

1 **Northwest Communications Union District**
2 **September 15, 2020 DRAFT Minutes**
3 **Virtual Meeting (Zoom Meeting ID: 820 0894 1202)**
4

5 **Attendance:** Emily Klofft (NRPC), Sean Kio, Chair (Enosburgh), Christopher Cota, Vice-Chair
6 (Fairfax), Shaun Coleman (NRPC), Everett McGinley (Montgomery), Tara Wright (Georgia Alt.), Brad
7 Docheff (Fairfax Alt.), Jonathan DeLaBruere (Fairfield), Ken Millman (Alburgh), Mustafa Mends-
8 Cole (Sheldon Alt.), Heather Jewett (Bakersfield), Will Anderson (USDA, DPS), Rob Fish (PSD), J.R.
9 Cox (Alburgh Alt).

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

12 Chair S. Kio called the meeting to order at 4:31 p.m. PSD was moved up in the agenda. A quorum
13 was present.

14
15 **Roll Call**

16 See attendance above.

17
18 **Approval of Minutes**

19 *J. DeLaBruere motioned to approve the minutes. C. Cota seconded. Motion carried.*
20

21 **Treasurer's Report - NRPC**

22 S. Coleman reported no changes since last meeting.

23 *C. Cota motioned to accept the Treasurer's Report. E. McGinley seconded. Motioned carried.*
24

25 **CUD Bank Account**

26 S. Coleman reviewed the non-profit corporate banking resolution using screen share. S. Kio
27 reported he contacted several banks and People's Trust was selected based on lack of fees and local
28 branch offices.

29 *E. McGinley motioned to accept the banking resolution. J. DeLaBruere seconded. Motion carried.*
30

31 **Public Safety Department**

32 R. Fish reported that PSD wants to provide funding through the COVID Resiliency Connectivity
33 Grant (Planning Grant). Funding must be used by the end of the year. He encouraged the District to
34 apply for funding. The goal is to provide some connectivity benefit to the communities between
35 now and the end of year.

36
37 Senate Finance and House Energy and Technology Committees are trying to determine how to
38 allocate \$1.5 million. It will likely be going towards planning based on the Treasury Department
39 Regulations. The District can help determine what the funding should be used for. It's likely not
40 going to be used for pole data collection. Some ideas are providing public wi-fi hot-spots for
41 unserved areas or helping bring in municipalities outside of the district or hiring a consultant to
42 provide additional work on a feasibility study.

43
44 Rob introduced Will Anderson from AmeriCorps/USDA who is working on their E-Connectivity
45 Initiative for Vermont and New Hampshire. Will outlined the Rural Business Development, Distance
46 Learning and TeleHealth grants. Contact Will for more information.

1
2 Rob mentioned that the CUD leaders are invited to a Forum tomorrow sponsored by Representative
3 Welsh to talk about broadband. Sean is planning on attending.

4
5 The Vermont Community Foundation is developing a CUD incubator type program that will help
6 educate CUD members. It will be very helpful for those who are new to all things broadband.

7
8 Everett asked whether any of the broadband initiative proposals had been awarded. Rob replied
9 that the first round was awarded and the next round will be announced in the coming days.

10
11 Chris asked what the Rural Development Grant was capped at and whether a phased project would
12 be allowed for multiple rounds of funding. Will replied it's capped at \$30,000 for individual
13 projects, but that could be changing soon. He will follow up about the phased funding approach.

14 15 **COVID Planning Grant Program**

16 S. Kio reported that the District is handcuffed by the timeline for using the funding. Just this past
17 week he had calls from 3 different principals asking how they can help. He recommended using the
18 funds to expand on the wi-fi hotspot program and making hot-spots more available. This would
19 include hiring a consultant to help accelerate growth and direction.

20
21 E. Klofft screen shared a draft application which listed the following tasks; wi-fi hot spots,
22 consulting services, conduction a survey and other educational outreach efforts. PSD is
23 encouraging our District to submit an application ASAP.

24
25 There was a brief discussion on the grant budget and tasks. The group agreed to allocate more
26 funding to wi-fi from the consultant line item. There was discussion about how to approach
27 distributing a survey. Ken, Brad and Emily shared their experiences with community surveys.
28 Shaun recommended having a survey ready that towns can have on hand at polling stations.

29
30 *C. Cota motioned to accept the work tasks and to authorize Emily and Sean to submit the application*
31 *in the near future. K. Millman seconded. Motion carried.*

32
33 E. Klofft added that the CUD can ask for grant funding upfront by including a Certificate of Financial
34 Hardship. There is no financial burden to municipalites by asking for this.

35
36 *J. DeLaBreure motioned to accept the Certificate of Financial Hardship. Seconded by C. Cota. Motion*
37 *carried.*

38 39 **CUD Organization**

40 S. Kio and C. Cota expressed their concerns about the direction of the Vermont Communications
41 Union District Association (VCUDA). The more senior CUDs are trying to drive the discussions and
42 decisions at the legislative level. Those CUDs are shovel ready and are not representative of all
43 CUDs. Rob Fish is aware of their concerns. Of particular concern is the requests VCUDA is making to
44 the legislature such as the pole data collection. There is no benefit to the newer CUDs who are still 3
45 or 4 years out from implementing anything with poles. The recommended the group continue to

1 actively participate at VCUDA meetings but not support their direction if there is no benefit to all
2 CUDs. Organizationally VCUDA, doesn't have adopted bylaws and are not mentioned in statute.

3
4 T. Wright added that NWCUD will eventually get to the spot where more senior CUDs are at. She is
5 concerned that any pole data collected now will become obsolete by the time we are at the their
6 level in a few years from now. A batch approach of pole data collection would serve the CUD efforts
7 better. The caution is having VCUDA speak on NWCUD's behalf when our Board thinks otherwise
8 based on our goals.

9
10 **CUD Website**

11 S. Kio reported once the bank account is open and he has a credit/debit card, he will proceed.

12 E. Klofft offered to draft a social media policy once the website design has begun.

13
14 **Member Updates**

15 Alburgh – Ken is recruiting alternates and will have something in place soon for the Selectboard's
16 consideration. He attended Isle La Motte's Selectboard meeting recently where Matrix gave a
17 presentation. He also pitched the NWCUD which the Board wasn't interested in. He offered to post
18 more information on Front Porch Forum to inform the citizens. Chris suggested having the website
19 up and running before FPF is used.

20
21 Fairfax – Brad reported that the town has created a secondary spot for remote learning and
22 telehealth at the community center. The challenge has been finding volunteers to be on site to help
23 manage it. The Selectboard and School have been supportive of it.

24
25 Chris added that he was trying to get in touch with Ting and SciFi which are ISP partners to
26 municipalities outside of Vermont. He will be reaching out to Franklin Telephone, GlobalNet and
27 Stowe Cable to see if they are willing to present at upcoming special meetings.

28
29 He also has been listening to as many Senate Finance and House Technology meetings as possible
30 and concluded that they are trying to financially support CUDs through other means but where the
31 funding is going to come from is uncertain. There are a lot of incumbent ISPS such as Comcast Cable,
32 Consolidate and various mobile carriers at these meetings and they are saying they are not hearing
33 a lot from CUDs. The NWCUD could host Special Meetings with local companies first then work our
34 way up to the larger companies. and make the meeting video recordings available on our website.

35
36 Enosburgh - Sean reported that Enosburgh is going through the same issues as Fairfax with their
37 community center.

38
39 Montgomery - Everett reported that he provided an update to the Selectboard. Montgomery has
40 only one public wi-fi spot at the public safety building/library. Still waiting for a response from
41 Vermont Electric Co-Op regarding their survey.

42
43 Bakersfield – Heather asked what the planning commission role is to the CUD. Shaun replied that
44 the town planning commission is separate from the CUD. This board is made up of representative
45 and alternates appointed by Selectboards.

46

1 Northwest RPC – E. Klofft reported she’s been working on the planning grant and trying to keep up
2 with Senate Finance Commission meetings.

3
4 Fairfield – Jonathan reported they are seeking an alternate after their first choice couldn’t commit.

5
6 Sheldon – Mustafa reported that he was brought in by Nick Norris and this was his first meeting.

7
8 Georgia - Tara reported there was no update and asked about the meeting schedule. Emily will send
9 out another Doodle Poll. The plan is to meet every other week but the group hasn’t pinned down a
10 regular meeting date. She recommended meeting in person when the state of emergency is lifted.
11 Georgia has meeting space if interested.

12
13 USDA – Will thanked everyone for asking him to participate in his first CUD meeting.

14
15 **Acceptance of New Members**
16 No new members since last meeting.

17
18 S. Kio reported that he and Shaun have been reaching out to municipalities for interest in joining
19 the CUD. Richford, Franklin, and Swanton Selectboards are interested in joining. Swanton Village
20 and Enosburg Falls Village Trustees have asked the CUD to be on Agendas for upcoming meetings.
21 Additionally, The Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union wants to support the District. Dominic
22 Durocher, the Tech Director for the Union is the representative for Berkshire. No word from NMC.

23
24 There was a brief discussion about at-large members including the County Courts, NMC and
25 Sheriff’s Offices.

26
27 **Other Business**
28 C. Cota spoke with Vice Chair of NEK about how their CUD formed. They formed last March. Based
29 on that discussion, what NWCUD is doing now is laying a strong foundation that will set us up for
30 success later.

31
32 He and Everette also asked to have on an upcoming agenda item be an organizational plan for
33 milestones so that we can have a trajectory.

34
35 E. Klofft also asked for ideas for what types of subcommittees the group is interested in.

36
37 **Public Comment**
38 None.

39
40 **Adjourn**
41 *E. McGinley motioned to adjourn. C. Cota seconded. Motion carried.*

42
43 Meeting adjourned at 6:33 p.m.

44
