

Vermont Community Broadband Board Meeting Minutes

Approved

112 State Street, 3rd Floor,

Giga Conference Room

Montpelier, VT

October 4, 2021

I. Call to order

Chair Patty Richards called the meeting to order at 12:05 pm.

II. Roll call completed by Patty Richards.

Patty Richards, Chair (In-person)

Holly Groschner (In-person)

Dan Nelson (In-person)

Brian Otley (In-person)

Laura Sibia (Arrived in-person at 12:07 pm)

Christine Hallquist (In-person)

Robert Fish (In-person)

III. Agenda Change Discussion

Motion made for the below:

- Request to add a standing agenda item to “review parking lot”. Motion carried.

IV. Executive Director Update and Q&A with Staff

- The Department of Public Service received an application from Cape Broadband for an additional 230 addresses. This is part of the Cares Grant from last year however the VCBB has been working closely with the Department on this application.
- An application has been received by NEK Broadband and it is currently moving thru the process.

V. Report back from Working Groups on Universal Service and Transfer of Assets Discussion

In follow-up from Board discussion of September 28, 2021, Holly Groschner and Brian Otley provided the language containing the enforceable provision and the accountability from Waitsfield to Maple.

- Steve Huffaker, Chair of Maple Broadband and Roger Nishi, VP of Industry Relations at Waitsfield, and Champlain Valley Telecom are in attendance.

- Holly Groschner stated there was a general condition on the approval of the pre-construction approval.
 - Maple Broadband will provide best estimate, non-binding, number of locations underserved or unserved in the District. That would be an amendment to their grant application. Maple further agrees to develop a Universal Service Plan for broadband service to locations in the district, including an estimated date for completion of the plan now. An update of that estimate will need to be provided to this Board with their construction grant.
 - Reconciliation of the issue between data. Providing a weekly update of how many addresses are connected, the Plan in relation to the actual number. Christine Hallquist suggested a board working group be put together regarding data. The board wants this brought to them as an element of their application.
- Discussion regarding how the Operating Agreement between Waitsfield and Maple interfaces with the Universal Service Plan.
- Steve Huffaker did not feel the Board should be singling out Maple Broadband regarding the concern over transfer of default but that this should be a requirement for all the CUDs. Holly Groschner explained this is a grant condition.
- Roger Nishi stated Waitsfield will meet all the conditions with Maple Broadband so that a complete application representing the whole Maple Broadband area can be made.
- The Applicant has heard the conditions of the grant and they must follow-up on items 1-4 with Staff.
- 00:46:18.480 Patty Richards moved to reiterate approval to \$2,399,200 pre-construction request from Maple Broadband. 00:47:00.300 Motion approved.

VI. Construction Grant Program and Review of Staff Recommendations

- Discussion regarding the decisions that need to be made before the issuance of the construction grants. Review and open discussion of the “Staff Recommendations and Work Groups” document provided by staff. (Available on-line.) Goal is to have Construction RFP out by December 2020.
- Due to the number of applications staff expects to receive, Christine Hallquist suggested an all-day meeting for October 18th for the Board to review.

- The Board declined this suggestion and expressed they will continue with meetings every two weeks and review applications that arrive during each two-week time period. Staff are required to review and score the applications and provide to the Board members within five days of each Board meeting.
- Discussion regarding operating in towns represented by a CUD and Non-CUD towns. Universal Service Plans must address all locations in the town. A town not a part of a CUD must have a Universal Service Plan or join a CUD now.
- Discussion regarding benchmarks for allocation of funding.
- Public broadband access in relation to shared broadband access.

2:46 Entered Executive Session due to contractual matter that would put VCBB at a disadvantage if discussed in open session.

VII. Pre-purchasing Discussion

Staff will continue to research pre-purchasing. Objective of agenda item; to inform board of what staff is doing. Exploring different avenues for pre-construction, such as working with the utilities as they already have an established purchasing. The other is to provide bridge funding thru other organizations as construction grants are not approved yet. Bulk purchases will be less expensive. Act 71 gives the Board powers, but the Vermont Community Broadband Fund has specific items funds may be spent on. In negotiations with CUDs on this.

3:18 pm Dan Nelson left the meeting.

VIII. VCUDA (Vermont Communications Union Districts Association)

Represented by Will Anderson, Interim Program Coordinator. VCUDA is hoping to collaborate to make the best possible decision for purchasing in conjunction with the staff and also discussing how as an organization can be beneficial for that purchasing as well.

In regard to the pre-purchasing issue, VCUDA will have responses to these policies moving forward at the October 18th meeting.

Should the need for volunteers for working groups arise, VCUDA would like to be considered for representation.

Major sense of urgency for obtaining ARPA funds from towns because the CUD thinking right now is that investment now will mean affordability later and as soon as possible.

Discussion where funding was coming from.

IX. Public Comment

As there was no public comment, the Board moved into Executive Session.

3:27 Moved into Executive Session

3:45 pm Exited Executive Session. Action item from Executive Session is for Christine Hallquist and Patty Richards to meet with Commissioner June Tierney to discuss staffing of the VCBB.

X. Parking Lot

Progress of items in the Parking Lot report were discussed.

XI. 3:49 pm Motion to adjourn was made and moved.

Minutes submitted by: Audrey Fargo, Temporary VCBB Recorder