

22 TOWNS HAVE VOTED SO FAR – MOST UNANIMOUSLY – TO DIRECT THEIR SELECT-BOARDS TO JOIN WIREDWEST’S COMMUNITY FIBER-OPTIC NETWORK

Western Massachusetts residents are working together to make universal high-speed internet access a reality. The organization, called WiredWest, is modeled on successful community-owned fiber-optic networks around the country. In order to join the organization, 45 towns unserved or underserved by broadband are being asked to vote on their participation at 2010 town meetings. Over the past 3 weeks, all 23 town meetings addressing the issue have passed the article – all but one town unanimously - and The Egremont Selectboard has also chosen to join. There are 21 more town meetings that will also be voting over the next five weeks.

Ashfield, MA (WiredWest), May 10, 2010 – Over the past several months, a network of citizens across Western Massachusetts, spanning Berkshire, Hampshire, Hampden and Franklin counties, have been working together to seed the formation of a community-owned fiber-optic network in unserved and underserved towns. According to Scott Jenssen, Chair of the Monterey Selectboard, “This initiative would be game-changing – not only for each town and its citizens, but for the region as a whole.” Monterey, whose citizens have DSL service in about a third of the town, passed the WiredWest article unanimously at their meeting on May 1st.

“Many people – particularly those without high-speed internet access - understand the urgency of taking action on this issue,” said David Greenberg, Chair of the WiredWest Steering Committee, “but we are conducting outreach, including public information sessions to educate citizens about the impact of a fiber-optic network to the future prospects of the region, and importance of moving this concept forward.”

Fiber-optic is the fastest telecommunication technology available, capable of handling vast amounts of data at a rate hundreds of times faster than typical technologies like DSL, wireless or cable. Fiber connectivity has the added benefit of being easily scalable to offer more bandwidth capacity as end-point equipment evolves. Sufficient capacity is becoming an issue as bandwidth usage in the U.S. doubles every two years, as more business and personal activity is conducted online.

Recent research by the Fiber-to-the-Home Council shows that a fiber-optic network is directly tied to the economic development of a region, including attraction of new businesses, greater business productivity, ease of employment expansion, more home businesses, and higher mid-week populations for vacation areas.

In addition, a fiber network would enable improvements in delivery, and cost savings in education, healthcare, government services and public safety.

Representatives from towns that opt to participate will form the initial governing board of WiredWest. Once all towns have had the opportunity to vote, the first meeting of the organization will be convened and pressing issues of governance and inter-municipal agreements will be addressed. The group anticipates that meeting will occur at the end of June.

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 would offer comprehensive, affordable and reliable internet, phone and television services to all residents, businesses and institutions who want service. Detailed information is available on the website: www.wiredwest.net.

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