

1 **Northwest Vermont Communications Union District**
2 **Governing Board Meeting**
3 **January 5, 2021; 6:00 p.m.**
4 **Zoom Meeting (810 1813 7272)**
5

6 **Attendance:** S. Kio (Chair, Enosburgh Rep), Brad Docheff (Fairfax Alt.), E. McGinley (Montgomery Rep.),
7 Dominic DeRosia (Berkshire Rep.), Ken Millman (Alburgh Rep.), S. McGowan (Alburgh Alt.), Tara Wright
8 (Georgia Alt.), Emily Klofft (NRPC), and Shaun Coleman (NRPC).

9 **Public:** Dave Stanley, Charen Fegard, Steve Whittaker.
10

11 **Call to Order / Adjustments to Agenda**

12 Chair S. Kio called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. followed by roll call. A quorum was present to
13 conduct business. There were no adjustments to the agenda.
14

15 **Minutes**

16 *E. McGinley motioned to approve the minutes. S. McGowan seconded. Motion carried.*
17

18 **Treasurer's Report**

19 E. Klofft provided the Treasurer's Report. The Vermont Community Foundation funds and CUD Planning
20 grant reimbursement from DPS will be deposited tomorrow.
21

22 There was \$68,333 for Wi-Fi program may be redistributed elsewhere due to the CARES Act funding
23 extension. The extension will run through the end of 2021.
24

25 S. Kio noted the NWCUD may resubmit a third time for the Planning Grant program. The federal funding
26 that will be coming from the state has not been allocated. The state is unsure how the funding will be
27 distributed for broadband/communication services.
28

29 S. McGowan mentioned the NWCUD does not have a political action type committee. S. Kio said the
30 NWCUD reached out to legislator's prior to elections. The Board discussed with legislator's again at the
31 start of the new year. S. McGowan offered to assist outreach to legislators.
32

33 S. Kio noted Postcard surveys to the public were sent out and will be delivered in the next week.
34

35 *E. McGinley motioned to accept the Treasurer's Report. S. McGowan seconded. Motion carried.*
36

37 **Vice Chair Nominations and Elections**

38 S. Kio reported that former Vice-Chair Chris Cota submitted his letter of resignation effective
39 immediately. Chair S. Kio opened nominations.
40

41 K. Millman nominated T. Wright as Vice President. T. Wright declined the nomination.

42 E. McGinley nominated K. Millman as Vice Chair. K. Millman declined the nomination.
43

44 After some discussion about the activities of the Vice Chair, S. Kio tabled nominations / election for Vice
45 Chair until next meeting. Members were encouraged to solicit interest among community members.

46 Additionally, the meeting falls on a day and time where other local board and committee meetings fall
47 on so we may need to adjust to allow for more participation.

1
2 **Lamoille Merger / MOU**

3 S. Kio reported that there was some discussion after Lamoille completed their feasibility. There was
4 some discussion previously about sharing services between Lamoille and NWCUD.
5

6 E. McGinley noted that actions that may increase the subscriber base would be a benefit to each of the
7 CUDs. Lamoille has some very knowledgeable members. Any form of collaboration would be beneficial
8 in terms of expertise sharing and resource sharing.
9

10 A discussion ensued about what the down side of merging would be. T. Wright noted that by staying
11 small geographically, the CUD can better make better decisions to benefit local communities. S. Kio
12 noted that Lamoille mentioned a similar concern where some member towns end up being pushed
13 down the list because larger towns would have more of voice due to population. S. McGowan suggested
14 inviting Lamoille to a future meeting.
15

16 S. Kio noted there is an effort to establish an MOU for sharing resources or staff which would be helpful
17 when responding to a joint application. There are a lot of similarities between Lamoille and NWCUD in
18 terms of goals and priorities.
19

20 S. Coleman asked everyone's opinion on how local Selectboards/Trustees may react to a potential
21 merger with another District. The general consensus was that if it would be a benefit to the NWCUD,
22 then local leaders shouldn't have an issue with it. It could save costs on resources and staff. T. Wright
23 noted that we are not going to merge CUDs at this time but rather just share services.
24

25 J. Jewett asked whether LCRPC and NRPC would each support a combined District. S. Coleman replies
26 that RPCs collaborate on many initiatives and programs such as the Economic Development District.
27 Each CUD would continue to be supported by their representative RPC.
28

29 K. Millman asked about the definition of big vs. large CUDs; financially such as Stowe; population;
30 density. S. Kio replied that Lamoille had similar concern. E. McGinley added that it would come down to
31 how the feasibility study would play out. We will have to compare the two feasibility studies once
32 NWCUD's is complete.
33

34 H. Jewett asked how the feasibility studies would change or if there would be a need to conduct another
35 for both. S. Kio noted that the data of the feasibility study would have to be aggregated for the business
36 strategy. The business plan would definitely change. Each feasibility study would remain viable. K.
37 Millman noted that Lamoille and NWCUD are independent, and there is an MOU that will define how
38 each CUD will work together when it is advantageous for each. The group agreed to invite Lamoille to an
39 upcoming meeting.
40

41 **CUD Planning Grant Update**

42 S. Kio noted we are waiting for some more guidance from Public Service. There is a question of whether
43 we can get back to the original goal of the grant.
44

45 There have been an additional 12 wi-fi hotspots installed in the region. It was a quick and somewhat
46 temporary solution for residents. The new hot spots were well received in Enosburgh, Bakersfield and
47 Alburgh.
48

1 S. Kio will work with NRPC in submitting a revised/amended application. E. Klofft noted that members
2 should be thinking about what, if anything, they are hoping to accomplish with the next round of
3 funding. Next round will be competitive.
4

5 **CUD Planning Grant Survey**

6 S. Kio reported he halted the Facebook advertisement. E. Klofft reviewed the data behind the survey
7 responses that were sent out. There were 430 people completed the survey with the most coming from
8 Alburgh and Bakersfield. She will distribute the data to the members including the town-by-town
9 breakdown. S. Kio noted that a lot of the results are right in line with the goals of the NWCUD with what
10 the public is seeking: affordability, reliability, and better speeds (preferred 100/100 mbps). K. Millman
11 added that it is also a great tool for digital literacy purposes. There was some social media discussion. S.
12 Kio asked for everyone to inform their Selectboards about the survey.
13

14 **USDA - Rural Business Development Grant**

15 E. Klofft reported that for the USDA RBDG we will need letters of support from local businesses (or
16 remote workers). The intent of the grant is job creation and job retention. The key for USDA is jobs
17 created and jobs saved. The letters should include how employees and businesses are impacted by not
18 being able to work remotely (i.e., a business unable to expand employee base or save jobs due to
19 insufficient broadband service and/or employee challenges or inability in trying to work remotely). The
20 letters should be submitted by mid-February
21

22 The letters of support should not be the typical general show-of-support but rather include specifics on
23 various impediments for remote employment. S. Kio and E. Klofft will develop a hit-list of topics as
24 examples for the letters. Emily will also develop a summary of activities for the board to review at the
25 next meeting.
26

27 **Member Updates**

28 Fairfax – B. Docheff no report. Searching for a new NWCUD representative. The build out from MC Fiber
29 has been well received by residents. The Town has had a good working relationship with them thus far.

30 Alburgh – K. Millman noted that the Town is in receipt of a proposal from Matrix to design, build and
31 operate a fiber to home network. Matrix submitted the proposal to the Town prior to the Town
32 receiving the Feasibility Study and Business Plan. The Town eventually received the study and plan
33 recently. The Town had some grave concerns about the Business Plan and contact VT DPS.
34

35 DPS was not pleased with the Alburgh Business Plan. Rob Fish and Clay Purvis from DPS will be
36 responding to Matrix to ask for follow up on several elements.
37

38 Consolidated Communications has installed fiber just over the Bridge to North Hero. An air strip
39 operator was willing to pay commercial rates for fiber. K. Millman reached out to Consolidated to see
40 what it would take for Consolidated to roll out fiber in Alburgh and has not heard back.
41

42 Berkshire – D. DeRosia had no update. He has point of contact information for all 8 schools in FNESU and
43 will send them to Sean.

44 Montgomery – E. McGinley reported that he is going to get a survey link on the town website. The new
45 hotspot is working well.

46 Georgia – T. Wright reported that the library has a new wi-fi hotspot installed through the state.
47 Comcast was offering free and/or discounted internet service to schools and libraries. That discount is
48 going away so the budget is going up accordingly.

1 Bakersfield – The Town is losing their assistant town treasurer and zoning administrator.
2 NRPC – S. Coleman reported that the Secretary of State’s Office asked for the CUD formation paperwork
3 to be submitted on letterhead prior to recognition from their office.

4 E. Klofft reported she will be setting up a System for Award Management (SAM) account for the CUD.
5 SAM registration is required to do business with the government for grant and reporting purposes.

6
7 In discussions with Matrix, they asked to see if the focus of the feasibility could be narrowed. The end
8 result would be that we would get a more detailed plan but the down side is that not everyone would be
9 covered. NRPC pushed back on the idea of doing that by town because that is not how the underserved
10 are working. There are areas within the district that are unserved and underserved and not by town.
11 NRPC will be requesting a status update and meeting with Matrix to ensure we are getting the product
12 we need.

13
14 **Public Service Board**

15 No comment.

16
17 **Public Comment**

18 S. Whittaker asked if all the towns in Franklin and Grand Isle were included in the feasibility study. E.
19 Klofft noted that all towns in region are open to membership within the district. The feasibility should be
20 looking at areas in the district and not necessarily on a town-by-town basis.

21
22 S. Whittaker emphasized the importance of posting minutes as required under VT’s Open Meeting Law
23 (10 days under current COVID-19 guidance and 5 days normally).

24
25 S. Whittaker spoke of the new PSD funded tower that went live at the FAA site in St. Albans. It is a VTEL
26 site that is available but is not being marketed. VTEL is offering their spectrum to CUDs and offered
27 CUDs to market them under their own label.

28
29 S. Whittaker continued with his recommendations for the CUDs to be prepared for the coming stimulus
30 funding including inventory, local resources, his work with statutes, monopoly models, back haul for
31 public safety communications, and broadband planning. He offered to talk with anyone interested off-
32 line.

33
34 C. Fegard commented that the discussions have been a learning experience. One of the things Richford
35 is trying to do is better support their businesses and the USDA grant discussed earlier seems like a good
36 fit.

37
38 S. Kio thanked everyone for the comments.

39
40 **Other Business**

41 E. Klofft noted the next meeting with MC Fiber is set up for next Tuesday at 6 pm. This regular board
42 meeting should begin after MC Fiber at 6:30 pm. Regular board meetings should continue at 6:00 on
43 alternating Tuesdays to limit conflict with other board meetings.

44
45 **Adjourn**

46 *E. McGinley motioned to adjourn. H. Jewett seconded. Motion carried.*

47
48 Meeting adjourned at 7:37 pm