

NEK Broadband

High-Speed Internet for Northeastern Vermont

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For Immediate Release
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NEK Broadband Receives Funding & Hires Interim Director

Planning efforts to create 2,800 miles of fiber optic cable based internet in the Northeast Kingdom has received \$276,250 to support next steps. The funding is from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. The pandemic has highlighted the need for every household and business to have access to high-speed internet and this federal funding supports states' efforts to expand networks. Additional grants are being pursued.

While NEK Broadband is primarily a volunteer organization, it's vital that there are paid staff members to oversee planning and project management. This funding will partially support the position of a professional administrator and the hiring of a project manager. Other basics such as insurance, software licenses and utilizing a legal consultant, when necessary, are also part of the funding package.

One other key element of the funding will create an Executable Project Plan. The Executable Project Plan is a detailed, step-by-step plan. This document is critical for efficiently building a broadband network across the entire Northeast Kingdom service area.

Finally, over \$110,000 has been allocated for completing the necessary utility pole inventory in Washington Electric Co-op territory within the Kingdom. Over 5,200 utility poles must be inspected to be sure they have space for an additional cable. This funding begins the process. Inspection and replacement will be required of all utilities that own poles in the planned service area and must be completed before each construction phase of the new fiber optic internet network can begin.

The organization's former administrator, Christine Hallquist, has been appointed by Governor Scott to the newly created statewide Vermont Community Broadband Board. The legislature created this board to support all of the Communication Union Districts, such as NEK Broadband, CV Fiber, etc.

Christa Shute, Esq., will serve as Interim Executive Director. Shute is a Northeast Kingdom native and has a solid history of working in telecommunications. She was Director of Business Development and Finance for the Vermont Telecommunications Authority from 2009 to 2015. As key negotiator for developing 175 miles of the Northeast Kingdom Fiber Network and over 150 miles of the Central Vermont Fiber Network, she has a track record of getting things done.

"I have lived in rural Vermont most of my life and understand the challenges of good internet access and its affordability. I am dedicated to helping build the public infrastructure needed in the Northeast Kingdom where the vastness of the territory and sparse population make the task particularly challenging."

NEK Broadband will do a search for and hire a permanent Executive Director.