

**July 22, 2022**

*For Immediate Release*

**Location:** WEC Garage in East Montpelier ([230 Fassett Rd - Google Maps](#))

**When:** Friday, July 22, 2022, 1:30 PM

**Contact:** Vermont Community Broadband Board (VCBB)

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**[Note: Updated July 25, 2022 to correct NEK Broadband number of premises served by the grant]**

## **VERMONT BROADBAND INVESTMENTS APPROACH \$100 MILLION**

### **\$48 million in new grants to support projects in Deerfield Valley, Central Vermont, Addison County, and Northeast Kingdom towns**

*East Montpelier, Vermont* – Governor Phil Scott joined the [Vermont Community Broadband Board \(VCBB\)](#), Congressional offices and community leaders to announce \$47.8M in additional construction grants to [CVFiber](#), [DVFiber](#), [Maple Broadband](#), and [NEK Broadband](#), with an additional \$441,000 pre-construction grant awarded to Otter Creek.

“This next round of grants shows our continued progress towards delivering reliable broadband service to every corner of our state,” said Governor Scott. “Broadband is a critical key that opens communities to so many opportunities, and it is our responsibility to work towards connecting more Vermonters, which in turn will grow our economy.”

With the awarding of these new grants, the VCBB has invested almost [\\$100 million](#) in efforts to provide universal 100 Mbps symmetrical service to every Vermont household. According to the VCBB Executive Director, Christine Hallquist, “Getting Vermonters connected to future-proof fiber technology will ensure that all Vermonters can have equal access to educational, energy, health, and remote work opportunities. There has never been such an equalizing force that touches on so many issues impacting rural Vermonters.”

The grants will expand service to Vermonters across the state including Halifax resident and mother of four Andrea Burke. “During the COVID-19 quarantine, our slow internet was a huge challenge—imagine trying to stream four different classrooms (three kids plus a teacher), plus an office meeting on 10 Mbps down and <1 up! Let’s just say that all of the cameras were turned off, and even then, there was significant lag. Sometimes it was so bad that my kids had to ‘skip’ class, or my husband had to call in ‘no internet,’ even though they all wanted to attend. I’m afraid my children’s education suffered—thankfully my husband and I both have some background in education and were mostly able to fill in the gaps. But for many families, I don’t think that’s the case.”

The sentiment was echoed by Congressman Peter Welch: “Without reliable access to affordable high-speed broadband, it’s harder for many Vermonters to work, study, and stay connected with loved ones. With these grants, thousands of families across the state will get connected and our state will gain valuable tools to build a dependable and accessible broadband network. This federal and state partnership is a model for how we can work together to help build stronger communities across the state.”

Each of the grants will go to [Communications Union Districts \(CUDs\)](#). CUDs now represent 208 of Vermont's 252 communities, constructing publicly owned fiber-to-the-premise (FTTP) infrastructure in the rural areas of the state left behind by for-profit carriers. According to Senator Sanders, "Reliable, affordable internet access is a necessity for work, education, health care, and nearly every aspect of everyday life. But for too long, investment has focused on larger, more populated areas, leaving out the small rural towns and communities that make up most of Vermont. Today's investment of federal funds is going where it should — to finally bring broadband to our most rural towns while also making sure it is affordable for everyone. Communications Union Districts are key to the success of this initiative, and I know that together, we can bring quality, affordable broadband to all Vermonters."

Burke is excited too for the opportunities the new fiber buildout will bring to Halifax and other rural Vermont communities. "My two boys are both in high school, and they hope to someday work as programmers, game designers, or software engineers. I would love for my children to be able to pursue these satisfying and valuable careers but still remain nearby in this wonderful state! I love just about everything about Vermont, most especially the strong communities that we have. Fiber internet will enable us to keep those communities, and even grow them, while still having productive and valuable careers and connections to the outside world. People in Vermont are geographically isolated, so sometimes the only way to connect with friends, even after the worst of the pandemic, is online. I'm so grateful for all of the work the legislators, CUDs, and governor have done to make this happen!"

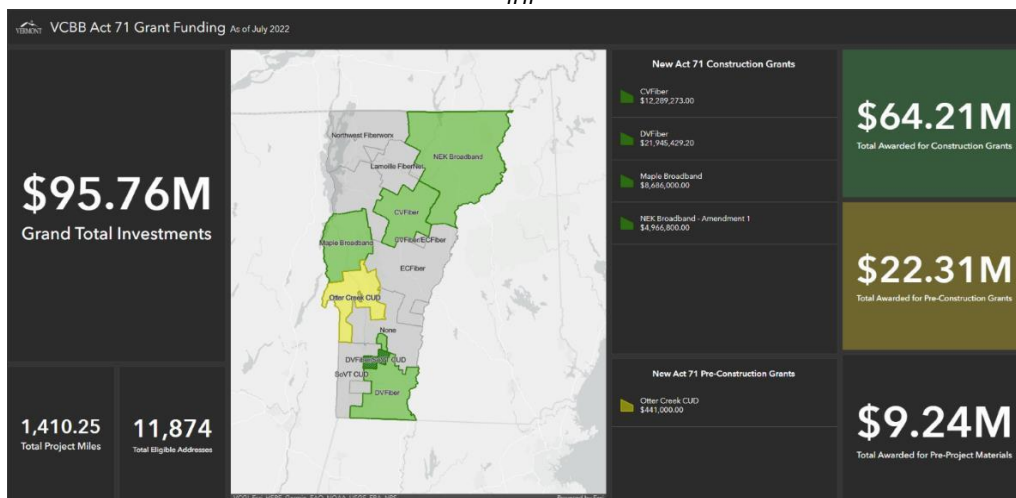
The VCBB was established by [Act 71 \(2021\)](#)—An act relating to accelerated community broadband deployment—to coordinate, facilitate, support, and accelerate the development and implementation of universal community broadband solutions. The VCBB has now invested \$96M to provide universal 100/100 Mbps service to all of Vermont, which benefits every county in the state. These funds have built the capacity and oversight capabilities of the CUDs, successfully addressed supply chain issues, and will now result in the construction of the backbone network that will pave the way to providing universal 100/100 Mbps service to all Vermonters living in the CUDs that have been awarded construction grants.

Details of Grant Awards and Stories of Vermont Impact are Below.

[Graphic: Interactive Overview of Grants](#)

(<https://vcbb.maps.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/04023eb5e15d4e36b8116a6f5d616d0a>)

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## Grants Award and Vermonters Impacted



### Central Vermont Communications Union District (CVFiber)

The first grant approved by the Vermont Community Broadband Board (VCBB) was awarded to [CVFiber](#), the Communications Union District (CUD) serving Central Vermont communities. The Board reviewed and unanimously voted to approve CVFiber's construction grant request of \$12.3 million. This grant was in addition to \$6 million previously approved to ensure CVFiber had the necessary materials and equipment to start construction. CVFiber's Universal Service Plan identifies approximately 6,000 locations along 1,100 miles of roadway that are eligible for grant funding. The \$12.3 million grant approved by the VCBB will support construction of fiber to nearly 3,000 eligible locations along 400 miles, at today's prices and estimated construction costs. The estimated total construction cost for the 6,000 locations is \$55 million. The recently approved grant funding will bring access to 100/100 service to portions or all of 20 CVFiber member towns.

CVFiber Chair Jerry Diamantides was thankful in explaining the impact of the grant and the support provided by the VCBB. "I want to thank the board members and staff at the VCBB for approving our grant request and I also want to thank CVFiber's volunteers and single staff member for the huge effort they made to satisfy the VCBB's requirements. Together, the VCBB and Vermont's CUDs will make a positive change for Vermonters that will last generations. Access to high-speed internet has become as necessary as access to electricity. VCBB and the CUDs are stepping up to make this important improvement a reality."

### Statement of Gillian Q. Fuqua, Principal, Doty Elementary School, Worcester (Letter of Support)

*"The implications for the students of Doty are enormous. Educational researchers estimate that it will take two to three years to recover from this period of remote learning even without internet access challenges. Then we need to consider the overall challenges of internet access for a community like Worcester, and Doty students are at risk of more regression than their peers in communities with reliable internet services. The third factor is that this inconsistent internet will only widen the achievement gap between those students from lower income families and those from families of more secure financial means. If Worcester were to have reliable, high-speed internet for all residents, Doty School would be better able to meet the needs of all learners".*

**DVFiber**

empowering our connection to the future



## **Deerfield Valley Communications Union District (DVFiber)**

[DVFiber](#) was awarded a \$21.9 million grant award towards efforts to accomplish a Universal Service Plan that provides 100/100 Mbps service over 485 miles of fiber to 4,470 locations, of which 4,410 do not have access to reliable high-speed broadband service now. When completed, DVFiber's Universal Service Plan will extend 100/100 service to 3,840 additional unserved and underserved locations.

Steven John, Chair of DVFiber, looked back on the long road it took to reach the stage of receiving a construction grant. "Now that we have our pre-construction tasks well in hand, with this construction grant we can proceed to hang fiber without delay and continue building out our network for the next year and more. We are eager to connect our first unserved customers later this year. With our pre-construction grant, DVFiber has been able to stand up our organization. Through a rigorous competitive process DVFiber chose an experienced private partner to construct, operate and maintain our proposed network. We have an approved business plan to support our high-level design for universal service across all 24 member towns. The advanced delivery of fiber cable we purchased is at our construction depot waiting for the bucket trucks to start rolling. With this construction grant we are now able to turn the caution yellow light in the yard to green, for full speed ahead."

## **Statement of Andrea Burke attending with her sons Peter and James (Full Statement)**

*"As a busy mom of four, I'm often pulled in several different directions. I work from home for a small Connecticut business in finance and consulting. During the COVID-19 quarantine, our slow internet was a huge challenge—imagine trying to stream four different classrooms (three kids plus a teacher), plus an office meeting, on 10 Mbps down and <1 up! Let's just say that all of the cameras were turned off, and even then, there was significant lag. Sometimes it was so bad that my kids had to 'skip' class, or my husband had to call in 'no internet,' even though they all wanted to attend. I'm afraid my children's education suffered—thankfully my husband and I both have some background in education and were mostly able to fill in the gaps. But for many families, I don't think that's the case. At a critical stage of development, social lives moved from the four-square court and lunch tables to Minecraft realms and Discord servers. My daughter begged me to schedule zay-dates (Zoom playdates) so she could talk to the friends she was unable to see. Unfortunately, most of the time they couldn't see her, because uploading video just wasn't possible at our stream rates.*

*"My husband has since left teaching and now runs his own online business. It's a huge challenge for him to get work done sometimes; it's frankly a little embarrassing as a small business owner who is hoping to be taken seriously to have to tell clients that he can't meet them on Zoom because our internet isn't reliable enough to guarantee he'll be able to make a scheduled meeting time, or that they will get the face-to-face meeting they are hoping for. When*

*he has something important that requires internet, he'll often drive somewhere with free public Wi-Fi, such as the parking lot of the local elementary school or community center—not the most professional background for a conference call. I myself have been frustrated numerous times trying to complete research for the company I work for, but having pages take minutes to load like it's 1994. For all of us, having fiber internet will revolutionize how we work and play. My two boys are both in high school, and they hope to someday work as programmers, game designers, or software engineers. I would love for my children to be able to pursue these satisfying and valuable careers but still remain nearby in this wonderful state! I love just about everything about Vermont, most especially the strong communities that we have. Fiber internet will enable us to keep those communities, and even grow them, while still having productive and valuable careers and connections to the outside world. People in Vermont are geographically isolated, so sometimes the only way to connect with friends, even after the worst of the pandemic, is online. I'm so grateful for all of the work the legislators, CUDs, and governor have done to make this happen—I look forward to Vermont entering the 21st century!"*



### **Addison County Communications Union District (Maple Broadband)**

[Maple Broadband](#) was awarded a construction grant of \$8.69 million. The award will enable Maple Broadband to roll out services exclusively to underserved areas within its 20 member towns in Addison County. The grant will be used to fund the construction of the first phase of Maple Broadband's high-speed fiber optic broadband rollout, covering portions of the towns of Cornwall, Leicester, Middlebury, Orwell, Salisbury, Shoreham, and Whiting. Construction is set to begin in early fall in the initial rollout areas, with the rest to follow over the next year. This grant will bring 100/100 Mbps broadband service to 1,789 addresses, of which 1,135 area currently underserved.

"We are tremendously excited," says Steve Huffaker, Chair of Maple Broadband. "This grant will enable us to bring broadband to some of the most underserved people and businesses in our district. Broadband internet has become a necessity for everything from businesses and remote workers who need a high-speed connection, to enabling tele-health services, and expanding educational opportunities for younger community members."

### **Statement of Jean Audet, Orwell (Attending)**

*"I am a Lister for the Town of Orwell along with 2 other Listers and we are elected each year at Town Meeting. The job responsibilities of a Lister are to keep accurate records of the value of every property within the Town. Each year we view properties, update the value of properties that have improvements, and upload more recent photos of properties. We record all this information in the software that is NEMRC (New England Municipal Resource Center) and CAMA (Computer Assisted Mass Appraisal). The Listers build the Grand List with all this information which in turn sets the tax along with the Selectmen's budget. All these duties require good internet service.*

*“With such slow internet speeds, I am not able to upload photos for our files and am hindered in doing much of the work that our software required. In a sense, the Town suffered from my lack of a good internet connection. As a Lister, if I cannot do these tasks that require high-speed internet then it is affecting my job.*

*“On a more personal level. I am on the Board of Directors of the Vermont Horse Council. I have numerous meetings with different state agencies in this role. I am unable to attend these meetings by Zoom because my internet is so iffy. I lose connection or no one can understand me. Our Vermont Horse Council meetings were also virtual, and I was forced to use only audio and even then, my connection would be dropped.*

*“Also, it has been hard to stream movies or do anything on the computer that requires a good DSL connection. My daughter who lives in Seattle, Washington and works from home could come for long visits if we had good internet service.*

*“I am not alone with this complaint of ‘iffy’ internet service in Orwell. The frustration level is very high. All the residents and businesses in the Town of Orwell deserve high speed internet.”*



### **NEK Broadband**

[NEK Broadband](#) is pleased to announce that the Vermont Community Broadband Board (“VCBB”) recently approved a grant amendment to NEK Broadband in the amount of \$4,966,800. This award provides the VCBB match for four towns that approved American Rescue Plan Act (“ARPA”) contributions: Peacham, Groton, Ryegate, and Walden. The towns have voted to invest a total of \$186,800 in ARPA monies towards constructing additional high-speed broadband infrastructure within their communities.

The amendment will also build additional infrastructure in Danville, Lyndon, and Saint Johnsbury. Altogether, service will be brought to 877 premises within the next 24 months. In addition to the original construction grant of \$15,899,089, the total \$20,865,889 will provide broadband to 2,978 addresses in the Northeast Kingdom.

“This milestone could not have been possible without the level of support and engagement provided by our board members in Peacham, Groton, Ryegate, and Walden,” says Christa Shute, Executive Director. “We’re grateful to our board members for their continued advocacy of NEK Broadband’s initiatives within their towns. It’s the perfect example of how a shared vision and strong-rooted sense of community can gain momentum and propel a grassroots organization into action at the local level.”

Statement of Leo Ormiston, Groton

*“Having reliable, high-speed internet would be life-changing for my family and I, who struggle because of the lack of an adequate internet connection.*

*“I’ve been a volunteer firefighter and EMR for the past 20 years, 2 1/2 in the town of Groton where I reside. I’m also on the Fast Squad, carrying a jump bag with me at all times. I’m certified by the state to administer basic life-saving measures, and often respond to emergency calls, arriving at the scene before the ambulance.*

*I recently took online coursework to obtain my EMR (Emergency Medical Responder) certification to be able to continue to serve the community where I live and volunteer. It was a struggle because the internet would cut out constantly. While I’d love to be able to go back to school (and have often considered it), I’m reluctant because I doubt my connectivity will allow me adequate access to my learning.*

*“When my children started remote learning due to the pandemic, it became impossible for us to all be online at the same time, so I’d drive into town daily, and we’d sit in my car in the library or fire department parking lots so that my children could attend school. This wasn’t an ideal learning situation for my kids, and we all struggled with the experience. As my children approach high school, I’m concerned that they won’t have enough bandwidth to even do their homework if they’re required to watch or stream it.”*

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