

Northport Broadband Internet Committee  
Meeting minutes -- February 10, 2022

Present (in person and via Zoom): Ann Frenning Kossuth, Karl Beiser, Bill Frysinger, Julian Sheffield, James Kossuth, Absent: Brady Brim-DeForest.

Guests: Sean Byrne, and Derek Gagnon of GWI; Mark Ouellette of Axiom

The meeting was called to order at 5:04pm.

Minutes of the February 3, January 20 and January 11 meetings were accepted as distributed.

Discussion focused on the ConnectMaine infrastructure grant effort.

Sean explained that the \$700 contribution per address passed in a proposed build. It is based on the average contributed by localities and vendors in past grants made by ConnectMaine. As such it is a useful gauge of what may be needed to get a positive application score. It is just one of a number of guideposts.

The matter of affordability of broadband was brought up. Julian asked if the proposal would incorporate mention of this essential element. Sean said yes and agreed that this is important to the chances for funding. He will reference that GWI is a part of the ACP (Affordable Connection Program), which provides a substantial discount to the normal monthly cost of connectivity. Beyond this it was noted that the Maine-based National Digital Equity Center (<https://digitalequitycenter.org/>), founded by Susan Corbett, who was a co-founder of Axiom Technologies, can be retained to create a detailed local digital literacy and inclusion plan.

It was suggested that the wording of the warrant for the upcoming town meeting, at which citizens will be asked to approve use of ARPA funds for broadband, should allow for support of affordability and digital literacy efforts in support of full use of the network that will be built.

Urged the town to commit all ARPA funds if the upcoming proposal, and subsequent efforts if necessary, are to be successful.

The apparent inaccuracy of ConnectMaine's Vetro map of areas supposedly served and unserved was discussed. Julian pointed out that the abbreviated process by which ConnectMaine solicited updates and corrections in December did not make available publicly the latest maps upon which eligibility for the current grant round is based. It is hard to correct something that you cannot see, someone suggested. The standard answer from ConnectMaine staff is very approximately paraphrase as, "We know the maps are inaccurate to some degree. But in order to move forward right now we have to start with something. And everyone else competing for grants shares the same difficulty."

Julian asked Mark if he had contacted the Northport Food Pantry in connection with their internet needs. He said he had not, but would.

In preparation for the Feb 14 meeting of the Northport Select Board, Julian will draft some talking points containing the gist of the Committee's recommendation and Karl will condense the summary of NBIC activities over the last 12 months done originally for the ConnectMaine planning grant report in

January. James will distribute those documents and any other relevant documents to the Select Board before their meeting.

The discussion returned to the overall goal of the town and of GWI: Provision of fast, affordable, sustainable broadband internet service to 100% of Northport residents through whatever means necessary. This could involve multiple grant funding rounds or other efforts outside a grant funding context.

It was announced that the Saturday Cove church would be the site of the Feb 26 town meeting. The time of the meeting and the Warrant stating the agenda for the meeting will be announced after the Select Board meets.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:06pm.