



Telecommunications & Connectivity Advisory Board

Meeting Minutes

April 16th, 2020 Meeting

10:00 am – 12:00 pm Remote Meeting

Attendees:

1. David Snedeker – Chair of the Board, Northeastern Vermont Development Association
2. Robert T. White- AOT
3. Michael Clasen – Deputy State Treasurer
4. Kenneth Jones - ACCD
5. Evan Carlson – Do North Coworking
6. Clay Purvis – Director, Connectivity Division, Dept. of Public Service
7. Michael DeHart- Telecommunications & Connectivity Staff, Dept. of Public Service
8. Rob Fish - Rural Broadband Technical Assistance Specialist, Dept. of Public Service

Members of public:

Bruce Wheeler

David Healy

Stephen Whitaker

Item	Item Description	Action By
1.0	Call to Order at 10:04am	Chair Snedeker
2.0	Meeting Minutes <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Corrections: none• Motion to Approve	Moved Michael C. Second Robert White unanimous approved
3.0	New Business: COVID-19 & PSD Telecom Efforts -put together list/map of public wifi hotspots -dept website: list of carriers' responses and activities -Telephone companies have suspended disconnects, PUC issued order suspending disconnects for all regulated utilities except for cable video -starting a campaign to identify students lacking broadband and evaluate options to serve them w/ AoE Carlson: have you talked to spectrum in regards	Clay Purvis

	<p>to their cable service and potential discounts or extra services provided?</p> <p>Purvis: They have a package for students, but I recall we need to speak together about St. Johnsbury.</p> <p>Carlson: I found a number of households in our district that can't afford spectrum, so I'm hoping there are some options they can make available.</p> <p>Extended BIG deadlines All deadlines pushed out. Early application deadline remains Apr 24 due to feedback from applicants.</p> <p>Update on Telecom Plan Not much progress. Telecom Division has been especially pre-occupied with COVID-19 response activities.</p> <p>Funding for outside consultant is unclear, given growing state budget constraints and ongoing uncertainty.</p> <p>Staff are still collecting data in attempts to meet statutory requirements of the plan, but we will need to know about FY21 budget.</p> <p>Carlson: It's pretty clear that there is a lot of focus on COVID for obvious reasons. With funding coming through for telemedicine and distance learning. It's important for State to put forth solutions that work for short and long-term progress toward 100/100 goal.</p> <p>Looking at the Microsoft/RTO and VTel offers for wireless solutions- does taking advantage of those short term fixes cause long-term disadvantages for wired solutions that can meet the 100/100 goal?</p>	
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	<p>Purvis: I don't think the hot spot solution will impact the long term strategy of creating CUD's. VTel's Rutland activities are an effort focused at low-income households that perhaps can't take advantage of offers made by incumbent cable/telephone carriers.</p> <p>CUD's have a rural focus, so I don't see any of these solutions being a long-term threat to that.</p> <p>With regard to Federal funding: the FCC and USDA applications have a short window. Hospitals need to apply now. That program can be used to pay for broadband for patients. Hospitals can buy internet connections for their patients, devices (tablets etc.).</p> <p>A new telecom plan won't really match the immediacy of the timeline posed by the available federal funding.</p> <p>Jones: Have any hospitals contacted you?</p> <p>Purvis: Staff have been in contact with the Telehealth Consortium. To the extent ACCD can be helpful, we should talk afterwards.</p> <p>Carlson: Can these funds be used for long-term infrastructure?</p> <p>Purvis: It's unclear. The relief funds are useable for response activities between March 13 and some undetermined point in the future. Joint Fiscal may know more about that question, perhaps also the State Treasury.</p> <p>Clasen: We are working with Treasurers from across the country to clarify those terms. We anticipate getting a small amount of that (being a small state)</p>	
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	<p>within the next week. The clarifying discussions will be ongoing to determine how it can be spent.</p> <p>Carlson: Can this board formally request these funds be used for long-term infrastructure?</p> <p>Clasen: I think it's premature to ask for a specific project- the funds are intended to be a relief for the expenses undertaken in direct response to the pandemic.</p> <p>Purvis: I would say that our lack of connectivity existed before the virus. The virus certainly highlights our disparities, and I've wondered the same. We'll have to wait for the legislature and the Treasurer's Office to weigh in on what's permissible.</p> <p>Congress is looking at an infrastructure bill in one of the upcoming stimulus packages. Federal BB programs (ReConnect) could bring an additional \$100M and it's possible that smaller projects in VT outside VTel territory could access those funds.</p> <p>Carlson: Did the commissioner get a response to her letter regarding RDOF, subsidy stacking, etc.?</p> <p>Purvis: We filed a motion for reconsideration, but I don't think the FCC has done anything with that. They are required to rule on it, but they are not obligated to pause the program while they take that motion under consideration. Illinois filed the same motion, and several states filed letters in support of our motion.</p> <p>I don't know what the risk is that the ReConnect is going to foreclose RDOF funding from the State. Someone would have to get a ReConnect loan</p>	
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	<p>inside the state, and the only one that can apply is VTel.</p>	
4	<p>Public Comment:</p> <p>Whitaker: There is a voiced need by legislators to proceed rapidly with telecom plan, and even to increase funding request.</p> <p>It's irresponsible to table this at such a critical juncture, while so much federal money is becoming available. Dept should be understanding and documenting requirements, and relaying information to CUD's and providers.</p> <p>There is a risk these band-aid solutions don't fit together long term and we're left with the same gaps after the funding has come and gone.</p> <p>I suggest this board draft a letter to the commissioner and the legislative body about how to wrap your heads around this. This is a worst-case scenario for haphazard planning.</p> <p>Wheeler: We got a free access unit her in Wolcutt, but I want to see how to build it out further. We need a plan, but we don't know how to make it fit the broader system.</p> <p>Rob Fish: We've been actively engaged in the Telehealth consortium. There is no disconnect there.</p> <p>The WiFi hotspots are not state funds, and there is no new infrastructure. Microsoft offered free routers, and the state assisted in facilitating locations.</p>	

	<p>Whitaker: 911 board met this week and has a deficit in the fund for this and next year. One option in their alternatives was to take remaining funds from Connectivity Fund. Seeing that that fund lacks a plan, and those were being deployed for obsolete DOCSIS and DSL, I think this board should recommend those funds be used to make the 911 fund whole.</p> <p>Purvis: Not going to comment on the possible solutions offered there.</p>	
5	Adjournment 10:41am	Motion: Michael C. Second: Ken Jones

Minutes Subject to Approval

