

Vermont Community Broadband Board Draft Meeting Minutes
112 State Street, 3rd Floor,
Giga Conference Room
Montpelier, VT
December 13, 2021

I. Call To Order – 12:09pm

II. Roll call completed by Patty Richards

Patty Richards, Chair Remote)
Holly Groschner (In-person)
Dan Nelson (Remote)
Brian Otley (Remote)
Laura Sibia (Remote)(joined at 12:30 pm)
Christine Hallquist - staff (In-person)
Robert Fish - staff (Remote)
Stan Macel – staff (Remote)

III. Review of Agenda

There were no changes to the agenda.

Patty Richards moved to approve the agenda, and Brian Otley seconded. Motion passed.

IV. Approval of Meeting Minutes

The Board then discussed the November 22, 2021 draft Board Meeting minutes. Holly Groschner moved to make a small amendment to the minutes, adding the words “as amended” just above Roman Numeral IV on page one. Holly Groschner moved to approve the minutes, as amended. Patty Richards seconded. The motion was approved.

V. 2021 and 2022 Budget Proposals

The Board then discussed the Board’s 2021 and 2022 budget proposals with Christine Hallquist.

- There were discussions about specific line items and whether grants in the 2022 budget were secured or contingent. Brian Otley suggested that those numbers that are not locked up be noted (e.g., by asterisk or color coding) in future budgets, and Holly Groschner agreed.
- The Board also discussed plans for reporting to the legislature regarding requests for additional funding, to be discussed in more detail in January. Christine Hallquist

noted that the numbers for the 2021 capital budget are firm, other than the Northern Borders Grant, which staff is working to finalize.

- The Board discussed the line item regarding the Construction Coordination Fund and suggested that the staff get feedback from the CUDs and/or VCUDA regarding this Fund.
- Next the Board discussed the Personnel line items, and Brian Otley and Holly Groschner wanted to understand the project developer role in more detail. The Board recommended taking out the Project Manager role at this time, with the option to come back to the Board if the position becomes necessary in the future.
- The Board did not have concerns about line items for equipment, software and supplies, or contracted services.
- Rob Fish noted that the executive assistant position would soon be filled with an excellent candidate.
- The Board discussed possible contracted legal services for specialized functions with the need for niche expertise, and asked how that would interface with the new General Counsel. They asked that Stan Macel work to monitor legal work with any outside vendor, which he agreed to do. The Board then inquired about the role of the fiber optic engineer who would work to review CUD plans. After discussion, the Board supported the line item, but urged staff to make sure that the resource is a deployed in a helpful way, engaging early (not meant to be a punitive tool).
- Regarding training and education, Christine Hallquist noted that she was working closely with the Department of Labor and others on this item, and that, as of now, the source of Funding is The Vermont Community Broadband Fund, 30 V.S.A. Section 8083(b)(3). Patty Richards wanted to clarify that this money was being used specifically for telecom-related training, and Christine Hallquist confirmed that it is. Laura Sibilila asked for details about the program, and Christine Hallquist provided details about the intended users. Rob Fish noted that there will be a survey to all major telecom employers in the State to identify current needs. Laura Sibilila expressed that the goal should be a program to meet the needs of employers, and Christine Hallquist confirmed that the development team is striving to meet that goal. Patty Richards asked how the cost for the program was calculated. Christine Hallquist noted that it was calculated using data from NEK Broadband and the Vermont Technical College, based on 144 classroom hours for the number of candidates necessary for projected upcoming projects (375 candidates). Patty Richards asked whether these funds were sufficient, and Christine Hallquist noted that we or the Department of Labor might need to request additional funds in the future from the legislature. Laura Sibilila encouraged seeking matching funds from other organizations as well.

- Christine Hallquist discussed connectivity grants, suggesting that the Board use the balance of the Universal Service Fund money (which is an annual fund), to address additional discrete projects, such as filling in service for some of the unique addresses that are pockets in other regions. The Board discussed the USF funds.
- Patty Richards made a motion to approve the 2021 budget as proposed, with the amendments discussed (e.g., removing the project manager position at this time, consulting with the CUDs regarding the \$5 million expense). Laura Sibilia seconded the motion, and the 2021 budget was approved. Christine Hallquist recommended presenting the 2022 Budget in March 2022 when there is a higher confidence in the funding numbers.

VI. Proposed Construction Grant Program RFP

Rob Fish presented the Construction Grant Program RFP to the Board. Holly Groschner first asked to discuss the meaning of Universal Service Plan, used throughout the document, before discussing the specific provisions of the RFP. Patty Richards suggested that this discussion be a separate agenda item at a later date. Christine Hallquist proposed that the staff come back with a recommendation on Universal Service Plan at a later date.

Rob Fish then discussed the RFP in detail. There were several discussions about specific provisions of the RFP, including affordability, sustainability and funding. Based on these discussions, for the benefit of the Board, Rob Fish edited the draft document in real time on the screen at the meeting. Staff proposed to have a one-hour follow-up open meeting on December 20, 2021 for the sole purpose of reviewing and discussing the proposed changes to the updated RFP as a result of the Board's discussion, with the goal of acting on the RFP at that time.

VII. Staff Updates

As mentioned previously, there will be an Administrative Assistant joining the VCBB in January. There were no other staff updates.

VIII. VCUDA Update

Will Anderson provided an update for VCUDA. He congratulated Rob Fish on his promotion to Deputy Director. He then noted that while the CUDs had not yet had an opportunity to build consensus on the budget item related to construction coordination, but expects that this is something that the CUDs would support as it would bring additional support to the CUD community. He also noted that the CUDs would support the Board's interpretation of Universal Service. Regarding Incidental Overbuild, and more broadly the RFP in its entirety, Will Anderson noted these are in line with VCUDA's recommendations, and he supports the short meeting on the 20th for the Board to review the RFP.

IX. Public Input

Several members of the public provided input.

- Irv Thomae of EC Fiber noted he liked the matching concept, and urged the Board to consider it in March rather than April.
- Christa Shute of NEK Broadband identified a few items on the RFP to discuss, as well as provided an update on some of the workforce issues.
- F.X. Flinn of EC Fiber expressed a concern regarding the matching concept.

X. Executive Session

Patty Richards made a motion to go into Executive Session, to discuss confidential negotiations, where premature general public knowledge would clearly place the public body or a person involved at a substantial disadvantage (1 V.S.A. Section 313.1). Dan Nelson seconded the motion. The Board approved the motion and went into executive session.

XI. Motion to Adjourn

Patty Richards made a motion to adjourn, and Dan Nelson seconded the motion, and the meeting was adjourned.