

Vermont Community Broadband Board Meeting Minutes
112 State Street, 3rd Floor,
Giga Conference Room
Montpelier, VT
November 1, 2021

I. Call to Order

Patty Richards called the meeting to order at 12:32 pm.

Changes to the agenda; Christine Hallquist stated they would not need an executive session to discuss personnel. Patty moved to approve the agenda. Motion passed and agenda was set.

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 Sibilina (Arrived at 12:39)
Christine Hallquist (In-person)
Robert Fish (In-person)

III. Approval of Minutes

Patty Richards moved to table the October 18, 2021 minutes until the next meeting. Motion passed.

IV. Agency of Transportation Presentation on Performance Reporting

- Jayna Morse, Director Finance and Administration for the Vermont Agency of Transportation explained the need for their reporting happened when the agency was tasked with looking at a picture of federally funded projects and how they align with other federally funded projects across the state.
- Director Morse gave a detailed presentation of the agency's dashboard including the organization, updating of and submittal of reports.
- Director Morse was asked to return and provide specific training for staff regarding the appropriate latitude in each of the elements in order to peg data cropped accurately. She is willing to provide the training but wanted to include Justin Kenny, who's coordinating the statewide dashboard.
- The VCBB is considering using the base program (adapting the model) to create a public facing report.

V. Make-ready discussion – Problem Solving with Electric Utilities

- Attendees from the electric companies that participated in the conversation included: Peter Rossi, Chief Operating Officer of Vermont Electric Coop (“VEC”), Mike Burke, V.P. Field Operations, Green Mountain Power (“GMP”), Dave Kresock, Director Engineering & Operations, Washington Electric and Ken Nolan, General Manager, Vermont Public Power Supply Authority (“VPPSA”).
- Christine Hallquist provided a presentation, “Make Ready Challenges”, to the group including an overview of PSC Rule 3.700 – Pole Attachments. The make-ready challenge is going to be the most difficult constraint due to the experienced electric line personnel needed. Make ready is also done on a first come, first serve basis.
- The VCBB was concerned as to what issues the utilities could be potentially facing in terms of the CUDs trying to make their fiber production schedules. The utilities each discussed their current capacity constraints and the process of broadband coming into the utility.
- Chair Patty Richards stated although the VCBB does not generally take public questions during this segment of the meeting, she informed attendees if they had a specific question that would inform the group, to please speak up. In response, there were no comments or questions.
- As the CUD’s and utilities will be pulling on the same resources at the same times, each utility representative discussed better communication between the CUDs and the utilities regarding planning, sharing information and scheduling timelines.
- Peter Rossi suggested the VCBB establish a relationship with Consolidated Communications and coordinate Consolidated’s plans with the CUDs. If the end goal is to get fiber to all Vermonters, doubling-up the effort concerning areas being worked on, would speed the process up. Christine Hallquist agreed with the coordination in this effort however was concerned if the coordination went thru cable areas, Consolidated would not be as cooperative. VCBB was of the opinion that it was not up to the VCBB to get behind Consolidated but up to the CUDs who they decide to work with. Peter Rossi further explained he was more concerned with reaching out in the essence of showing Consolidated the VCBB is trying to do the right thing for all Vermonters.

VI. Budget Discussion

- Review and discussion of the same budget presented at the last meeting where the Board did not have time to discuss.
- The presented budget starts as of July 1, 2021 and ends June 30, 2022. Staff will submit another budget that continues from July 1, 2022 for another full year during the next meeting of the Board.
- The budget has changed from 30 million to 35 million however staff are still waiting for confirmation from the office of Finance Management on the increase. As there was no prior request to the Board for this increase, the Board asked staff to return with a formal request for resolution on the increase, including an explanation for it. As it relates to the increase, there was a discussion regarding “what is the construction process?” and applicants reaching milestones. In summary, for preconstruction, should the actual make ready construction be in the construction budget? Should only make ready applications be in pre-construction?
- Staff asked if they were to bring in a budget to the Board or come in for a resolution for each item.
- An interim meeting was scheduled for Monday, November 22nd for the sole purpose of developing and finalizing the construction grant program timeline.
- Holly Groschner made a motion for make ready application costs to be eligible for inclusion in preconstruction grants and the make ready construction costs in the construction grants. Laura Sibia seconded. Motion passed.
- Remainder of budget was tabled until the next meeting.

VII. Executive Director Updates – May require executive session for Confidential personnel issues and pre-purchase of fiber. Premature public knowledge would clearly place the public body, or a person involved at a substantial disadvantage (1 V.S.A. § 313 1)

- The Board went into Executive Session at 02:23:33 and came out at 3:32 p.m. Holly Groschner amended her motion to go into Executive Session to discuss confidential personnel issues in proprietary contract manners regarding fiber contracts. The premature public knowledge of which would clearly place the public body at a substantial disadvantage. Laura Sibia seconded. No action was taken during Executive Session.

VIII. VCUDA Update

- Will Anderson, Interim Program Coordinator will be meeting with CUD leaders to put together a policy proposal for the November 15th meeting with regard to the make ready construction grant policy. The Board asked Will to forward the information to them if it was ready before the actual meeting so they may read beforehand in preparation.

- CUDs have some concern regarding competition for make ready work.
- The CUDs will want to have input on when the construction grant funding is available and what the process will look like. The CUDs need to know they can be applying for make ready funding in the very near future.
- There may be some concerns from the CUDs regarding the motion that passed today as to how the CUDs can be most effective to do their make ready work.
- Regarding funding the association dues, the Board suggested a line being added in the construction grants for “dues”. Grants already approved will be amended to add the line.

IX. Public Comments

- Irv Thoma explained there is a provision in rule 3.700 that provides some flexibility in the 14 days between getting the make ready estimate and having to pay for it if agreed mutually by the parties. The parties can mutually agree to revise the schedule.
- Christa Schute, NEK BRoadband concerned they may be able to arrange when not ready to pay but that does not mean that the company is not ready to have the make ready done. Processes should be respected and adhered to as if not, it has a domino effect on work needing to be done and put off.

X. Adjournment

Motion to Adjourn made at 3:55 by Holly Groschner and seconded by Laura Sibia,

Minutes submitted by Audrey Fargo, Temporary VCBB Recorder