

**Minutes**

WiredWest Board of Directors Meeting

Goshen Town Hall, 42 Main Street

Goshen, MA

Saturday, November 12, 9:30 am

Meeting called to order at: 9:30 quorum at 9:34

**Welcome and Introductions**

**Approval of Minutes**  October 22, 2016 Kathy Soule-Regine moved, Craig Martin seconded. Approved unanimously, Leslie Rule abstained.

**Report from the Chair**

EChas been meeting with potential suppliers**,** 2 are promising and we’re sending them town data & negotiating. ADTRAN presentation was good, want to have Calix do similar presentation – management software is key as well as the equipment itself.

**Final vote on Proposed Bylaw change**

2nd reading Kathy Soule-Regine moved, Leslie Rule seconded – passed unanimously.

**Town Termination vote**

Motion – to terminate the town of Royalston and town of Great Barrington as members of WiredWest. Leslie ruled moved,? seconded Motion carries, Mark Klitzke abstained

**Plan A2**

Continuing negotiations with 2 vendors who responded to the RFI, will provide details when we have more from them, at next meeting or following one.

**Review MBI FAQs**

David Dvore – towns submitted questions to Bill Ennen, MBI response has been to provide a FAQ page. Answers are more generic, not responding to specific questions or allowing discussion. Many towns concerned that policy is being created without input from towns. There’s a concern that the private partnership RFP will allow cherry-picking. Response “favoring proposals that include a number of towns” – still can leave the smallest towns without solution. Policy is being created above MBI Board level, from Jay Ash Office/Carolyn Kirk. It may help if town SelectBoards & MBI Liaisons push back.

Bob Handsaker is not sure that RFP is promoting more cherry-picking than is going on now. He suggested to Bill Ennen that MBI should look at how much of the problems the solution addresses (e.g. covering the most expensive small towns should be subsidized more).

Jean Atwater-Williams – the FAQ statement on ownership & governance seems to specifically exclude WiredWest.

Kathy Soule-Regine – John Furey said the RFP was because MBI has seen the private companies showing interest, RFP process required to access state funds.

Bob Labrie quoted strong statements in the Municipal Modernization law – agencies should promote cooperation by giving priority to regional solutions.

Kathy Soule-Regine – towns about to go forward should send a letter expressing our concerns to MBI/Ash/Governor. Jim Drawe reminded us that political power is in the SelectBoards; they should communicate.

David Dvore – the “early town“ meeting resulted in those towns working on a letter to Peter Larkin and Carolyn Kirk asking that towns have a voice at MBI Board meetings and input to policy creation.

Steve Nelson – we should present a regional solution and stress that law now requires a regional solution to be prioritized.

Jim Drawe – Outreach committee should work on communication to be sent when we have a proposal.

Leslie Rule – should we consider rebranding? Jim Drawe – we have brand recognition by our population.

Kent Lew – we should bring SelectBoards talking together to push the regional solution. Jim Drawe – plans to do a road show to present to SelectBoards, regional meetings to invite the SelectBoards, an opportunity to bring them together.

Trevor Mackie – Small Town Summit – Dec 1 may be an opportunity to promote.

HCOG – legislative summit at JFK school Dec 3, session on “Internet for Everybody” which Jim is leading.

Jim Drawe – we don’t need much extra to connect towns. A few towns, e.g. New Ashford are not contiguous, will need some fiber to connect them. David Dvore - we may be able to use Middle mile especially for non-contiguous towns; to connect in a ring, towns may need to purchase SFPs.

**MBI Readiness Process**

*Early town summit* – Ashfield, Rowe, New Salem, Shutesbury, Wendell attended. These towns have strong SelectBoard support, all towns (except Ashfield) have strong interest in regionalization, David Kulp mentioned smaller regions. Rowe, New Salem, Shutesbury strong WiredWest supporters, Wendell open. MBI will be splitting project agreement into 2 parts – design/engineering and then construction. Towns agreed to share reactions to policy. David Kulp will write letter to Carolyn Kirk/Peter Larkin requesting more participation by these towns, with input from other towns. Steve Nelson is concerned that Washington & Egremont were not invited, this is a smaller group; everyone should have input into the process and we should have 1 united voice. Kathy Soule-Regine – this grew out of eastern town efforts, these towns are being pushed to move forward and are the “firewall”.

Craig Martin – intent was not to limit participation, but to unite the SelectBoards. Bob Handsaker – it’s good to have a small group already working with MBI to articulate need for representation, which would apply to all towns. Jim Drawe – these towns are the guinea pigs to show how MBI will cooperate, so they can be a beachhead. Steve Nelson concerned no Berkshire county towns are involved – the towns are being cherry-picked. Mark Klitzke – state governmentt likes to do multiple phases, so this fits. Craig Martin – this can be separate letters from SelectBoards, we can share. Jim Drawe – it’s asking for a seat at the table, policy input. Bob Handsaker – MBI budget counts on spending money this year – if towns stop, they have no way to pay their people.

David Dvore – MBI will want to have contracts signed early in January, so we need to have alternative ready, quoted Gayle Huntress – felt Shutesbury will participate in a regional network only if subscriber price is less than $75-80.

*Shutesbury* – waiting for pole survey to be scheduled.

*New Marlborough* – signed no MBI docs, Frontier responded to RFP – Broadband committee will present to SelectBoard on Monday and likely recommend that solution. Finance – towns sign up to pay a fee per subscriber for a number of years to subsidize, low speed connection at no extra cost, higher tiered service will cost more, PON network. Since SelectBoard can’t authorize long-term debt, need home rule petition to allow commitment.

*Sandisfield* – complete readiness with MBI, also looking at Frontier or other private provider. Might be able to do through MLP w/o home rule. MBI asked New Marlborough & Sandisfield to wait for their RFP.

*Monterey* – pressure from residents, due to fiber installer now working. Monterey, Sandisfield, Tolland, Tyringham, Blandford met Tue night – 2 towns agreed to form an MLP coop, which could sign a service agreement (no RFP required). They are asking towns to fund consultant & attorneys to create/review contracts (Monterey TM approved $45,000 for this). Looking for constructions and operations – “expeditious and least risk” – turnkey operations, hoping for reasonably priced service. Otis also attended, might break with Westfield Gas & Electric if more attractive solution. Frontier has presented to some of these towns – attractive to them because they are contiguous.

*Wendell* signed agreements – pole survey Dec 12. Did town survey to determine current telecom costs and interest in higher priced service. Jim Drawe asked data be shared.

*Charlemont* – Readiness application almost complete, may submit application based on Matrix proposal. Sent a survey to residents like Wendell’s. Worried about operational cost - ~$100/month for Internet only (with a very high take rate – possibly down to $80). Town info meeting on Wed, Nov 15. Considering town RFP. SelectBoard not keen on owning network, so don’t want to start process yet. Trevor Mackie – is there muni space available? Jim Drawe – muni space is by by contract, not law, must be negotiated – does not include telecom – if there’s a pole hearing, require Verizon to leave space on the pole. Trevor Mackie – National Grid application specifically mentions muni space – but they said they don’t need pole hearings.

*Blandford* – Bill Ennen came a month or so ago – Peter Langmore is having problems getting help in town – attended the Monterey meeting. They do border Tolland, so thinks it makes sense to join that group. Town does not want to own network. They have completed readiness document but not submitted.

*Middlefield* – after special election, will have 3 SelectBoard members. Currently looking at alternative tower which costs less. Will continue with the pilot which has already been funded.

*Washington* – pole surveys right after Thanksgiving. “Most towns don’t want to own their own network”

*Becket* – readiness document submitted, working on fixing defect in posting (expect that will take only a few weeks). One SelectBoard member interested in regionalization, Westfield Gas & Electric is presenting next week.

*New Salem* – pole survey to begin Nov 21, waiting for draft contracts from MBI to review.

*Peru* waiting for town to come up with documents to back up readiness application (new town clerk). Todd Corcoran (MBI) offered to help push for documentation. New SelectBoard member has been talking to Charter – “they’re talking to 22 towns now”

*Conway* – partial cable town. Agreement signed with Comcast in August (3 6-month periods –pole survey/design, construct ½, then last group). Bob Armstrong – no recent updates from MBI.

*Chesterfield* – readiness process - by Town Administrator. (Bob Labrie – trying to get information from Cornerstone is the delay).

*Heath* – received pole survey agreement documents, haven’t signed yet. Had chosen stand-alone network to speed process. Steve Nelson – there’s no impact to the town to sign that agreement. Heath would like to push MBI to provide solution.

*New Ashford* – readiness finished, working on pole attachment agreements. Have contacted Charter, town does not want to own a network.

*Leyden* - finished paperwork, pole surveys to start late Nov/early Dec. Town forum last week, Todd Corcoran attended. Town will continue payments to stabilization fund for broadband. Town negotiating with Greenfield (Wired West reps don’t feel that will be fiber solution). Town wants to wait until RFP completes, but still open to WiredWest. Question about availability of refund form – we have document posted on website which should be easy to find.

*Worthington* – haven’t authorized debt – Broadband committee planning for Special Town Meeting to get funding, SelectBoard now supporting. Town took a tax hit starting own school, so reluctant to ask for much more. Considers putting all costs on subscribers. Completed town survey, asking about rates customers would support. Over 50% would pay $77-101 for internet only, over 70% $97-121 with phone. Open to all options, not much interest from providers yet. Charley recommends looking at Frontier customer service ratings.

*Goshen* – working on greenlight letter.

*Plainfield* – waiting for greenlight letter. Haven’t talked to private vendors yet; some interest in small regional group. Their goal – deliver for the same cost at VZN ($85 including phone), but better service. SelectBoard strongly supportive. They’re also planning to contact Larkin/Ash/Baker.

*Rowe* – midway through pole survey. SelectBoard supportive. Talked to Graybar/Corning/Fujitsu – proposal was more expensive than expected. Rowe has about 6 premises/mile. If private company owns the network, it is not regulated like phone service is today. VoIP is not regulated – providers not required to fix coverage issues.

*Cummington* – Finance Committee thinks town should own network if it funds it. Broadband committee working on readiness documents.

Larry Klein commented on Frontier’s reputation. They have taken over many marginal cable companies and have fixed many problems. Frontier installed base is happy, complaints mostly from new acquisition.

**Reports from Committees**

*Finance* – Bob Labrie distributed handouts with current income statement and escrow account information. Leslie Rule asked if would WW cover hardcopy mailing costs (based on MBI planning grant). Jim Drawe – we should be able to cover this with an invoice from the town. Charley Rose – MBI allowed them to use planning grant money for their survey.

 Jean Atwater-Williams – writing article for town paper re WW, regarding signups: leave deposit until solution decided, request a refund, our donate deposit to WW. Jim Drawe – concerned about stampede for refunds, but there is no problem with donating the money. Bob Handsaker – they are having info session, need to address refunds – they will recommend people leave the money, but would like a template letter for refunds. Craig Martin says this was asked in Shutesbury social media, he responded that betting on WiredWest is a good investment compared to putting that same money into a bank. David Dvore – the total amount who signed up is the key indicator (not who remain after refunds). Larry Klein – people ask for refunds either because they are moving or they don’t believe WiredWest is still viable – would like to see more communication on activities. Steve Nelson – Berkshire Eagle working on big article, talked extensively to Bob L.abrie .Steve Nelson feels that it’s better to leave the money in escrow, rather than ask for donations (otherwise have to identify what it will be used for).

*Outreach* – we still need time to produce a package, so not much to communicate on that. Working on letter to SelectBoards for FY17 contribution with invoice, but feels we’ll have more info soon. Kathy Soule-Regine reminding of the need to send heads up letter much earlier (sent in April this year, town budgets completed before then). Berkman center working on followup paper – Jim asked them to wait a bit.

*Executive Committee* met with two Massachusetts Rural Advisory Council members; they were interested in WiredWest work. They followed up with David Dvore on streamlining the makeready process – they’re working on recommendations to governor/legislature “one touch” & overlashing. Use of MBI123 – not sustainable, towns shouldn’t be forced to subsidize. Jim Drawe – you only buy transport on MBI 123 (dark fiber) $1240/Gb to Springfield), pay ISP for bandwidth. Chris Lynch – towns may have other providers, e.g. Lightower. Dark fiber – pay for the entire IRU as capital, but you can use as much BW as you want; most carriers also require a monthly maintenance fee. Bob Handsaker – Axia will have many dark fiber IRUs after the MBI contract expires. Jim Drawe – we need to research requirements of federal grant for middle mile – can’t transfer to private company, but we’d like to look at intergovernmental transfers. Bob Handsaker MBI would not be involved in buying dark fiber from Axia.

*Outreach* – there was a round of applause to David Dvore for website improvements. He’d like a new story for main page. Robert Heller – hard to use website on dialup – would like direct URLs for important documents. David Dvore will consider making a links page for slow connections.

**Other Director Input**

**Confirm and Schedule next BoD meetings**

December 10th 9:30 - Ashfield

January 7th 9:30 – Worthington

**Other business which could not be reasonably foreseen within 48 hours of meeting**

**Adjourn**