



State of Vermont
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

For Immediate Release

Monday, May 23, 2022

Contacts

Jason Maulucci, Press Secretary
Office of the Governor
Jason.Maulucci@vermont.gov

Christine Hallquist, Executive Director
Vermont Community Broadband Board
Christine.Hallquist@vermont.gov

Alissa Matthews, Special Projects
Vermont Community Broadband Board
Alissa.Matthews@vermont.gov

**GOVERNOR SCOTT, CONGRESSMAN WELCH, COMMUNITY BROADBAND BOARD
ANNOUNCE \$16 MILLION IN BROADBAND CONSTRUCTION GRANTS**

Grants Support Projects in Bolton and Northeast Kingdom Towns

Bolton, VT - Governor Phil Scott and Congressman Peter Welch joined the Vermont Community Broadband Board (VCBB) and community leaders to announce over \$16 million in broadband construction grants that will bring fiber broadband speeds to residents of Bolton and several towns in the Northeast Kingdom (NEK).

Standing in front of two bucket trucks installing fiber on a stretch of Stage Road in Bolton, leaders congratulated NEK Broadband (a Communications Union District (CUD)) and Waitsfield Champlain Valley Telecom (a small, family-owned telephone operator), on receiving the grants.

"These two grants are the start of a major statewide broadband buildout effort unlike anything in Vermont since rural electrification and the highway system," said Governor Scott. "And just like those two historic advancements, these investments, and those coming over the summer, will be just as impactful and ensure all underserved Vermonters have access to broadband."

"Far too many Vermont families lack access to highspeed broadband, making it harder for Vermonters to work, complete schoolwork, and stay connected with loved ones," said Congressman Welch. "These grants will help thousands of families get connected and give our state the tools to build a reliable and

accessible broadband network. This federal and state partnership is a model for how we can work together to help build stronger communities across the state.”

The first grant approved by the Vermont Community Broadband Board was awarded to the Communications Union District serving the Northeast Kingdom. The Board reviewed and unanimously voted to approve NEK Broadband's construction grant request of \$15,899,089, making it the first Communications Union District (CUD) in Vermont awarded through this program.

The funding will allow NEK Broadband to construct 215 miles of network, connecting 1,479 households along the way. "This is a watershed moment for our CUD," said NEK Broadband Governing Board Chair Evan Carlson. "We are thrilled to now have the funds in hand to get construction underway." Early construction will be concentrated in Concord, Kirby and Waterford, with additional miles expected in Brighton, Burke, Danville, Groton, Newark and Peacham. NEK Broadband also received \$6.9 million to support pre-construction work on 2,800 miles of fiber optic cable-based internet for residents and businesses in the Northeast Kingdom.

"The grant application process was rigorous and included thorough vetting from CTC Technology & Energy, an independent fiber optic consultant contracted by VCBB," said Carlson. "It speaks volumes to the work of our team and establishes a path for other CUDs in the state. I'm personally inspired to see the NEK leading the way."

Executive Director Christa Shute notes that this grant was based on NEK Broadband's Universal Service Plan. "The goal of that plan is to provide each on-grid underserved E911 address within the Kingdom access to high-speed internet connectivity." According to Shute, "This \$16M is the first batch of up to \$104M in necessary grant funding for the \$184M project and made possible by volunteer time, efforts, and involvement from NEK Broadband board members, as well as all towns in Orleans, Caledonia, and Essex counties and the town of Wolcott."

The second grant was awarded to Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecom (WCVT) to complete its fiber to the home project for the remaining customers in the area it serves in the town of Bolton. The project will build to the remaining 500 locations still on copper, of which 271 are currently underserved.

According to Deb Shelby, Bolton resident and early champion of the effort, "Early in the COVID pandemic it was clear how critical broadband is for our community. My desire to quickly bring fiber-optic broadband to all Bolton residents is now a reality. It's wonderful that WCVT has garnered funding from the VCBB in addition to what our town has committed so that they can bring fiber to all our residents this year. From day one we have been dedicated to working with Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecom as a local Vermont company that has been serving our community. We are meeting our town plan requirements to address all the unserved and underserved areas and working with a local company just makes sense for us."

The VCBB unanimously approved a grant to WCVT for \$421,000. The town of Bolton is contributing \$200,000, with WCVT covering the remaining \$1,297,000 of the project. VCBB's contribution was only 20% of the total project cost. The remainder was leveraged from private and local sources.

Roger Nishi, vice president of Industry Relations for WCVT, said, "I am very excited about, and appreciative of, the VCBB grant for the Town of Bolton. More importantly, I'm excited that the funding

will help us build to all the Bolton residents in the area we serve this year. It's been a pleasure to work with the Town of Bolton, and we truly appreciate the town's support of our efforts."

According to Christine Hallquist, executive director of the Vermont Community Broadband Board (VCBB), these first two projects exemplify the two community-driven paths available to bring universal, reliable high-speed service to all Vermont. "The two efforts prove that when Vermonters work together, they can make anything happen. NEK Broadband consists of fifty towns. The Town of Bolton, via the work of a handful of dedicated volunteers and a financial commitment from the Town, developed and are implementing a plan with WCVT to bring universal service to all residents."

The two projects funded must be completed within the next twenty-four months. The Vermont Community Broadband Board expects to consider applications from Maple Broadband, Deerfield Valley Fiber, and Central Vermont Fiber during the month of June. The Governor and the Vermont General Assembly have appropriated \$245M in broadband funding from the American Rescue Plan.

About the Vermont Community Broadband Board

The VCBB was established by Act 71 (2021)—An act relating to accelerated community broadband deployment—to coordinate, facilitate, support, and accelerate the development and implementation of universal community broadband solutions.

About NEK Broadband

NEK Broadband is a community-driven organization working to ensure every resident in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont has access to high-speed internet. Affordable internet is central to creating greater economic prosperity and educational opportunities for today's residents and for future generations. NEK Broadband is a Communications Union District representing every town in Caledonia, Essex, and Orleans Counties, plus Wolcott in Lamoille County.

About Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecom

Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecom is an independent, privately owned telephone company serving the Mad River and Central Champlain Valley regions of Vermont. Locally owned and operated, Waitsfield Telecom has been providing telephone service to the Mad River Valley since 1904.

###

109 State Street | The Pavilion | Montpelier, VT 05609-0101 | www.vermont.gov
TELEPHONE: 802.828.3333 | FAX: 802.828.3339 | TDD: 802.828.3345



