

Broadband Study Committee (BSC) Meeting Notes

Date: April 22nd, 2022

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FAIRHAVEN,
MASS.

The meeting was held virtually, on Zoom.

Committee Members Present: Sean Powers, Alyssa Botelho, Cathy Melanson, Tom McAfee

Committee Members Absent: Sean Daly

Town Staff Present: Derek Frates.

Consultants Present

Entry Point -Jeff Christensen (Part time), Bruce Patterson, Devin Cox

Lewis, Young, Robertson & Burningham - David Robinson

The meeting was called to order at 1:03 PM.

Cathy Melanson made a motion to approve the meeting notes from April 14th, amended to correct the spelling of Sean Daly's last name. Sean Powers seconded. There was no further discussion and the motion passed with all in favor except for one abstention, Tom McAfee (who was not present for the meeting).

Bob Espindola provided an update on the meeting with Bond Counsel, Town Counsel, Town Administrator Angie Ellison, Jeff Christensen and himself.

Bob explained that it was the first time that Bond Counsel and Town Counsel had conferred on this subject so there was some history to cover and various scenarios for financing and operations were discussed. Bond Counsel was familiar with Cooperatives but not Municipal Light Cooperatives and not Cooperatives developed within a single community. He volunteered to research and provide feedback on a possible Town Meeting article that would allow for the Town, if Town Meeting members vote in support, to finance a Broadband project in one form or another.

Town Counsel explained that betterments, under statute, do not envision an opt in scenario whereby only people who opt-in would pay for the betterment. Town Counsel explained that one option for a betterment model might be to allow for an opt-out model where people would use an abatement process to opt out of the cost and he said that process could even be automated to ensure that everyone who did not subscribe to broadband service could, potentially, receive an automatic abatement.

Bond Counsel will be providing language, for Article 35, that would address special legislation.

The hope is that there will be feedback from Bond Counsel before the next BSC meeting.

Town Counsel pointed out that, between Article 34 and Article 35, there will be no request for borrowing at the June 18th Town Meeting.

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Bob Espindola pointed out that without a borrowing question for Town Meeting that could reduce the number of questions Town Meeting members will ask but the BSC committee should be prepared to answer questions about what lies ahead if Article 34 and Article 35 should pass.

David Robertson asked why not ask Town Meeting members to authorize borrowing at this Town Meeting. Bob Espindola explained that doing so would require a very detailed explanation of what, exactly the borrowing was for, what the cost implications would be, etc. and that, currently, those things are not defined sufficiently.

Bob Espindola suggested that if the special legislation Article, #35, passes at Town Meeting, that the BSC might want to consider reaching out to local delegation of legislators to explain the benefits because they may hear an opposing view.

Jeff Christensen displayed the table below of communities who have operational broadband networks and suggested reaching out to some or all of them to understand how they financed their projects and if they needed special legislation for the model they are operating under.

David Robertson offered to research what type of borrowing was done on these projects and to provide feedback to the BSC on that.

Municipality	Model Type	Public vs Private ISP & M&O	Residential Gig	Commercial Gig
Concord, MA	Municipal Light Plant	Municipal ISP & M&O	\$89.95	Call for Pricing
Leverett, MA	Municipal Light Plant	3 rd Party ISP & M&O	\$83.40	\$299.95
Taunton, MA	Municipal Light Plant	Municipal ISP & M&O	\$69.95	Call for Pricing
New Salem, MA	Municipal Light Plant	3 rd Party ISP & M&O	\$85.00	\$110- \$260
Shutesbury, MA	Municipal Light Plant	Municipal ISP & M&O	\$75.00	Call for Pricing
Wendell, MA	Municipal Light Plant	3 rd Party ISP & M&O	\$99.00	\$99.00
Peabody, MA	Municipal Light Plant	Closed	\$89.95	\$299.95
Westfield MA	Municipal Light Plant	3 rd Party ISP & M&O	\$69.95	\$84.95- \$399.95

Sean Powers asked about other funding sources that could be available for additional grants. Bob Espindola explained that getting additional ARPA funds, beyond the \$37,500 already committed to

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match the Community Compact Cabinet (CCC) grant application submitted would be unlikely as there is a lot of competition for the ARPA funds.

Sean asked if we could set aside funds for a potential match for another grant opportunity. Bob Espindola explained that funds could not be set aside for a hypothetical grant or in anticipation of a grant that may be on the horizon but if the BSC were to identify a specific grant opportunity, such as the CCC grant opportunity, they could again ask for matching funds from ARPA or other source.

Bob Espindola explained that ARPA funds do not require a Town Meeting vote to be expended, it is the decision of the Select Board how to spend those funds.

Jeff Christensen said that he believes two main questions remain to be answered;

- 1) Will the Town support a betterment model to finance a broadband project
- 2) Will the Town support a Municipal Light Plant

Bob Espindola said that he believes that the Town needs to have an updated survey where we can ascertain interest level at a specific price point or range depending on take rate.

Bob Espindola brought up concerns that the current model did carries the cost of borrowing over a 20-30 year period and suggested that there might be a middle ground that would be more palatable in terms of monthly cost vs. years to payoff.

David Robertson will work to refine the numbers and scenarios and assumptions cost to build, take rate, financing term and monthly payments per subscriber into a single page document for reference at the next meeting and to be refined as necessary for reference at Town Meeting or as outreach prior to Town Meeting. He said he would work to have that completed by May 1st.

Bob Espindola discussed Mass Broadband Institute (MBI).

Bob Espindola asked Jeff Christensen to provide the list of things that MBI will approve for funding with their current \$50M fund.

Sean Powers made a motion for Bob Espindola to meet with Josh Eichen from MBI and Entry Point to discuss possible grant opportunities in capacity building. Tom McAfee seconded the motion, there was no further discussion and the motion carried unanimously.

The Committee discussed meeting frequency and feels it is important to meet regularly ahead of Town Meeting and decided to meet again on Tuesday, May 3rd, at 7:00 P.M.

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Bob Espindola made a motion to adjourn at 2:02 PM, Cathy Melanson seconded. There was no further discussion, the vote passed unanimously.

Meeting notes submitted by Bob Espindola