



Telecommunications & Connectivity Advisory Board

Meeting Minutes

May 21st, 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
9. Katherine Sims – NEK Collaborative
10. Corey Chase – Telecom Engineering Specialist

Members of public:

David Healy
Ann Manwaring
Bill Esses
Carole Monroe
Sally Carpenter
Mike Chase
Claude Phipps
David Healy
David Jones
Ed Bove
Jeremy Grip
Kevin Reagan
Kristen Fountain(NEK Broadband)
Brian Otley
Susan Paruch
Robbie Leppzer
Sheila Kearns (Sandgate, SoVTCUD)
Susan Baldwin
Tim Scoggins
Zach Tomanelli (South Burlington, VPIRG)
Henry Amistadi

Jeff Austin, Consolidated
 Michael Birnbaum, Kingdom Fiber
 Irv Thomae ECFiber
 Michael Reed Mission Broadband
 Stephen Whitaker

Item	Item Description	Action By
1.0	Call to Order at 10:06am	Chair Snedeker
2.0	<p>Meeting Minutes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corrections: none • Motion to Approve 	Moved Robert White Second Michael Clasen Unanimous Approve
3.0	<p>New Business:</p> <p>BIG Updates</p> <p>Three early awardees, remaining funds will be awarded on July 3</p> <p>Emergency Broadband Action Plan</p> <p>Purvis provided short presentation summarizing the EBAP</p> <p>Evan: I'd like to hold my comments until I've heard from the public, can we set aside a few minutes after the comments so we can react to them?</p> <p>Clay: sounds good</p>	Clay Purvis
4	<p>Public Comment:</p> <p>Brian Otley: Do we have a list of unserved addresses?</p> <p>Kristen Fountain:</p> <p>Albany, NEK, vice Chair of NEK Community BB. Providing brief overview of comments on EBAP, will submit more detailed written comments. Applaud Dept for swift production. Strongly support overall objective. Components of plan we don't</p>	

	<p>agree with, and urge the Advisory board to recommend the following to the dept. Any public \$ that flow to projects that cannot be improved/upgraded to 100/100 should not happen.</p> <p>We believe that applications for emergency projects should involve a plan for/commitment to making upgrades by 2024 to 100/100.</p> <p>Must be strong accountability measures in place.</p> <p>Strongly believe that (garbled) Concerned about workforce constraints, and would like to see investments in workforce training programs to support this big proposal. Concerned that costs will be higher than Magellan report estimates.</p> <p>Encouraged by the acknowledgement of CUD importance.</p> <p>Believe that block grants would be a simpler method than reverse auction.</p> <p>David Jones: Deerfield Valley CUD, clerk. Believe that most pressing need right now is how to participate in the RDOF auction in October. Reverse auction- how coordinated with RDOF subsidies? Our territories are not economically capable of supporting two providers. Awards going to two competing entities is not productive.</p> <p>EBAP money is speculative- if real- we want it conducted in such a way that applicants are fully aware if competitor has been awarded RDOF funds.</p> <p>We want to know how to participate in RDOF without a service track record, etc. Plan should consider how CUD's can access federal funds, including their legal and consulting needs.</p> <p>Sheila Kearns: Vice chair of SoVTCUD, Sandgate.</p>	
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	<p>Section I: cable line extension- I feel that addresses that fall within 1 mile of existing cable lines should be public information.</p> <p>Fast tracking pole license applications: any investment to pole owners should include a requirement to share attachment info</p> <p>DPS needs to do more for CUD's in RDOF.</p> <p>Reaction to middle mile transport and electric distribution etc. Disheartening to hear the assumption that middle mile is easily accessible</p> <p>USDA reconnect: loan repayment area/protected borrower status</p> <p>Any reverse auction that could lead to provider exclusivity like protected borrower status areas without universal service mandate should not happen.</p> <p>Zach Tomanelli (VPIRG): Communications director for VPIRG. Broadly speaking, appreciate the EBAP. Ask that any fast-tracking or lifted siting standards be clearly temporary.</p> <p>Anything less than 100/100- broadly against it. Recognize the tension that stopgap/short term solutions are a necessary component of rapid response. Ask that any entity taking state dollars for less than 100/100 should include a plan to serve those addresses with fiber by 2024.</p> <p>Reverse auction- agree with the idea that block grants would be administratively simpler than reverse auction. Bidding on reverse auctions is difficult for grant-seekers.</p> <p>Accountability- providers should</p>	
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	<p>demonstrate they are fulfilling their proposals</p> <p>Support transparency on pole-attaching entities and pole owners.</p> <p>Jeff Austin: submitting written comments</p> <p>Irv Thomae:</p> <p>Michael Birnbaum: Generally supportive of the plan. Creative solutions.</p> <p>Section 1b: cable line extensions should be restricted to current commitments so they don't encroach too deeply into CUD territories and undermine business case.</p> <p>248a/250 emergency expedite- don't support waiving those. Fast-tracking good. There will probably be many instances of towers that become regrettable.</p> <p>1d: applaud the fast-tracking pole licenses and subsidizing costs.</p> <p>1f: workforce limitations are a major threat to target deadlines. Training systems need to be put into place and a practical plan to increase the number of laborers and trucks</p> <p>Block grants to CUD's according to a cost formula seem like a better idea than reverse auction.</p> <p>If reverse auction accepts less than 100/100, I recommend a weighted formula similar to RDOF to balance awards and incent 100/100 deployment.</p> <p>Consider the impacts on CUD's if they are not RDOF recipients. Vermont will be even more divided and the business</p>	
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	<p>case for rural areas could be completely lost.</p> <p>Doubtful that EBAP deadlines are met due to financing and workforce constraints.</p> <p>Supporting CUD's for letter-of-credit-needs clarity. If CUD's aren't in a bidding position, they don't need a letter of credit.</p> <p>Reducing cost/free access to state fiber unduly harms existing license holders of state fiber. If an existing holder spent time/money on one set of terms, then competitors have lower barrier to entry and can undercut current license holders. Will submit written comments later.</p> <p>Irv Thomae: Very impressed, very supportive of plan. Do not fully agree with Birnbaum about existing licensees, but retroactive adjustments could be made to compensate those who bought in at a higher price.</p> <p>Several things money could be spent on right now that could be eligible for CARES money and applied to immediate effect.</p> <p>There are people who cannot afford to access broadband that passes their home (undergrounding costs). Could be lower cost than a cable line extension for some people. Mobile homes are required to have utilities undergrounded through conduits, for example.</p> <p>Think more utility crews should be hired and trained- possible within 3 or 4 months, and could have a lasting positive impact.</p>	
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	<p>Disagree: section on making use of electric utilities for middle mile suggests amending 8091. That could place new fiber into the power space. That fiber SHOULD be placed in the communications space (reduced cost, easier repairs, simpler access)</p> <p>Disagree: page 7/8 drop costs – do not vary based on take rate very much. Splicing costs are constant and that language should be re-examined.</p> <p>Suggest proactive make-ready. State highways with no fiber will need work- why not go ahead and encourage utilities to do it right now?</p> <p>We are very supportive and impressed and will submit further written suggestions.</p> <p>Dick Birch? There are plenty of people willing to enter the workforce right now. Lots of us travel to other states on a regular basis, and we feel like we aren't as well utilized in our own state as we could be.</p> <p>Claude Phipps: Submitted written comments, but not hearing enough about affordability. A lot of people have service pass their house but cannot afford the cost to connect/monthly fees. Consider measures to increase affordability. Consider the subscriber when crafting a bid structure (lowest cost encourages providers to put cost onto subscribers).</p> <p>FX Flinn: Chair, ECFiber – will submit written comments shortly. We will provide very specific, costed out projects we are ready to enact. Also hoping to give specific numbers for cost to install conduit for low-income homes. Believe that CARES money should be dispensed on specific things</p>	
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	<p>now rather than a reverse auction in the future. Will set us up well for the coming year.</p> <p>Stephen Whitaker: Montpelier. Misaligned with 10-year telecom plan. Emergency plan lacks actionable task for this coming school year. We need immediate strategy to get students/teachers, doctors/patients connected with CARES money by December 31.</p> <p>Scheduled to have a 10-year telecommunications plan by December 1. That's the official plan. This is an attempt to usurp the plan and position the department to control the funds. I think we need a professional engineering firm to get that plan underway.</p> <p>Consolidated inventive reg plan could undercut CUD's</p> <p>Ignores statutory policy goals</p> <p>Most of what's in this plan is in violation of goals.</p> <p>Set this plan aside and come up with a new plan.</p> <p>This is no substitute for statutory processes. Good ideas in this document, but ideas are not a plan.</p> <p>We need planning and engineering.</p> <p>Most of the content of this emergency plan should be vetted by a professional engineering firm, or set aside.</p> <p>Carlson: Themes from public comments- exception to 100/100 is a problem sense of a lack of accountability for</p>	
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	<p>those that would offer something less.</p> <p>concerns around reverse auction vs block grants</p> <p>prioritization of workforce</p> <p>Motion to request that department update the plan to address those things that were expressed by the public (accountability for <100/100, recommendation to issue block grants instead of reverse auction, prioritize workforce)</p> <p>Seconded- Ken Jones</p> <p>Purvis: we will take those comments and provide them as added content in an appendix. We will respond to them either in the appendix or in the plan. If an idea isn't adopted into the plan, it's still in the plan itself. Points and counterpoints will be present in the final document.</p> <p>Ken: When will the EBAP be finalized?</p> <p>Clay: We're working as fast as we can to get it finalized. Comments open until the 26th, but we haven't picked a specific date to publish the final one. We can schedule a meeting two weeks from now to discuss what it looks like, but we should talk offline when we have more clarity.</p> <p>Katherine Sims: Appreciate Evan/Ken's suggestion, support PSD to take time to incorporate comments then give the board the opportunity to weigh in. Support an additional meeting two weeks from now.</p> <p>Michael C: concur with Katherine's comments</p>	
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	<p>Ken J: Concur with Katherine's comments</p> <p>Evan C: Concerned that board won't be able to influence how those comments are adopted. Suggest tabling motion.</p> <p>Unanimous Tabled. Purvis will notify TCAB when comments are incorporated and schedule a meeting to discuss.</p> <p>Evan C: Burke Mtn. fixed wireless project mentioned by Tierney in testimony- what is dept doing to look at short term actions like that? Seems like it would fit within the CARES budget.</p> <p>What can dept do to support short term solutions like that?</p> <p>Purvis: We're still trying very hard to collect good data from around the whole state. 600 responses on our interactive map so far, but additional communication to Districts from AoE should spur increased input of address-level data. St Johnsbury is the best type of short-term project. No guarantee that CARES money can be put towards that, but we're trying to get that hammered out.</p>	
5	Adjournment 11:43am	Motion: Ken Jones Second: Michael C.

Minutes Subject to Approval