

Warrant Article for Annual Town Meeting

Whereas bringing broadband internet service to small towns in western Massachusetts is essential to our economic viability, future opportunity, education, health care and quality of life;

Whereas in the summer of 2014 the Massachusetts legislature enacted and Governor Patrick signed a bond bill authorizing \$50 million for bringing broadband internet service to towns in western Massachusetts, including the Town of Washington;

Whereas in February 2015 the new Baker-Polito Administration affirmed its support for the bond bill and said that: "Providing high-speed broadband access to all cities and towns is not only a matter of basic fairness, but it is an essential part of building stronger communities and a stronger economy";

Whereas in the fall of 2014 the Massachusetts Broadband Institute presented a plan, jointly developed with WiredWest, for MBI to build and WiredWest to own and operate a regional "last mile" fiber broadband network in towns unserved by high-speed internet, including the Town of Washington;

Whereas that plan called for MBI to use \$40 million of those authorized funds and for the towns to contribute approximately twice that amount as their share of the cost of the project;

Whereas in May 2015 at our Annual Town Meeting, by a vote of 102-7, we authorized the Town of Washington to borrow \$770,000 designated by MBI as our town's share of the cost of construction, installation and startup of the network;

Whereas at a subsequent town election, by a vote of 76-25, we approved excluding that borrowing from the tax levy limits of Proposition 2½;

Whereas by May 2015 over 40% of all the households in the Town of Washington had signed up for service from WiredWest and made a \$49 deposit;

Whereas MBI has failed to implement the broadband plan and has thwarted the decision of our town and other towns to work together through WiredWest on a regional fiber network;

Therefore we the people of the Town of Washington hereby affirm that we are committed to the WiredWest project, that we recognize it has risks but are deeply concerned about the risks of not solving the problem of our lack of high-speed internet access, and so we urgently request the Baker-Polito Administration:

To lift the so-called "pause" presently in effect for the last-mile program;

To instruct the Massachusetts Broadband Institute to accept input and policy direction from the towns and WiredWest, so as by June 30th, 2016 to jointly produce an actionable plan that is acceptable to the towns and that can be implemented expeditiously and without further delay;

Failing that, to engage a private sector party in lieu of MBI to build the network for WiredWest to own and operate for the benefit of our town and other towns participating in the cooperative;

To commit to the people of the Town of Washington that nearly two years after the passage of the bond bill, and one year after we authorized our town's share of funding for the WiredWest regional fiber broadband network, the project will now move forward.