

Vermont Community Broadband Board Meeting Minutes
112 State Street, 3rd Floor,
Giga Conference Room
Montpelier, VT
November 29, 2021

I. Call to order at 12:07 p.m.

Agenda Change Discussion

Chair Patty Richards made a motion to move the make-ready discussion to item #3. Executive Director Christine Hallquist added an introduction to Stan Macel, new General Counsel of the VCBB, be moved to the start of the meeting and ten minutes to discuss a couple of budget items at the end of the meeting. Laura Sibilias moved. Patty Richards seconded. Motion carried.

II. Roll call completed by Patty Richards.

Patty Richards, Chair (Remote)
Holly Groschner (Remote)
Dan Nelson (In-person)
Brian Otley (Remote)
Laura Sibilias (Remote)
Christine Hallquist (In-person)
Robert Fish (In-person)

III. Introduction of Stan Macel

Executive Director Christine Hallquist introduced Stan Macel, who has joined the staff as the General Counsel of the VCBB.

- Stan provided his professional background history to the Board and the Board introduced themselves with their backgrounds.

IV. Make-ready Considerations

- Chair Patty Richards explained the Board felt make-ready is basically tangible construction work and should be moved into the construction phase. As some of the CUDs expressed their concern, the Board is taking up further discussion today as to whether they should roll the make-ready work into the pre-construction.
- Christine Hallquist and Rob Fish provided a proposal to the Board and a discussion ensued with Rob answering Board questions.
- Rob Fish made changes to the proposal as they were suggested and agreed upon. Once the changes were made, Will Anderson, Program Coordinator for the Vermont Communications Union District Association, stated on behalf of the CUDs, they would be comfortable working within the parameters of the proposal.

- Motion made by Laura Sibiliala to approve the pre-construction program make-ready costs as reviewed during the November 29, 2021 VCBB meeting. Patty Richards seconded the motion with the clarification that the proposal with the Board's changes was presented to the Board by Rob Fish in WORD format and reviewed during the November 29, 2021 VCBB meeting. Laura Sibiliala also suggested changing the word "proposal" to "policy" before finalizing. Motion carried at 1:13 pm. Rob Fish will post the policy on the VCBB website as below:

Preconstruction Program - Make Ready Costs

Goals:

- Ensure accountability
- Reduce delays
- Speed access to funds

Proposal:

1. Make Ready Applications are allowed
2. Make Ready Construction is allowed in both the Preconstruction and Construction Program.
3. Communications Union Districts may only include Make-Ready Construction costs in the preconstruction program if the costs are within their pre-determined preconstruction allotment.
4. Communications Union Districts must certify that they are taking full advantage of the tariff reduction and submit a detailed overview of their pole applications and strategy if make-ready is included in the application. Accepted applications will be amended to reflect this change.
5. Make-Ready Construction costs will only be approved for payment when the CUD presents to staff a sufficient level of design specifications that demonstrate and can deliver a high percentage of make-ready accuracy.
6. Staff can sign off that make ready was approved in the scope of the grant and meets the requirements of #5. The applicant does not need to return to the Board for approval.
7. Communications Union Districts are encouraged to save the 25% upfront to pay for approved Make-Ready Construction to reduce the risk of state delays in issuing payments.
8. The Staff shall report out to the Board any approvals for Make Ready Construction.

V. NEK Community Broadband

Executive Director Christine Hallquist recommended approval of the NEK Community Broadband grant application. Christine noted that the request came in approximately \$16,000 over the allocation however Christa Shute, Executive Director with NEK, explained she copied the amount from page 2 of the RFP. Brian Otley made the motion to approve the application in the amount of \$6,670,000 and Holly Groschner seconded. Chair Patty Richards wanted to add the proposal was very well written and NEK did a “tremendous job”. Motion carried at 1:21 pm.

VI. Draft and Proposed Construction Grant RFP - Continued Discussion from November 22, 2021 Meeting

The VCBB finished the review of the Construction RFP. VCBB Staff will make the recommended changes and bring the RFP back for final approval at the December 13, 2021 meeting. This keeps the VCBB on schedule for issuing the RFP in mid-December and accepting construction grant applications in Mid-January of 2022.

VII. Budget Discussion

- Executive Director Christine Hallquist will be ready to present a budget to the Board during the December 13, 2021 meeting. The budget will have a request for a fiber optic engineer consultant which would be a contracted position. Staff would like to have that individual on board in January of 2022 to provide technical expertise to the construction grant applications that will be coming in.
- The VCBB has approved expenditures of H.315 funds for a grant writer to help the CUD access fund from the USDA ReConnect grant program.
- The VCBB approved expenditures for a software platform to be used for grant management and reporting. The goal is to have the platform in place by mid-January to accommodate the construction grant program. This will enable the VCBB and the CUDs to report progress as well as comply with state and federal grant requirements in a cost effective and manageable way as well as provide key metrics on overall program progress and success.

VIII. Public Comment(s)

IX. Adjournment

Laura Sibilia moved to adjourn and Holly Groschner seconded. Meeting was adjourned at 4:01 p.m.

Minutes submitted by: Audrey Fargo, Temporary VCBB Recorder