

1 **Northwest Vermont Communications Union District**
2 **Governing Board Draft Meeting Minutes**
3 **March 9, 2021 6:00 p.m.**
4 **Zoom Virtual Meeting**
5

6 **Attendance:** Ken Millman (Alburgh Rep.), Dave Stanley (Fairfax Rep.), Mary Kay Raymond (Fairfax Alt.),
7 Tara Wright (Georgia Alt.), Emily Klofft (NRPC), Randy Connelly (Highgate Alt.), Stu McGowan (Alburgh
8 Alt.), Dominic DeRosia (Berkshire Rep.), Everett McGinley (Montgomery Rep.), Jake Kane (Sheldon Alt.),
9 Brenda Churchill (Bakersfield Alt.), Charen Fegard (Richford Rep.), Heather Jewett (Bakersfield Rep.) J.R.
10 Cox (NWTV/Alburgh Alt.), Elizabeth Nance (Swanton) and Shaun Coleman (NRPC).

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

13 Vice-Chair S. McGowan called the meeting to order at 6:04 pm. There were no agenda adjustments.
14

15 **Approval of Minutes**

16 *D. Stanley motioned to approve the minutes from the February 23rd meeting. E. McGinley seconded.*
17 *Motion carried. Two abstained.*
18

19 **Treasurer's Report**

20 E. Klofft provided the Treasurer's Report. The balance of the bank account is \$58,185.65. There are
21 invoices totaling \$15,492.76. The balance of the DPS Planning Grant is \$32,538.64. Still waiting for DPS
22 for an extension approval. VCF funding has a balance of \$24,857.52.
23

24 M.K. Raymond provided an updated on legislative activities in preparation of the American Rescue Plan
25 funds which will likely be signed by the President this week. One of the funding priorities is broadband.
26

27 *K. Millman motioned to approve the Treasurer's Report. M.K. Raymond seconded. Motion carried.*
28

29 **USDA Rural Business Development Grant**

30 E. Klofft reported that she received confirmation from the USDA that the proposed grant activities
31 (planning and organizational support) are eligible. Additionally, USDA ruled that there is no conflict with
32 VTel's protected borrower status because all providers will be allowed to compete on an open access
33 network. The application is now moving forward. S. Coleman recruited K. Lavoie who is working with
34 Tim Smith from Franklin Co. Industrial Development in reaching out to businesses and non-profits for
35 letters of support. Members were encouraged to seek letters of support as well.
36

37 The grant is for \$30,000. If the CUD decides to hire a consultant/program manager prior to March 31st,
38 then they can avoid the federal procurement process. M.K Raymond stated the importance of retaining
39 a consultant given the amount of time it will take to follow the federal procurement process. There was
40 consensus to move forward.
41

42 **H360 Legislative Update**

43 E. Klofft provided an overview of H360 that is before the Senate. It calls for creating a Broadband
44 Authority with a Rural Broadband Technical Support Specialist; establishing a Connectivity Initiative
45 (increasing speeds of 25/3 to 100 symmetrical); added changed to VEDA's Broadband Expansion Loan
46 Program; addresses CUD Trade Secrets; creates exemptions for state property tax; and creates
47 educational/training programs for line personnel. The draft bill currently calls for \$30.9M in

1 appropriations, reallocates remaining CRF funds to DPS, and transfers DPS’s Northern Border Grants
2 Funds (\$1M) to supporting CUDs.

3
4 There was a discussion on how the funding will be distributed. M.K. Raymond noted the goal is to serve
5 the state in addressing connectivity in challenging areas. The funding should not be distributed equally
6 among the CUDs given the status of each CUD.

7
8 E. McGinley added that it appears there will be \$100M in broadband support coming from the Federal
9 Rescue bill. This will allow the CUDs to build out the initial portions of their network and then apply for
10 senior debt from VEDA and revenue bonds. It will greatly accelerate the initial startup. S. McGowan
11 agreed.

12
13 E. Klofft noted that the funding may flow from the Broadband Authority and then to the CUDs. That is
14 what other CUDs are advocating are for.

15
16 C. Fegard offered to reach out committee members with questions. Send questions to E. Klofft and she
17 will compile.

18 19 **Feasibility Study Update- NRPC**

20 E. Klofft reported that NRPC is still working with Matt Dunn and Dave Walsh from Matrix. At the last
21 meeting, a topic of discussion was ensuring that the study focuses on an open access model. S. Kio will
22 be reaching out to some engineers he knows who have expertise with open access models to address
23 some specific questions. The next meeting is March 18 at noon.

24 25 **ValleyNet / RISI VCF-Funded Technical Assistance**

26 E. Klofft reported that Vermont Community Foundation has provided funding for technical support to
27 ValleyNet / RISI to support CUDs. Each CUD has approximately 35 hours of free technical assistance
28 through this program. There will be a link where CUDs can submit questions and ValleyNet / RISI will
29 provide a proposal with hours/costs to address the question.

30
31 There was discussion about the Vermont Communications Union District Association (VCUDA) which is
32 made up of CUDs across the state and serves as a coordinating body at the state level. S. Coleman
33 provided a brief overview of NWCUD and VCUDA and the reasons behind why NWCUD hasn’t officially
34 joined. E. McGinley added that there is some legislation that specifically refers to VCUDA so we should
35 reconsider joining. C. Fegard suggested that we should consider joining in order to add ourselves to the
36 greater advocacy efforts of VCUDA. S. Coleman will follow up with the Chair about joining VCUDA.

37 38 **Update on Other Funding Sources- NRPC**

39 The NTI program has \$100M nationally that is being provided by the last stimulus bill. It will not have
40 the USDA protected borrower status (VTEL) affecting it like the USDA has. There is a webinar about the
41 grant program on March 17th.

42 43 **Member Updates**

44 K. Millman reported that he sent an email to VT Electric Coop Executive Director Rebecca Towne asking
45 for a discount on pole connects in the right-of-way. Alburgh would need to pay \$700-\$800K for the
46 right-of-way access to get the connections. Last week, the state announced that tariff credits for pole
47 connects will be available. Tariff credits are \$2k per underserved household. This amounts to

1 approximately \$450K in potential savings for Alburgh. VT Electric has committed \$3M over the next 3
2 years to do this. The program is available on a first come first serve basis. Alburgh will vote on moving
3 forward with broadband in May.
4

5 E. McGinley encouraged everyone to get letters of support for the USDA grant application.
6

7 M.K. Raymond reached out to the Fairfax Town Manager to help generate letters of support for the
8 USDA grant from the community.
9

10 B. Churchill announced she is now on the Selectboard in Bakersfield and is trying to get letters of
11 support from the community for the USDA grant as well.
12

13 There was discussion about Starlink. J. Kane reported that northeast Vermont is part of the area Starlink
14 is targeting. Some Starlink customers have posted speeds of 230/240 mbps. Vermont is part of their
15 beta testing which should conclude by the end of the year. SpaceX is launching Starlink satellites twice a
16 month. SpaceX's next generation launch vehicle "Starship" is almost ready to be put into service. It will
17 have the ability to launch 400 satellites at once.
18

19 **Department of Public Service**

20 No report.
21

22 **Other Business**

23 None.
24

25 **Public Comment**

26 None.
27

28 **Adjourn**

29 *E. McGinley motioned to adjourn. D. Stanley seconded. Motion carried.*
30

31 Meeting adjourned at 7:06 pm.