

WIREDWEST – NEW COMMUNITY GROUP WORKING AT LIGHT SPEED TO BRING FAST, AFFORDABLE INTERNET TO EVERY HOME AND BUSINESS IN WESTERN MASS.

Citizens from across Western Massachusetts are working together to make universal high-speed internet access a reality for all. The organization, WiredWest, is modeled on other successful community-owned fiber-optic networks around the country. As a first step, 46 towns are deciding on their participation at 2010 town meetings. Towns that opt to participate will form the initial governing board of WiredWest.

Ashfield, MA (WiredWest), April 26, 2010 – Earlier this year, broadband advocates and legislators from across Western Massachusetts met to hear from experts, and begin to solve the problem of lack of high-speed internet access faced by close to 50 towns in the region. Since then, the group has surged ahead, creating the foundation for an organization tasked with building local portions of a network that would provide reliable high-speed internet, phone and television services to all who want it, in participating towns.

“Our region’s economy - our businesses, workers, students, citizens, local governments and public safety agencies - needs high-speed internet access to grow and flourish,” says Western Massachusetts Senator Ben Downing, “I encourage all efforts to make universal access a reality.”

The principles of the proposed network stipulate it must be financially self-sustaining; community-owned; available to all; based on the future-proof technology of fiber-to-the-home; and open access. An open access network allows all service providers to offer their services to any residential or business customer on the network, which enables better and faster services, lower prices, and steady innovation over time.

Fiber-optic is the fastest telecommunication technology available, capable of handling vast amounts of data at a rate many orders of magnitude faster than typical technologies like DSL, wireless or cable, and fiber is easily scalable as end-point equipment evolves. Just one line can deliver reliable phone, high-speed internet and HDTV. Sufficient capacity is becoming an issue as bandwidth usage in the U.S. grows by an order of magnitude every two years, as more and more applications in business, education, healthcare, government operations, public safety and entertainment are being delivered over the internet. “In much the same way you would plan a highway based on future use projections, we’re designing this network looking at future bandwidth needs, the technology that will support those needs, and the longevity of that network,” says David Greenberg, Chair of WiredWest’s Steering Committee. Experts put the lifespan of a fiber network at 40 years or more.

WiredWest is researching the more than 37 community owned networks in the country and will recommend best practices to its participating towns. The group has received support and in-kind expertise from other organizations involved directly and indirectly in broadband, including the Massachusetts Broadband Institute, WesternMass Connect, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, Franklin County Council of Governments, several CDCs and Chambers of Commerce, ECFiber, and local legislators. WiredWest is working closely with the Massachusetts Broadband Institute to ensure their proposed fiber network into the center of each town dovetails effectively with WiredWest’s proposed network, which extends that connectivity out to individual homes and businesses.

WiredWest’s immediate task is to mobilize citizens around this issue – and engage them in the effort, beginning with supporting the 2010 warrant articles. WiredWest is conducting public information sessions throughout Western Massachusetts to provide more information. There are two open sessions in Berkshire County, including Friday, April 30th at 4pm at Berkshire South Regional Community Center, 15 Crissey Road and Saturday, May 1st at 10am in Dalton at Nessacus Regional Middle School, 35 Fox Rd. Their website at www.wired-west.net provides detailed information on other locations and dates.

About WiredWest:

WiredWest is a community organization with the mission of designing, building and operating an open-access, community-owned, fiber-optic network in member towns that offers comprehensive, affordable and reliable internet, phone and television services to all residents, businesses and institutions who want service. For more information see www.wiredwest.net.

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