



**Select Board /Assessors Meeting Summary
March 16, 2022
7 p.m.**

Select Board members Present: Wes Daniel, Tom Johnston and Mitch Garnett

Others Present: Town Clerk/Treasurer Mary Anderson, Mark Ouellette from Axiom Technologies, Broadband Committee members Sara Bullard, Misty Darton and Will Darton, residents Don Grinnell, Rosie Del-Tejo Williamson, Erick Anderson and Lynn Carroll. Via Zoom: Charlotte Henderson, William Orrick, Lynn, Kenneth Mills, Lee, Will, Kathleen, Mary West, Mary J, Brian Morris and an unidentified phone number.

Wes Daniel called the meeting to order at 7 p.m.

Approve Summary of March 9, 2022: Motion to approve summary by Tom Johnston, Mitch Garnett seconded; all in favor, motion carries.

Sign Treasurer's Warrants dated March 17, 2022:

P/R Warrant #22: \$5,401.40

A/P Vendor Warrant #23: \$160,034.50, which includes a payment to the school district.

Motion to approve by Tom Johnston, Mitch Garnett seconded; all in favor, motion carries.

Road Foreman Report: Written by Frank Jones Jr. and read by Wes Daniel

3/6: Called out to plow, Frank called Steven, David and Jimmy to plow.

3/7: Washed off trucks; took off plow and put cold patch in P300 to warm up

3/8: Steven had a doctor's appointment; David and Frank sanded dirt roads for ice and tried to unplug culverts on Sprague, Prescott and Mountain roads.

3/9: Patched mud spots on Old County Road (84 yards), Mountain Road (42 yards) and Lenfest Road (42 yards)

3/10: Picked up shop; all went for drug testing; put plows back on trucks

3/12: Frank called Steven, David and Jimmy to sand for ice, and plow

CEO Report: None

Health Officer Report: None

Town Clerk/Treasurer's Report: Town Clerk/Treasurer Mary Anderson said a magnetic sign was ordered and received that will be used to mark a drop box for absentee ballots. Kit (Lascoutx) posted the warrants, sample ballots, and ordinance changes today.

Other Agenda Items: Select Board members signed the January bank statement.

Tom Johnston made a motion to approve the appointment of Micah Nelson as a Planning Board alternate, Mitch Garnett seconded; all in favor, motion carries.

Mark Ouellette from Axiom Technologies spoke about the recently awarded NTIA grant that, if approved at town meeting, will create a municipally owned broadband network in partnership with Axiom. The federal grant will cover 90 percent of the build costs and because Washington's will be a municipally owned system, Maine's ConnectME Authority will pay the remaining 10 percent match. Washington is one of three communities to receive the grants alongside Axiom, the other two are Somerville and Isle au Haut; other municipalities have to come up with funding for the 10 percent match. Mark said no towns have put in a broadband system without putting up its own money in the past three years that he's aware of.

Mark outlined a rough plan: Once the broadband system is up and running, Axiom will pay back a percentage of the revenues to the town to be used toward insurance coverage and to start a fund for maintenance. Some money is built into the budget for replacement equipment already. The town will own the completed broadband system and, in the future, if Axiom was not meeting its contract, another provider could be contracted with. Mark said he will have a sample contract to Select Board members in the next few weeks, in addition to a 6-month budget (required by NTIA and the state by March 25). He said equipment purchases will likely be front-loaded because of anticipated delays in manufacturing and shipping. Pole licensing is expected to take six to eight months as well.

There is a "serious reporting element" to the grant, Mark said, which will be handled by Axiom. He said he hopes the state will take over some of the reporting so eventually Axiom will submit invoices to the state. He promised a transparent process.

Labor – Axiom will contract with Hawkeye Construction – is included in the grant funding as well, but Mark warned there is always the possibility of cost overruns. He said a contingency amount included in the grant application was deemed ineligible and cut, but said he has some ideas about how to protect the town from cost overruns that can be discussed further down the road. Hawkeye Construction will be brought in to meet Select Board members and answer questions as the project moves forward. It is a Poland, Maine, based company and Mark said Axiom prefers to work with small, local companies. Hawkeye already has done extensive work in Somerville.

Mark said he expects a high "take rate" in Washington because of the limited internet options available. Projections will use a 50 percent take rate and Axiom intends to guarantee its speeds.

Regarding an office building and housing for equipment, Mark said \$270,000 is included in the grant. He expects to need about a 10-by-14-foot building with heating/cooling and an automatic standby generator, funding for all of which is included in the grant. Hawkeye will assess the planned site for the building when a location is found; the most vulnerable point of the system is the length of high-count

fiber before it splits off to other locations, so near the center of town is ideal. Mark strongly suggested the building be on town-owned property to avoid leasing. The back-up generator means that as long as a home has electricity, it will have internet.

Tom asked about insurance coverage and said Maine Municipal Association will insure the central office and equipment when it is complete. Mark confirmed Hawkeye's insurance covers the construction phase and said some of the revenues returned to the town to create a maintenance fund should cover the smaller cost(s) of fixes throughout the year. Axiom will monitor the broadband system 24/7. Mark said he asked Hawkeye about its largest equipment loss to date and was quoted \$50,000.

Sara Bullard asked about options for low-income residents as far as subscription costs. Mark said Axiom has applied to be part of a discount program that provides a \$30/month reduction through an online application process. Axiom has proposed several pricing plans ranging between \$59.99/month (50/Mbps/50Mbps) to \$109.99/month (250Mbps/250Mbps), with one higher plan at \$179.99 for 1G/1G that's rarely chosen as an option. The town can negotiate into its contract free service to municipal buildings, the library and school if desired, or set up an internal network for municipal use. Axiom also offers a business rate, a seasonal rate, and the option for a fixed IP address by request.

Axiom hopes to encourage residents to sign up for service in advance, either with or without a fee that will be returned on the first and/or second billing cycle (the fee will be worked out during contract negotiations but other towns have gone with \$99). That gives the company an idea of how many residents intend to connect when the infrastructure is in place; Mark said it is his experience that a few people change their minds in the meantime. Anyone who misses the initial sign-up period would pay more – around \$1,000 – to connect at a later date.

Mark said the company anticipates hosting informational meetings periodically throughout the process.

The grant calls for work to be completed in a year but Mark cautioned because of the poll licensing process, manufacturing and shipping delays as well as workforce shortages, it may take longer and that Axiom could ask for an extension. He said Hawkeye can install 30 miles of strand per week followed by 30 miles of fiber per week, then will begin "drops" to each participating resident.

Tom asked about a law classifying emergency installations. Mark said Axiom is looking for a community to challenge that law and if Washington is willing, it could – but he did not recommend Washington be the test community at this time because all of the "make-ready" work will be paid for under the grant.

Don Grinnell asked if part of the system can be activated prior to the full installation being finished. Mark said it depends on the design of the system but in most cases, a partially complete system can be activated. Don also asked about the billing and payment process. Mark said bills will be issued by and paid to Axiom, which will then pay the town its percentage. Options for credit cards, online payments and checks will be offered, as well as quarterly, annual or monthly payments.

Tom asked if the talked about “every house, every road, every camp” connections are feasible. Mark said it is, but some places may have more complicated situations. Most connections will use existing poles, or a drop directly to the home.

Ken Mills asked about the projected take rate of 413 homes. Mark said it was an estimate. Ken asked about his specific location in West Washington, close to Somerville, and if he would be eligible for connection to the broadband system; Mark confirmed he would be connected.

Ken asked what he can do to help promote the broadband project; several people responded he should attend, and encourage others to attend, town meeting Saturday, March 26, 10 a.m., at Prescott Memorial School, to vote to accept the grant funding. Mark said he can have information about the grant available at the town meeting.

Tom asked when Select Board members should expect to meet with Mark again. Mark said he will have a sample contract in the next week – a contract that’s already been reviewed by several town attorneys and will be nearly identical to Somerville’s – for Select Board members to review before the next meeting.

Mary officially thanked Mark and Axiom for the hard work in securing the grant on Washington’s behalf. Mark reciprocated his thanks to the town and the Broadband Committee.

Other business: Don Grinnell asked if an addendum to the warrant is needed to show the balance of the rollover accounts, as he could not immediately find it in the town report. The numbers were later located in the auditor’s report in the town report.

Questions/comments: None.

Motion to Adjourn by Mitch Garnett, Wes Daniel seconded; all in favor. Meeting adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Stephanie Grinnell