.
 - Constraints: Time for make-ready (6mo), construction crew availability, materials, seasonality, everyone building at the same time.
- Build Strategies- for resiliency (rings) to overcome the failures in the network.
 - NRTC has proposed 4 middle mile back bone rings. The locations are still up in the air.
 - How to build? Town by town, decentralized laterals, or service areas.
- Evaluating: pros and cons for each of the build strategies
- Other things to consider: it will be hard to get the projects done. There will be setbacks and delays, being conservative so that the NEK is not over promising like other incumbents.
- Communities will be put into different phases, and it may take a while for the builds to happen in the last phase. No one wants to be last, but we want to listen to the communities for opportunities to support them until we can get to those last miles.
- Coming up for the board: Small group sessions, NRTC will incorporate the feedback, final presentation for the plan at the June Governing Board Meeting.

- Questions:
 - Town by Town could be problematic for individuals as roads only enter and exit through other towns.
 - Service area by service area suggested.
 - Is a hybrid possible? A primary and a secondary focus?
 - Can bring it back to NRTC. Have multiple utilities for smaller utilities could go faster than the larger utilities, which leads for the possibility of getting multiple areas going at one time.
 - Why was Concord/Waterford chosen first?
 - Was brought through last years CARES funding via DPS. Tilson was producing the feasibility study and they were asking to partner with the NEK. It does not hold a strategic plan, but the money was made available for that specific project. Planning for future use of that network.
 - After we have the strategy, could we do a lottery as a way to decide who gets to go first? Is there room for the outliers to get subsidies for wireless or other internet possibilities?
 - The back bones have to be constructed. The resilient rings will uphold the network, and after that the NEK could potentially hold a lottery. To go to the bond market we need to be able to audit and show that we have assets and money on the books, revenue to service any debt that we carry.
 - Can we share the slidedeck with the public
 - You can, but it could be more advantageous to wait until later in the week when the slidedeck is more clear.
 - Provide feedback?
 - Send feedback to the executive committee (execs@nekbroadband.org) with Christine (christine@nekbroadband.org) copied
 - Important that while we are making hard decisions there is a benefit of being together as a larger group. Together we may be able to access more resources and get to the end goal together faster.
 - If there is backbone will it be repeated?
 - Where we can access, we will access (NEK is not trying to overbuild) State assets, Northern Enterprise assets. They exist within electrical space vs. the communications space.

- Kristen and Bill are on Northern Enterprise board and feeling optimistic with VEC. The bill that Katherine has been working on will give the CUDs the state assets.
 - NEK will give the all reps access again to the ARC GIS maps and the intro that Christine gave.
 - Real maps may have levels of detail that we do not want to share publicly, but perhaps in Executive Session with a Selectboard.
 - What is the balance of business model vs unserved addresses?
 - Accessing the bond market is going to need revenue. Need to access the bond market for residual income to service the debt. Going to have to start by serving areas with a higher take rate (all of the areas are already in places that ordinary businesses would not want to build initially).
 - Some of the process will be driven by which utilities can do the work first.
 - Will need to be able to communicate those decision driving factors that stack up to make the plan the way that it is.
- The NEK exists to get to the last-mile persons, unlike an ordinary business.
- Evan will speak with NRTC about meeting session times, daytime and evenings available.

7:20 - In Person Meetings Plan

- Where can there be an in-person meeting that accommodates zoom as well.
 - NVU Lyndon Campus- larger conference rooms.
 - David Stahler will look into other options at Lyndon Institute
 - Catamount-Nick
 - Fairbanks-St. Johnsbury: Katherine.
 - Other suggestions can be sent to Evan

7:25 - Vote on Three CUD MOU for Washington Electric Cooperative

- Washington Electric coop is in our district, the only utility that plans to use its own resources to help build a fiber optic network.
 - To work with the CUDs and RDOF winners and go through the USDA to get low interest loans.
 - The WEC project can go in parallel with our other builds because the other CUDs involved will be taking a major lead.

- The cost we are covering is design and engineering.
- Construction is provided through the loan via WEC.
- Looking to come with MOU with WEC to the GB. Awaiting for legislation for a concrete tax exemption. Affected towns, Groton, Peacham, Walden, etc. NEK is looking to start email list with the reps would be involved.

Motion to approve the Three CUD MOU for Washington Electric Cooperative network as well as the Three CUD NDA. Motioned: Kristen Fountain, Seconded: William Piper, Carried: (30-0)

Motion to adjourn. Motioned: Kristen Fountain. Seconded: Dale Urie, Carried:(30-0)

*Respectfully Submitted,
Jami Jones, NEK Broadband, Clerk*

