

1 **Northwest Communications Union District**
2 **Organizational Meeting - Minutes**
3 **August 3, 2020 1:00 p.m.**
4 **Virtual Meeting via Zoom (Meeting ID: 820 1869 1616)**
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6 **Attendance:** Emily Klofft, NRPC; Sean Koi, Enosburgh, Christopher Cota, Fairfax; Everett
7 McGinley, Montgomery; Brad Docheff, Fairfax; Rob Fish, PSD; Shaun Coleman, NRPC; Jonathan
8 DeLaBruere, Fairfield.

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10 **Call to Order and Adjustments to the Agenda**

11 S. Coleman welcomed everyone and began the meeting at 1:01 p.m.
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13 **Acceptance of Signed Resolutions from Founding Municipalities**

14 S. Coleman reported that State Statute 30 V.S.A. § 3051 gives municipalities the authority to
15 form a communications union district. During the declared state of emergency due to COVID-
16 19, the legislature passed an amendment (H.958) to allow municipal governing boards to vote
17 to form the district during a public meeting. The Department of Public Service and Northwest
18 Regional Planning Commission were given notice from the Town of Enosburgh and the Town of
19 Fairfax that their respective Selectboards signed resolutions to form a Communications Union
20 District during regularly scheduled public meetings on July 20, 2020.
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22 E. Klofft reported that the Town of Montgomery also voted to join the Northwest CUD later on
23 July 20, 2020.

24 *S. Kio motioned to accept the resolutions from Enosburgh, Fairfax and Montgomery. C. Cota*
25 *seconded. Motion carried with a unanimous vote.*
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27 **Roll Call of Governing Board**

28 All municipal representatives present. Brad Docheff present as alternate for Fairfax.
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30 **Motion to Declare District Formed**

31 *C. Cota motioned to declare the Northwest Communications Union District formed. S. Koi*
32 *seconded. Discussion offered.*
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34 B. Docheff asked if there is only one vote per municipality. E. Klofft confirmed.
35 *Motion carried.*
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37 **Election of Officers**

38 *C. Cota nominated Sean Kio for Chair. E. McGinley seconded. There were no other nominations.*

39 S. Kio did not object.

40 *Sean Kio was elected Chair.*

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S. Kio nominated Christopher Cota for Vice-Chair. E. McGinley seconded. There were no other nominations.

C. Cota did not object.

Christopher Cota was elected Vice-Chair.

S. Coleman turned the meeting over to Chair S. Kio.

E. Klofft offered NRPC staff to serve as Clerk and Treasurer if no one else is interested in these early stages if needed. R. Fish added NRPC can serve as interim or longer. As other towns come on board, there could be others who may be interested to fill this role.

E. McGinley motioned for NRPC staff to serve as Clerk and Treasurer. C. Cota seconded. There were no other nominations.

Motion carried.

Bylaws and Conflict of Interest Policy

The Conflict of Interest Policy was not ready and will be a future agenda item.

C. Cota motioned to ratify the bylaws with the exception of Section 23.

There was a brief discussion on the number of members of the Executive Committee.

E. McGinley amended the motion to change Section 14 from “Executive Committee consisting of up to seven members” to “Executive Committee consisting of up to five members”.

S. Koi seconded the motion and the amended motion. Motion carried.

Authorizations for Clerk and Treasurer

C. Cota authorized the Clerk and Treasurer to attend to the financial matters pertaining to the NWCUD such as notifying Secretary of State’s Office that the district has been formed, opening a checking account, getting insurance quotes and acquiring a Tax ID and serving in Treasurer’s role. E. McGinley seconded. Motion carried.

E. Klofft and S. Coleman abstained.

Regular Meetings of the CUD

After a brief discussion, the group agreed that recurring meetings will be held on Wednesdays at 4:30. In the early stages of the NWCUD formation, the group agreed to meet weekly.

Fiscal Agent and Structure

E. McGinley motioned to use Northwest Regional Planning Commission as the fiscal agent for the Northwest Communications Union District. C. Cota seconded. Motion carried.

82 *E. Klofft and S. Coleman abstained.*

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84 **BIG and CUD Grants**

85 E. Klofft report that the Broadband Innovation Grant (BIG) is due at 4:30 p.m. today. This grant
86 provides \$60,000 in funding to RPCs in support of CUDs to develop a feasibility study and
87 business plan. She presented a draft letter of support from the current members in support of
88 the broadband innovation grant.

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90 *E. McGinley motioned that the NWCUD to approve the letter of support for the Broadband*
91 *Innovation Grant by NRPC. C. Cota seconded. Motion carried.*

92 E. Klofft and S. Coleman abstained.

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94 There is another grant available to the CUD called the Covid Community Resilience Grant or
95 informally the CUD Planning Grant that provides up to \$100,000 in funding. R. Fish noted that it
96 is out of the CARES funding in response to COVID. Could be used for staff time, collecting pole
97 data, hiring a consultant to help with various negotiations. The key is to it tied back to
98 telehealth, remote learning and remote governance to respond to current crisis. Deadline for
99 work is end of year. Can be used to expand upon the broadband innovation grant. As long as it
100 accelerates the deployment of broadband.

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102 Because of the short time frame, even if it's not for the full \$100K. The CUD can use it as a line
103 of credit. NEK only applied for \$30k. The goal is to accelerate the CUDs.

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105 There was a brief discussion on the cost of engineering and business plans with potentially up
106 to 20 municipalities joining. It is likely that the BIG won't cover the actual costs. The Electric Co-
107 op is currently conducting a survey of needs. They are looking at business plan development
108 and trying to determine if they want to start engineering. It may be part of the middle mile
109 feasibility initiative from earlier in the year.

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111 Pole collection surveys are very expensive. Most private contractors charge between \$23 to \$30
112 a pole. The state is considering bringing the pole collection surveys in-house and have a cadre
113 of volunteers trained to do the surveys.

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115 S. Kio noted that in Detroit, they had a youth internship (internet interns) program. Essentially
116 bringing in high school students looking for a trade. They brought them in and trained them
117 how to be linemen for fiber.

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119 Also, during the Franklin County Covid Recovery meeting we heard from Franklin telephone
120 company and their struggles to educate the customers on the importance of this and why it's
121 necessary. Probably something we should look at on why its important and engage our
122 communities.

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R. Fish reported that other CUDs are using the funds to implement other programs whether its' paying for line extensions or the soon-to-be lifeline program. DPS is collecting student addresses (only) to determine where infrastructure could be deployed for underserved areas. This is a great opportunity for showing the communities what the role is of the CUD for connectivity – increasing digital literacy, connecting the various programs, building the infrastructure and having local demographic control of what is happening in the communities.

E. Klofft added that the CUD is now able to receive \$10,000 in funding from the VT Community Foundation by authorizing NRPC to be fiscal agent. All we need is to set up a bank account.

Department of Public Service Update

S. Coleman and E. Klofft reported that the NW CUD received a notification of connectivity initiative from the Department of Public Service. The CUD has the opportunity to comment on several proposals in the area. The CUD has up to 7 days to provide comment on the proposal by statute. Only towns that are official members of the CUD can comment on expansion efforts within their towns. It doesn't mean that DPS will accept the proposals regardless of comments but it gives CUDs an opportunity to comment.

Acceptance of New Members

There was clarification regarding Enosburg Falls being incorporated. S. Kio will follow up with the Village regarding voting on joining the District.

Jonathan reported that the Town of Fairfield Selectboard has not taken action to join the District but it is anticipated that they will in the coming weeks.

E. Klofft suggested that the CUD has the option to pre-accept municipalities so that they would be immediately accepted as soon as they voted to join.

E. McGinley motioned to accept Georgia into the CUD. C. Cota seconded. Motion carried.

It is anticipated that Fairfield (8/10), Berkshire (8/17), Highgate (8/20), Alburgh (8/12), Sheldon (8/10), Bakersfield (?) and Enosburg Falls (?) will join.

C. Cota motioned to preauthorize any municipality in Franklin and Grand Isle Counties to join the Northwest Communications Union District as long as the municipal Selectboard, Trustees or Council voted in favor to join the District. E. McGinley seconded. Motion carried.

Public Comment and Member Announcements

162 There was a discussion about future agenda items: web presence, Open Meeting Law training,
163 Fiber Broadband Association, Conflict of Interest Policy, 3 member at-large positions at a future
164 meeting, and utilizing Slack.

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166 R. Fish provided brief overview of VCUDA. Everyone encouraged to attend VCUDA meetings.

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168 **Adjourn**

169 *C. Cota motioned to adjourn. E. McGinley seconded. Motion carried.*

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171 Meeting adjourned at 2:08 p.m.

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173 Action Items

174 Submit Broadband Innovation Grant application

175 Apply for Vermont Community Foundation funding

176 Conflict of Interest Policy

177 Planning Grant examples

178 Open bank account

179 Apply for tax ID

180 Insurance

181 Comments on Broad Band Proposal Initiatives within District (due 8/10)

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