STATE OF VERMONT DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SERVICE DIVISION OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND CONNECTIVITY

2017 VERMONT TELECOMMUNICATIONS PLAN

November 8, 2017 6:30 p.m.

115 Eastern Avenue St. Johnsbury, Vermont

Public Hearing held before the Department of Public Service, at the Catamount Arts Center, 115 Eastern Avenue, St. Johnsbury, Vermont, on November 8, 2017, beginning at 6:30 p.m.

PRESENT

<u>Vermont Department of Public Service:</u>

Clay Purvis, Director of Telecommunications & Connectivity

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MR. PURVIS: Hello and welcome. Today is November 8th. It's 6:30 p.m. and we're here today to hold a public hearing on the 10-year Telecommunications Plan. The agenda tonight will be to take testimony from the public on things that -- items that should be included or discussed in the Telecommunications Plan.

To get started we will lay out some ground rules. Those wishing to speak, please state your name for the record, and please keep your comments to five minutes apiece until everyone who wishes to speak has had a chance to speak. And then if you would like to make a second comment, please come up and make a second comment.

So with that, I'll open the floor to anyone who would wish to speak. Nick?

MR. ANZALONE: Sure. Very awkward.

MR. PURVIS: It is but --

MR. ANZALONE: All right. So my name is Nicholas Anzalone, and I live in Ryegate.

A-N-Z-A-L-O-N-E. What I want to say -- I have a lot of opinions, but they are going to escape me now. So I would like to say that we are really frustrated by the situation personally, and in Ryegate, I have been waiting 10 years to get something a little bit faster

than 1.5 megabits. And it feels like too long. It feels like whatever we are doing is really slow, and I'm really frustrated about it.

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I want to see if I can do something about it. I've heard a lot of things that may change this opinion. I would really like us to consider treating Internet the way we treat roads or other sort of like things that are for the public good, and for our like public service that need state support in a more intensive way and a more sort of equitable way that sort of spans the entire state including If that's really not viable in terms of rural areas. the politics, I think I would really like to see us pushing to make it -- to lowering the bar, to making it easier for communities to solve their own problems, individuals to solve their own problems, but with education like some sort of like public resource that makes it easy for somebody like myself who literally didn't know anything about this until I got angry enough about it two months ago to look up -- like how can I help myself fix this problem. can I reach out to? What are the resources? Who are the companies that have like fiber that are like who can tell me like where those pipelines are. So that I can reach out and try find out for myself like what

1 the -- what a possible solution might be for me and 2 my community. 3 Connected with that, I feel like it 4 might be a good idea to try to prioritize and help 5 communities building centers where high-speed 6 Internet is available. Like there isn't even a 7 public place really where I can go right now that's 8 within easy driving distance of my house where I can

That's it.

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do remotely.

MR. PURVIS: Thank you. Anyone else like to make a comment? Michael?

go and get a solid connection during the workday and

feel like I can perform my normal daily duties that I

MR. BIRNBAUM: Up there?

MR. PURVIS: Maybe for the cameraman.

MR. BIRNBAUM: Sure.

MR. PURVIS: Thank you.

MR. BIRNBAUM: So my name Michael Birnbaum. B-I-R-N-B-A-U-M. I have a company named Kingdom Fiber that is going to be utilizing state resources in the Northeast Kingdom. It's about 170 miles of networks if you include the north link network which is separate still.

We're here to address what we would like to see in the 10-year plan. And so the 10-year

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plan ought to have some audacious goals and some pragmatic achievable goals. And I didn't come here intending to tell you what the right ones are. But I do think that the plan ought to make distinctions between what are aspirational and what are achievable goals in 10 years, in terms of the amount of bandwidth that ought to be delivered to every location, in terms of how government and the private sector separately and as partners can achieve those goals.

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My experience as an Internet provider with my wireless company which is separate has been that the cooperation between government and private sectors is fraught. The larger companies are very skittish around regulators, and regulators are anxious to encourage those larger companies to open up, open up their resources, share them, sell them, lease them. If they are, I'm sure that the Department of Public Service would love to have the right to tell a large company you need to share your resources, you can be compensated for it, but you need to share them. But I know that the Department has no leg to stand on because there are federal rules and state rules and that prevent them from regulating these companies in that way. So I know

that there is lots of fiber.

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MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC: Is your mic on?

Is there a switch on the bottom?

MR. BIRNBAUM: Maybe I wasn't holding it high enough. Can you hear me all right back there? Sorry.

I don't have an answer to that question, but I'm sure that that's an important one to the Department. And so in the meantime, in order to achieve let's say a goal of 100 megabits per second at every home and business in the state, which I believe is one of the goals that the state has had for a little while now, that can be achieved with both fiber and it can be achieved with fixed It's a very expensive goal. wireless. taxpayers; so we all want it. It's like mom and apple pie. We all believe it should be provided like roads and electricity and water. But the problem is we don't have the funds to support that idea. the state can either double our taxes to get those funds or hope that there is going to be federal stimulus money to support that kind of expansion.

So I don't -- I guess the only thing I can say about the 10-year plan is that it ought to be pragmatic looking at the resources that are

available, and also state the aspirational goal in case federal funds can be made available. 3 that's enough for now. Do you want me to describe the project I'm doing? I can do that. 5 MR. PURVIS: Sure. 6 MR. BIRNBAUM: But I'm addressing the 10-year plan. MR. PURVIS: Your call. Your

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testimony.

I'm happy to have MR. BIRNBAUM: publicity.

MR. PURVIS: Sure.

MR. BIRNBAUM: So Kingdom Fiber is a new venture. And it's going to serve the 22 towns that the Northeast Kingdom dark fiber network traverses through including the north link network which is kind of in the middle of it. And it's launching at the end of the winter after the Craftsbury municipal dark fiber network is completed. And I guess that's all the prepublicity I'll claim here. You can check it out on Kingdomfiber.com.

MS. ALGIER: Can I ask a question? Heather Algier from Ryegate. So what segment of the Northeast Kingdom -- so it just the includes around Craftsbury?

1	MR. BIRNBAUM: No.
2	MS. KITCHEL: Norton.
3	MR. BIRNBAUM: You may not have heard
4	Clay describing the network.
5	MS. ALGIER: No, I heard that.
6	MR. BIRNBAUM: It starts in Hardwick,
7	goes up to Newport, out to North Troy. East all the
8	way to Bloomfield. It also goes up to Derby Line.
9	And then from Bloomfield it goes a loop, Canaan north
10	and down.
11	MS. ALGIER: So that what you're
12	offering
13	MR. BIRNBAUM: And also down to
14	Guilford in the Connecticut River Valley. So we are
15	going to light all of that fiber.
16	MS. ALGIER: Okay.
17	MR. BIRNBAUM: And we are going to
18	light the fiber in Craftsbury.
19	MS. ALGIER: Okay.
20	MR. BIRNBAUM: And we intend to extend
21	into other towns in the same way that Craftsbury is
22	getting extensions, so that ultimately it will grow.
23	And
24	MS. ALGIER: I mean what could the
25	build out look like for that?

1 MS. KITCHEL: Would it include Ryegate? 2 MS. ALGIER: Yes. Would it include --3 be St. Johnsbury. 4 MR. BIRNBAUM: So the whole corridor 5 Burke, Lyndonville, St. Johnsbury, Ryegate is not in 6 the picture for our project because there is no fiber 7 anywhere near that we can access, and if we were to 8 build it ourselves it would be prohibitively 9 expensive in the near term. But in the long term, 10 anything is possible. MR. PURVIS: Okay. Thank you, Michael. 11 12 MR. BIRNBAUM: Okay. 13 MR. PURVIS: Anyone else who would like 14 to speak? Senator Kitchel? Or David. Okay. Thank 15 you. 16 MR. SNEDEKER: David Snedeker. 17 S-N-E-D-E-K-E-R. And I work with the Regional 18 Planning and Development Corporation for the Northeast Kingdom. I'm also on -- Clay shared -- on 19 20 the connectivity advisory board. 21 Looking at the Telecommunications Plan 22 that we are in the process of updating, I looked 23 through the goals which speak to broadband speed, 24 broadband deployment, affordability, local public

content, adoption and usage, mobile service, basic

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service, enhanced 911, competition and fairness.

I think we are falling short on each and every one of those goals. So I think there needs to be some acknowledgment in the plan that more needs to be done. There probably are many reasons why we are not getting to where we need to be, but I think it's an important part of rural economic development and just rural community development. So having that acknowledgment in the plan is important.

I also think that I'm glad to hear that Michael's group is taking up the north link dark fiber assets. That's been basically idle with the exception of a few strands that were leased for a few years. And there was a lot of promise when that project went in years ago, which has basically been unfulfilled, so those are my comments. If the state can help facilitate that, that would be great.

MR. PURVIS: Thank you very much. Thank you so much.

MS. KITCHEL: I'm Jane Kitchel. K-I-T-C-H-E-L. I'm the state senator for Caledonia and a third of Orange County. And I think if there is anything we hear is the importance of broadband availability as part of really our economic vitality. And we recognize that rural and very disperse

populations are very difficult.

I would agree with some of the other comments. I think a lot of political rhetoric has been thrown out that's created expectations, but the resources and the money has not really been honestly described. So that people would say this is what has been the goal of the last three Governors. Why isn't it here?

So the other question I have is a 10-year plan is a long-time plan in the life of technology in a very changing world. And so I, you know, I hope that there is some ability to make a plan as dynamic, I think, as a technical landscape that is going to be ahead of us and things that we may not have even thought about.

But I would just like to say that if there is anything the Northeast Kingdom and for people who want to stay in this area certainly telecommuting is an important consideration. We know that there are jobs available in other parts of the state. But we really place a high priority on the vitality, and the economic viability of our area. And so the work that goes into the plan, I do think we need to be realistic about our goals. I don't think we have been in the past. I think expectations

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have been set too high, and when you do that, people get frustrated; they get angry.

The other thing is being pragmatic and being as nimble as we need to be, which sometimes it's difficult for government, or when we are dealing with regulated entities as well, which broadband is not.

The other thing I would simply say is I think I speak on behalf of all legislators that broadband is a priority, as was mentioned, we are a little state, and the price tag is pretty enormous if we were to get to that optimum level. So I think we do have to be pragmatic in terms of what we can do, and be strategic about what we do do. And I'm not sure that that in fact has been the case.

We had a lot of ARRA money that came into the state. And I'm not sure that we are at a place that we hope to be. So I want this plan to be something that doesn't collect dust. That in fact, can be used and have utility, and that can be modified as we go along.

So appreciate your willingness to come out and hear from people and what's on their minds. Thank you.

MR. PURVIS: Thank you very much.

Anyone else? All right. The time is 6:46. And we have taken testimony from everyone present who wishes to -- wished to speak. So I think that we can adjourn.

MR. BIRNBAUM: Can I speak again?

MR. PURVIS: Sure.

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MR. BIRNBAUM: Okay.

MR. PURVIS: I take that back. We will have one last comment.

MR. BIRNBAUM: I miss the VTA. The Vermont Telecommunications Authority made some mistakes in its early days and did a lot of good in its later days. And the legislature mothballed it and entrusted the Department of Public Service to take over those functions, which has in -- and the Department has some very well meaning, talented people, including Clay here. But the Department is a regulating agency. And it's been very difficult, it seems to me, for the connectivity initiative which is what the new function was named, to aggressively and creatively respond to the needs of the state. And I personally am a recipient of a grant from that initiative, so I'm -- I don't think it's all bad by any means. But I think having it an agency or authority like the VTA used to be is something that

should be revisited.

I understand from someone that the VTA is very reluctant to manage the fiber resources it was entrusted with. And is not -- for example, the north link network, which has been offered to the Department, but if that was an independent agency perhaps that resource could be managed. And so I think that those who are making the 10-year plan should at least address the possibility that a recommendation to the legislature be made to move the functionality of telecom planning as opposed to telecom regulation be moved out of the Department. Thank you.

MR. PURVIS: All right. Anyone else?
Well it's now 6:48, and so I think that this
concludes this hearing. Thank you very much.

(Whereupon, the proceeding was
adjourned at 6:48 p.m.)

<u>C E R T I F I C A T I O N</u>

I certify that the foregoing is a correct transcript from the record of proceedings in the above-entitled matter.

Kim U leavo

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