

1 **Northwest Communications Union District**
2 **August 12, 2020 Minutes**
3 **Virtual Meeting (Zoom Meeting ID: 850 1431 5183)**
4

5 **Attendance:** Emily Klofft (NRPC), Sean Kio, Chair (Enosburgh), Christopher Cota Vice-Chair
6 (Fairfax), Everett McGinley (Montgomery), Tara Wright (Georgia), Brad Docheff (Fairfax), Ian Scott
7 (Montgomery), Rob Fish, (VTPSD), Shaun Coleman (NRPC) and Jonathan DeLaBruere (Fairfield),
8

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

10 Chair S. Kio called the meeting to order at 4:31 p.m. No adjustments to the agenda.
11

12 **Public Comment**

13 None.
14

15 **Roll Call**

16 See Attendance above.
17

18 **Approval of Minutes**

19 *E. McGinley motioned to approve the minutes. B. Docheff seconded.*
20

21 T. Wright asked for clarification of the final changes to the bylaws referenced in the minutes. S.
22 Coleman noted that he will send out the final version of the bylaws as approved at the last meeting.
23

24 S. Kio reported that the Conflict of Interest Policy draft will be distributed prior to the next meeting.
25 *Motion carried.*
26

27 **Treasurer's Report - NRPC**

28 S. Coleman reported that that there has been no notice of an award for the Broadband Innovation
29 Grant. The CUD received notice of a \$10,000 grant award from the Vermont Community
30 Foundation. A checking account should be opened next week by the Director of NRPC.
31

32 I. Scott and C. Cota joined the meeting. Brad noted that Chris would assume his role as Fairfax
33 representative.
34

35 **Acceptance of New Members**

36 S. Kio reported that the Town of Fairfield is now a member. The District passed a resolution at the
37 organizational meeting to accept any municipality in the region that has signed the resolution to
38 join the NWCUD. J. DeLaBruere added that the Town is currently seeking an alternate
39 representative.
40

41 **Member Updates**

42 Fairfax - C. Cota reported that there have been a lot of webinars regarding funding. There is one
43 coming up specifically for broadband funding by the US Office of the Comptroller for rural areas.
44 This will be held on August 27 at 2 pm CST.
45

46 Georgia - T. Wright that she and Amber Baker to be added to the Slack Channel.

1
2 Montgomery - E. McGinley reported that according to the 2020 FCC Broadband Deployment Report
3 that was released in April, the FCC is sticking with a standard of 25/3. The industry is now saying
4 that it is inadequate. There is a great report by Benson Institute (think tank for broadband) that he
5 will post to the Slack Channel. Everett surmised that 5G will never be deployed in rural areas.

6
7 Fairfield – J. DeLaBruere reported that the SB just voted to join.

8
9 Enosburgh – S. Kio reported the he and S. Coleman worked on drafting a response to the broadband
10 proposals by VTel, CCI, and MCFiber. The response was based on the results from the Special
11 Meeting held last Friday. Comments were submitted only for the Towns that were members of the
12 NWCUD that were in the proposal.

13
14 E. Klofft noted that the Broadband Innovation Grant included all towns except Alburgh and Isle La
15 Motte who were considering going another director for feasibility and planning at the time the
16 grant was written. All other municipalities in region were included in the grant.

17
18 S. Kio reported that he spoke with several industry engineers regarding costs associated with
19 developing the studies. Costs ranged from \$40k to \$100k. There are so many different factors that
20 go into feasibility and business planning and costs vary depending on many factors that the CUD
21 may want included in the plans. Recommend looking at what other CUDs have developed.

22
23 C. Cota mentioned a program Community Networks Quick Start which may be helpful to look at
24 before diving into a feasibility study. Helps communities quickly assemble key cost information to
25 build or partner for a community network. Posted to Slack. <https://cnquickstart.com/>

26
27 **Discussion - Mission Statement, Goals, Branding**

28 S. Kio began the discussion noting some items could be developed into goals and objectives. A
29 mission statement could come later.

30
31 E. McGinley added that the CUD needs to define what the District wants to achieve for our
32 communities and what the minimum standards could be.

33
34 A discussion of standards ensued including universal service – access for everyone; base
35 symmetrical 100 mb service; time scale (needs to be defined); technology platform that evolves and
36 is affordable; avoid dead-end technologies, business model should be agnostic at this point; fiber to
37 the premises is the goal as anything less is not a long-term solution for residents in our District.

38
39 S. Kio added that fiber is a primary focus however, knowing the geographical challenges of running
40 fiber in our region, it may not be economically feasible. There due to ledge, length of driveways, etc.
41 However, microwave technologies on top of fiber backbone may work for such instances.

42
43 M. McGinley recommended setting the goal to be fiber to the premises and make an exception later.

44

1 T. Wright added that we need to prioritize: people with no access priority before people who have
2 some service? CARES Act which is providing some grant funding for the work is meant to cover the
3 needs of remote learning, telehealth and work from home.

4
5 R. Fish noted It will come down to the business plan and what is going to be feasible to do. It may
6 have to cover some areas that have 4/1 service now but not cable before you can get to the areas
7 with no access. Most CUDs are not building out areas with cable right now because there's more
8 limitations on what dollars can be spent on over building cable.

9
10 Funding link <https://publicservice.vermont.gov/content/broadband-funding>.

11
12 Other potential capital funds programs may be: USDA reconnect program; FCC Rural Digital
13 Opportunity Fund (RDOF) program; CARES Act (if end of year expenditure restrictions are relaxed);
14 USDA's Northern Borders Program and ACCD Community Development Block Grants (maybe) and
15 partnering with private entity and providing a governance role.

16
17 Most CUDs have adopted a goal of: Universal service, future proof, and affordable service.

18
19 A lot but not all substations have fiber going to them. A lot of fiber that passes through town will
20 give your network back haul but it's not fiber that can be used as fiber to the premises.

21
22 MC Fiber will get fiber to the last pole plus 400 ft. There is a charge for running conduit, etc. In
23 terms of universal access, it's whether we can get fiber to the pole closest to their premises plus a
24 400'-500' allowance. Everyone gets the same service level including business and residential.

25
26 T. Wright cautioned that we can't predict the technology but the approach is logical.

27
28 C. Cota added that lifeline services are important and should be added to whatever network is built.
29 Priorities would be people with school age children who have no service.

30
31 B. Docheff mentioned that the Town of Fairfax is looking at public spaces to potentially run service.
32 The Town would like to work with schools and families to create a depot for remote learning. The
33 Town is searching for short term funding. Sean echoed that Enosburgh is looking into this as well.

34
35 R. Fish encouraged the CUD to put together the plan to use the \$100,000 Planning Grant before the
36 end of the year. This would be a goodwill type project that would be eligible. Some CUDs are using
37 the funds for pole surveys. Be sure to reach out to legislature and school districts.

38
39 C. Cota added that the Public Service Department maps of underserved high priority students to
40 town Selectboards are good starting point to start discussing needs and create awareness in the
41 community. Let them identify what public spots could work and report that back so the CUD can
42 address that need. Sean will work on the message to towns. Rob provided the link:

43 <https://publicservice.vermont.gov/sites/dps/files/documents/Survey%20Map%207%202022.pdf>

44
45 There was brief discussion on long-term time frame. It's hoped that some implementation will
46 begin by 2022, whether it be shovels in the ground or partnership with ISPs, etc.

1
2 C. Cota said one of the goals should be try to introduce competition where there isn't. There are
3 open access models where single entities run fiber and other companies bring service. Some good
4 examples such as Ammon are posted on Slack.

5
6 A discussion began on digital literacy especially for older residents. Sean mentioned Mozilla
7 Foundation whose goal is for digital literacy in broad spectrum for all ages. Rob mentioned
8 partnering with libraries and they are working with AmeriCorps VISTAs for internet internships for
9 educating seniors.

10
11 S. Kio tabled the branding discussion.

12
13 **Website (domain, webhosting, design)**

14 S. Kio is willing to create the website. Chris offered to assist.

15
16 There was a brief discussion on hosting website management, Weebly or Square Space, generating
17 traffic, social media for CUD, domain name, posting of public documents (agendas, minutes, etc.),
18 social media and social media policy, provider having archived email option, and having options for
19 survey and donations.

20
21 E. Klofft added that if you find a domain and purchase it, you can be reimbursed by the CUD. The
22 \$10,000 grant should be in the account by the end of next week.

23
24 **Department of Public Service Update**

25 Rob had to leave but provided the group with good information earlier.

26
27 **Other Business**

28 E. Klofft encouraged everyone to start looking at the DPS's COVID-Response Connected Community
29 Resilience Program Grant Application. The legislature intends to fund each of the CUDs. We need to
30 develop a scope of work sooner rather than later. Posted to Slack.

31
32 E. McGinley raised the concern about a risk of partnering with an ISP to deliver services to only
33 areas that are most profitable. Does the CUD want to actively promote the line extension program?
34 The concern being this could remove the home as priority underserved site and they are left with a
35 bare minimum of service. All agreed there was no need to actively promote the program as it is
36 being widely shared already.

37
38 There was a brief discussion about who could serve as one of the members-at-large. NRPC will
39 reach out to NMC to see if they are interested. Sean will reach out to the Franklin NE SU. Everett
40 offered to reach out to Franklin East SU.

41
42 **Adjourn**

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

44
45 Meeting adjourned at 6:20 p.m.
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