

Northport Broadband Internet Committee
Meeting minutes -- January 20, 2022

Present (via Zoom): Ann Frenning Kossuth, Karl Beiser, Bill Frysinger, Julian Sheffield, James Kossuth, Absent: Brady Brim-DeForest. Guests: from GWI: Derek Gagnon, Sean Byrne; Axiom: Mark Ouellette.

The meeting was called to order at 5:02pm.

The session focused mainly on the upcoming ConnectMaine grant application window.

Sean gave the following updates:

- The ConnectMaine workshop for those planning to apply for the current infrastructure grant opportunity, held yesterday (Jan 19, 2022), emphasized that the procedure and rules for applying will be substantially different than in the past. More complicated in some respects.
- It appears that ConnectMaine has pre-determined eligible and ineligible areas, based on whether their data indicates that people in those areas are “unserved” or “underserved”. The definitions are new for this grant round. The only way to determine which Northport locations are considered eligible for inclusion in a grant request is to initiate a grant request using the new online application portal. Only after an entity has been accepted as eligible to apply will maps be made available to the applicant that indicate the categories assigned to Northport locations.
- GWI has initiated the application process and expects to gain access to the maps in a few days. Once they have been reviewed we will know the number of residences for which grant funding can be requested. GWI and NBIC will discuss the eligibility specifics, probably at a February 3, 2022 meeting of the NBIC. The number of locations, and whether there are any obvious construction challenges associated with them will dictate the amount of financial support needed from the Town, GWI and ConnectMaine.
- With respect to the eligibility maps, there is no appeal or amendment process to deal with any map inaccuracies, this time around.
- NBIC will alert the Select Board that a financial commitment on the part of the Town, toward the cost of a grant-supported project in partnership with GWI, will need to be made officially by the end of February. The Town portion needed should be known by Feb 3 and the Select Board will be asked to schedule a special meeting soon thereafter to review the amount of funding and call a Special Town Meeting at which citizen approval of the commitment will be requested. Feb 7 was mentioned as a possible date for that special Select Board meeting.

Sean suggested that if the total amount of available ConnectMaine funding is \$6.5 million, we may find it difficult to succeed in competition with many other Maine communities. However, the very recent prospect of the Maine Connectivity Authority moving \$10 million of funds under its purview into this round would greatly enhance our chances. (On January 21 the latter’s governing board did just that.)

There was general discussion of the piecemeal approach to building out to the portion of Northport not currently in the GWI plan. Because of the rigid eligibility requirements, the particulars of which are not yet fully known, there is no alternative to piecemeal for this round.

How much will the Town need to come up with as a local cash contribution in order to score well in grant evaluation? Someone from GWI did some back of the napkin math and suggests that something on the order of \$700 per location passed would be realistic. This contribution would come from both the Town and GWI.

Meeting was adjourned at 6:15pm