I. Call To Order – 12:03pm

Roll call completed by Patty Richards

Patty Richards, Chair (Remote)
Dan Nelson (Remote)
Brian Otley (Remote)
Laura Sibilia (Remote)
Holly Groschner (Remote, joined at 12:05pm)
Christine Hallquist - Staff (Remote)
Robert Fish – Staff (Remote)
Stan Macel – Staff (Remote)
Alissa Matthews – Staff (Remote)

II. Review of Agenda

Patty Richards made a motion to approve the amended agenda. Brian Otley seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved.

III. Approval of Meeting Minutes

The Board discussed the April 11th, 2022 draft Board Meeting minutes. Patty Richards made a motion to approve the minutes. Brian Otley seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved.

IV. GIS Platform Presentation –

VCBB Staff & Stone Environmental presented updates on the status of VCBB's GIS platform. Alissa Matthews provided an overview of the progress that has been made, including:

- over 60 layers of data loaded into the Online GIS Atlas so that we can create maps & dashboards for planning, analysis, and reporting

- published a map of the eligible location data and available funding per town and CUD online for public view

- CUDs were given ESRI accounts to track their broadband construction progress and will be able to interact with the VCBB GIS Atlas and dashboards

- Stone Environmental began hosting webinars for VCUDA and the CUDs to assist in getting everyone set up with their new accounts and to provide training around data sharing and online navigation tips

Nick Floersch & Paige Gebhardt from Stone Environmental presented background on the process of setting up the VCBB Hub and tools and shared some of the challenges the team has faced while trying to set up data transfer and develop definition and reporting standards since CUDs and ISPs are all using different mapping systems, operations management systems, and engineering consultants.

Holly Groschner asked if the team has a sense of the additional cost or the potential lack of reliability of data that comes from having multiple sources overlaid into this integrated system

versus having all of the CUDs and grantees using the same system. Nick responded that the team has been looking at that closely and explained that it's the main reasoning behind building an application programming interface (API) to get the data into our system automatically and reduce user error. He added that the larger question right now is how to ensure we share the most up to date data for the CUD's systems to use since some of it is private which complicates the process quite a bit and we know that any point where there's a manual step or somebody has to click something to make it happen that adds a real risk so the team is trying to avoid that through sharing data as services that are consumed by other systems when possible. He continued that once the team works with ADS to adjust the scope it will be easier to compare costs, but everything has been moving fast on the CUD planning side so the GIS team is still evaluating solutions and trying to respond in the most efficient way. Christine Hallquist added that the VCBB had originally allocated two different budget line items for this project but decided overall it would be less expensive to expand the scope of this project with Stone Environmental and staff are anticipating a cost savings compared to what was originally budgeted for. Brian Otley commented that it would have been wonderful to leave the dock with all the CUD's in data conformity to a standard but that ship left the dock long ago and is comforted by having Stone Environmental with their expertise and their track record doing the necessary data aggregation from whatever source it is available rather than trying to make the CUDs go back and adjust the systems they have implemented to plan and manage their projects. Holly and Brian agreed that going forward CUDs should be encouraged to pick up a consistent data plan and consult with Stone Environmental to make sure data structures and tracking are in compliance with the system being set up.

Holly then asked whether the process being developed will allow the VCBB Board to keep track of unchanged baseline data for unserved or underserved addresses to be able to compare availability from a point in time to another point in time to track progress. Nick confirmed that the baseline data will stay the same as a layer and the apps and widgets and templates will be tracking the progress and changes over time.

Dan Nelson emphasized the importance of being forward thinking while setting these standards now in terms of maximizing the analytical capabilities while ensuring anything backwards continues to translate and is hard wired for data flows and expressed excitement for reviewing these metrics in action as construction and service starts. Holly asked if the Public Service Department (PSD) data is integrated into this platform and Christine confirmed that the baseline data starts with the PSD data.

Patty Richards asked how the VCBB Board can best interact with the system and provide input on additional data that might be helpful or that the Board would like to see. Alissa responded that she would facilitate sharing login information to view the maps and data and also will share the spreadsheets of data layers and questions and metrics that the team is working to set up queries, apps and dashboards to track.

V.   Construction Grant Review – NEK Broadband

Christine Hallquist introduced the application submitted by NEK Broadband and explained the checklist that the VCBB is using to review proposals.

Patty Richards raised a process concern moving forward to ensure the Board is aware of the amount of materials that need reviewed prior to the Board Meeting. Holly Groschner expressed how important review from Board members with technical expertise will be to consider agreement with the staff assessment and Patty added that everyone will glean different things in each review.

Stan Macel provided the list of criteria that Act 71 §8086 (b) lays out that the Board should give priority to in evaluating grants.

Christa Shute, NEK Broadband's Executive Director, presented an overview of the proposed project and background on NEK Broadband's process and included the following highlights:

- NEK Broadband has 51 member towns consisting of all of the Northeast Kingdom communities plus Wolcott and have a total of 39,735 E911 addresses in the District.
- The District has already constructed 21 miles passing 342 premises and they own or lease up to 170 miles of backbone.
- 44% of the addresses are either unserved or underserved, 1/3 of the statewide addresses that are considered unserved in their district
- They also have some of the least populated counties and the lowest per capita income in those counties with a shrinking population.
- NEK Broadband currently has one full time staff and have hired a Community Relations Manager who is currently part time and will become full time in May and have a part-time grant manager and treasurer.
- NEK Broadband has been working to leverage private resources and working with distribution utilities in the district.
- There are three RDOF award winners in the area that they are hoping to work closely with in assisting in any build out and have tried to accommodate that into their design.
- She described the amount of work over the last quarter on the high-level design including span miles and fiber distribution routes along with the purchase of 1000 miles of fiber and 250 miles of other materials with a 16 week or higher lead time.
- The NEK Broadband Governing Board have passed net neutrality and consumer protection policies.
- NEK Broadband takes affordability extremely seriously and they have already been approved as a provider under the affordable connectivity program and also formed an affordability group with 5 governing board members explore creative opportunities strengthen their business plan by increasing take rates through affordability initiatives.
- In terms of promoting geographic diversity of funds rather than building out a specific area in total NEK Broadband is focusing on building out their backbone and spurs that get to unserved priority addresses identified by the state.

Patty Richards asked Christa to elaborate about the challenges NEK Broadband is experiencing in terms of working with utilities. Christa explained that some of the smaller cooperatives and municipalities are realizing the impact that this is going to have both from the amount of poles that are already out of compliance and therefore are not the CUD's responsibility to replace and the capacity of being able to get the make ready work completed in the time frame necessary with increasingly limited resources available. Patty asked if they had already applied for the make ready and Christa responded that NEK Broadband has applied for 6,000 poles for make-ready so far.

Patty asked about the 1 and 10 Gig performance tiers they will offer and Christa explained that those tiers are waiting until they have more redundancy in place and additional backhaul

capacity. Patty asked if the top tier has added cost to the network and Christa explained that they don't expect it to create added costs but it won't be added unless they have plenty of capacity to allow for it without jeopardizing the speeds of other customers.

Holly Groschner complemented the very comprehensive portrayal of NEK Broadband's construction project. She noted that the take-rate is interesting and asked how they got to the differential for those households with income under $50k. Christa explained there are numerous factors that their take-rate is based on including the number of premises per mile based on the particular spans, if particular spans in a work packet primarily pass through cable or primarily pass through unserved areas, as well as addressing the affordability issue in a rural area with high-cost of living and 3 of the 4 lowest income averages in the state on a county wide basis.

Dan Nelson asked if the ratio of permanent residence to camp or seasonal residents was determined out of familiarity with the area or if it is based on a tax allocator or something similar. Christa responded that they were based on the E911 premise data.

Christine Hallquist introduced the Fiber Optic Engineer Consultant CTC Technology & Energy and explained that they are providing a 3rd party review of the grant applications and providing a professional overview of the business plans and will also be providing the review of the detailed designs as they are submitted from an engineering standpoint. CTC consultant, Teles Fremin then went over the questions they had posed that required more explanation of confidential business information that would need to be discussed in Executive Session.

Patty Richards made a motion enter into an Executive Session and invited the VCBB Staff, NEK Broadband's Executive Director and Executive Committee Board Members and Teles Fremin from CTC Technology & Energy to discuss confidential details of the NEK Broadband's application, where premature general public knowledge would clearly place the public body, or a person involved at a substantial disadvantage (1 V.S.A. 313). Holly Groschner seconded, the motion was unanimously approved, and the meeting went into Executive Session at 1:38pm.

The meeting returned to public session at 2:21pm and Patty Richards confirmed that no action was taken in Executive Session.

Christine Hallquist provided a high-level summary of NEK Broadband's project:

> *Universal Service Plan*
>   -Total Estimated Cost of Universal Service Plan: $185M
>   -Total Miles Required: 2760
>   -Total # of eligible addresses: 15,368
>   -Public Ownership: Yes
> *Current Project*
>   -Cost of proposed project (amount of grant): $15,899,089
>   -Miles to be constructed: 214.5
>   -Total # of eligible addresses: 1479
>   -Total Addresses passed: 2101
>   -Towns with addresses to be served this phase: Newark, Sutton, Burke, Lyndon, Kirby, Concord, Waterford, Barnet, Wheelock and East Haven

Christine and the VCBB Staff recommended the Board approve NEK Broadband's project as proposed. Holly Groschner made a motion to approve NEK Broadband's request for $15,899,089. Laura Sibilia seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved.

The VCBB Board took a break at 2:23pm and reconvened at 2:30pm.

VI. Construction Grant Review – Bolton/WVCT

Christine Hallquist introduced the application submitted by Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecom (WCVT) for a $421,093.69 grant to build out their Universal Service Plan in the Town of Bolton. She mentioned that the request is for 22% of the total project cost, making the cost per address to the taxpayer for 271 addresses about $1,700 which is relatively low.

Roger Nichi, WCVT's Vice President of Industry Relations, presented an overview of the proposed project for Bolton and included the following highlights:
- The town has committed $200,000 of ARPA funding in match for the project. We are going to finish building to each and every subscriber this year, we're doing, it in 4 areas.
- The town has committed $200,000 of ARPA funding in match for the project.
- WCVT will finish building to each and every subscriber this year in 4 main areas.
- There are 271 unserved and underserved customers and WCVT will also build to another 400 that are currently served at 25/3 or more but will get improved service even though they are not in the category that can be funded by the VCBB.
- There's a small portion of Bolton that is part of the Waterbury Exchange that is just slightly over the border into Bolton. There are 4 or 5 CCI customers that are also part of an RDOF Grant and with CCI receiving money and committing to build to those addresses, that did make the towns Universal Service plan a whole.

Laura Sibilia and Holly Groschner commended WCVT for their effort in using the tools available to pull together a workable project and getting the Town's support.

Holly Groschner asked how WCVT addressed the ACT 71 criteria in terms of any incidental overbuild and whether or not there is an affordability component. Roger responded that there isn't any overbuild because WCVT's plan for now is to replace current customers and lines that go to current customers so there is zero overbuild in this instance. Later, where there is another carrier WCVT will not request funding for the areas where it would be considered an overbuild because the customers are already considered served. He added that in terms of affordability WCVT participated in the EBB program and will be participating in the ACP program to get $30 to the customers that sign up and are eligible and added that if the customer has voice services they may be able to get approved for the federal lifeline program and some funding out of the state program.

Holly asked for clarity in WCVT's additional business plan information where it references that approximately 54% of the customers are considered unserved or underserved, but under take-rate assumptions the proposal says that 81% of the locations served subscribe to

broadband, Roger explained that WCVT serves 81% of the homes in Bolton, and of those 54% are unserved or underserved based on VCBB eligibility.

Christine Hallquist provided a high-level summary of WCVT's Bolton project:

Plan
-Total Estimated Cost of Universal Service Plan: $1,918,897
-Total Miles Required: 12.45
-Total # of eligible addresses: 271
-Public Ownership: No

Project
-Cost of proposed project (amount of grant): $421,093.69
-Miles to be constructed: 8.14 miles aerial, 4.31 buried. 12.45 Total.
-Total # of eligible addresses: 271
-Total Addresses passed: 498
-Towns with addresses to be served this phase: Bolton

Christine and the VCBB Staff recommended the Board approve WCVT's Bolton project as proposed. Laura Sibilia made a motion to approve $421,093 for WCVT's project in Bolton. Patty Richards seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved.

VII.   Staff Updates

- Christine shared that the budget process through the Legislature seems on track and we expect it to be finalized within the next couple weeks and then VCBB staff will make any minor adjustments to the FY23 proposed budget to recommend to the board for approval.
- Staff and VCUDA attended the regional fiber broadband conference last week and after meeting with vendors for field management software that will assist with monitoring and reporting and had several conversations with suppliers that helped Will Anderson and Christine feel more comfortable with their plan for sourcing materials.
- Legislative
    o VCBB staff provided testimony to the Senate Finance Committee in regards to the receivership language in H.738 and the Committee had questions and Legislative Counsel is now working to add in some language to address those questions which staff think will get us to the place we need to be.
    o Staff are closely watching the budget bills, H.738 H.739 and H.740.
    o There are hearings this week on H. 703, the workforce development bill that Christine will hopefully have the opportunity to testify on.
    o Continuing to work on the material default and the signature authority policy
- Rob Fish provided updates on grants & CUDs
    o Shrewsbury became the latest town to join otter Creek CUD, and there might be a few additional towns joining other CUDs in the next few weeks.
    o The process for the pre-purchase of materials is moving forward with DVFiber Maple Broadband, and NEK Broadband submitting and getting their requests approved by staff.
    o Maple Broadband submitted an updated application that is ready to be reviewed by the Board and will need the review scheduled.
    o The VCBB received a pre-proposal eligibility screening from Otelco for several of the towns that are also served by the Maple Broadband application. Staff will

review and make a determination and will update the Board accordingly.

Patty Richards suggested waiting to review Maple Broadband's application until the next regularly scheduled Board Meeting on May 9th, 2022.

VIII.   VCUDA Update

Will Anderson provided an update for VCUDA. He expressed appreciation for the Board authorizing the NEK Broadband Construction grant and shared that it will encourage the rest of the CUDs in regards to the process. He commented that VCUDA is also appreciative that WCVT's proposal was approved even though they are not a CUD they are close partners for many CUDS and in setting up the consortium for materials.

He shared that DVFiber and CVFiber received their first deliveries of fiber optic cable last week and it seems that invoicing will allow more time than they had anticipated. Additionally, VCUDA is making progress on finding suppliers for many of the materials with long lead times and they hope to solidify plans in the near future.

Along with the fact that things are looking ok for the budget in the State Legislature, Will agreed with Christa that labor will be the next real problem but is encouraged by the work that Christa and Christine have done in relation to workforce development.

Will also noted a discrepancy in the minutes from the last Board meeting in regard to comments that Christa and Will made related to affordability initiatives and requested adding the clarification that VCUDA advocated for and is in strong support of the VCBB Board to specifically attempt to uplift the efforts of the Equal Access to Broadband organization and building its capacity in order to help CUD's provide affordable service to their constituents via subsidies and other programs.

Will responded to prior requests from the Board to consider how VCUDA could scale up marketing across the state and because each CUD is faced with such a different situation and timeline he doesn't have suggestions on an immediate pathway to scale up marketing as much as that might be a cost saving effort and beneficial to the CUDs in terms of the potential to improve take rate and instead suggested the Board explore ways to use EAB's efforts to combine the marketing and affordability efforts across the CUD 's to simultaneously target both those that can and cannot afford access.

Will closed by announcing that he is leaving his current role at VCUDA in mid-May but anticipates staying involved and attempting to be a volunteer for the CUDs and the movement and will be working over the next few weeks on finding a replacement and making sure the association is left in good hands.

IX.   Public Input

Stan Macel reminded everyone of the Vermont statutes regarding an open meeting. The public shall be given reasonable opportunity to express its opinion on matters considered by the public body as long as order is maintained.

Patty Richards confirmed that we will stick to the three-minute limit.

Three members of the public provided input:

- Steve Huffaker expressed concern that the GIS platform has progressed so far and wants to ensure that Maple Broadband is participating as needed and make sure it is

clear how MapCom will be applied in the environment in which we're all working right now.
- Irv Thomae reiterated the support from the CUDs perspective for Equal Access to Broadband.
- Christa Shute raised appreciation for the countless volunteers that provide the technical, financial, marketing and other support that supports her work and makes the work of the CUDs manageable and a huge part of being able to bring forth a successful application.

X. Parking Lot Review & Agenda for Next Meeting

Parking Lot Review

Christine Hallquist reviewed the five open topics in the parking lot:
- The VCBB needs to develop policy around signature authority and the policy on whether the Board can hire staff without Legislative or State approval to be proposed at the May 9th, 2022 meeting
- The affordability and digital equity conversation is ongoing
- Stan Macel confirmed he should be able to provide an update at the next Board meeting on the material default policy.
- The GIS Platform presentation took place today and can come off the list

The Board expressed additional appreciation and praise for all of the work it has taken at so many levels to get to this point.

Patty Richards made a motion to adjourn. Laura Sibilia seconded, the motion was unanimously approved and the meeting was adjourned at 3:50pm.