

1 **Northwest Communications Union District**  
2 **Special Meeting Draft Minutes**  
3 **October 6, 2020 4 p.m.**  
4 **Virtual Special Meeting (Zoom meeting ID 813 2523 7139)**  
5

6 **Attendance:** Chris Cota (Vice-Chair and Fairfax Rep), Emily Klofft (NRPC), Ken Millman (Alburgh Rep),  
7 Northwest Access Television, J.R. Cox (Alburgh Alt.), Sean Kio (Chair and Enosburgh Rep), Everette  
8 McGinley (Montgomery Rep.), Heather Jewett (Bakersfield Rep.) and Stu McGowan (Alburgh Alt.).  
9 Guest: Kim Gates, Franklin Telephone

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

12 Vice-Chair Chris Cota called the Special Meeting to order. The purpose of this meeting is to share  
13 information and learn from the experiences of Franklin Telephone as a local ISP.  
14

15 **Kim Gates, Franklin Telephone**

16 Franklin Telephone was created by Kim's great Grandfather approximately 125 years ago. Franklin  
17 Telephone serves the communities of Franklin, Highgate and Sheldon. Fiber to the home deployment  
18 started in 2013.  
19

20 Regarding fiber to the home is that even if you build it, people may not use it to its full extent. Franklin  
21 Telephone found that there the demand for the higher packages isn't as high as they thought it might  
22 be. Many residents are not willing to pay for the premium service even if the cost is relatively low to  
23 other service levels.  
24

25 Federal reporting is quite extensive for ISPs and includes service type and number of customers.  
26

27 The decision to build out with fiber was customer based. An area in town that was served by copper had  
28 a customer that wasn't having a lot of satisfaction with the service at the premises. Franklin Telephone  
29 decided to replace the copper with fiber. Issue was resolved.  
30

31 A question was asked about prioritizing customers, businesses and areas. Franklin Telephone has a good  
32 understanding of the needs within their area, whether there are businesses or students learning from  
33 home, etc.  
34

35 Kim discussed some the challenges. Seasonal based connection requests are common. In Franklin, there  
36 seasonal residents and only want to pay for service for the months they are in Town. That is a huge  
37 factor for business planning. There are also competing ISPs. This spring, there was uncertainty if out-of-  
38 staters were going to be able to return. This all affects the business model.  
39

40 Everette spoke of take rates. If people are willing to pay more than the base rate, that kind of looks like  
41 a take rate for fiber over copper. Take rates above 50% start to work economically in situations where  
42 fiber is overlaying copper. If that's true that's a pretty encouraging result.  
43

44 Chris clarified that take rates are not how many people are taking a package, but rather how many  
45 customers you are getting if you build fiber in an area. Per Kim, if you build it, they may not take it.  
46

47 There was a discussion about open access networks. NWCUD's preference is to either have an open  
48 source fiber where providers could use the fiber to bring service to customers. The other option is to  
49 bring both fiber and service to the premises. Kim mentioned maintenance issues in rural areas, installing  
50 fiber to premises and customer satisfaction. Chris noted these are issues that the CUD will have  
51 addressed in the feasibility study.  
52

53 Stu asked Kim about any reservations she had regarding the Town of Franklin joining the NWCUD. She  
54 listed several valid points including which towns get prioritized, which areas in those towns, lack of  
55 District capital, and infrastructure maintenance. What's helpful is getting a neighborhood who are all  
56 willing to sign-up and become customers. Chris noted the CUD is trying to develop a survey to help  
57 determine, among other things, what level of service and demands residents are looking for.  
58

59 Chris explained some of the reasons why towns should become members including conducting surveys  
60 to determine where needs are, coordinating grant funding to towns, and determining where the  
61 priorities lie (unserved and underserved). Once the District begins developing a feasibility study and  
62 business plan, then towns who are members and have representation will have input. The  
63 representative can inform and guide the development of the feasibility and business plan for what  
64 makes sense for their town.  
65

66 Sean added that the goal is not to become an ISP and operator nor a competitor against local  
67 companies such as Franklin Telephone.  
68

69 Kim noted concerns that CUDs have the opportunity to comment on any existing ISP build outs. In some  
70 instances, there have been some CUDs that have objected to some of the build outs. Sean replied that  
71 the NWCUD supported Franklin Telephone's build out proposals. The NWCUD opposed some  
72 questionable ISPs who have poor track record on quality of service and level of service.  
73

74 Kim asked how the District defines unserved and underserved. Chris replied that underserved is below  
75 broadband standard of 25/3 and unserved is no service. There is a town by town breakdown that the  
76 state has provided. The data is provided by the FCC from ISPs. Kim noted that there are some  
77 inaccuracies in the way the data is reported. Chris said the NWCUD is aware of the discrepancies. There  
78 was a brief discussion about surveys and the kinds of questions to ask residents.  
79

80 Kim asked about the timeline for implementation. Sean replied that we are looking to expand the wi-fi  
81 hot spot program the state started by providing 1 hotspot per municipality and maybe 2 before the end  
82 of the year. Feasibility likely will take place from now into next year. Looking at some form of  
83 implementation by 2022. Pole survey data would likely be outdated before the NWCUD is ready to do  
84 anything.  
85

86 There was some discussion about survey questions and pole surveys. Kim suggested conducting the  
87 surveys yourself rather than participate in a larger effort. Know your infrastructure and don't rely on a

88 dot on the map. Heather noted the terrain and roadway challenges in Bakersfield along Bakersfield  
89 Mountain Road and Lapland Road.

90

91 Kim noted if you ask a conduit question in the survey, you will likely get an incorrect answer. Ken asked  
92 if Kim was willing to provide some suggestions for survey questions.

93

94 Kim offered to answer any follow up questions via email. She will send any of her questions to Chris as  
95 well.

96

97 Chris and everyone thanked Kim for her time and willingness to share information.

98

99 **Public Comment**

100 No comment.

101

102 **Adjourn**

103 Meeting adjourned at approximately 6:00 p.m.