



Select Board /Assessors Meeting Summary

March 15, 2023

6 p.m.

Select Board members present: Wesley Daniel, Thomas Johnston and Mitchell Garnett

Others Present: Broadband Chair Sara Bullard; Town Clerk Mary Anderson; residents Kathleen and Neil Gross, Bryan Gess, Lynn Carroll and Charlotte Henderson; Axiom Technology's Mark Ouellette and Lisa Leahy; Hawkeye Construction owner Ryan Hawks, and employees Keith Ellis, Michael Jacobs and Peter Desjardins; Maine Connectivity Authority's Kendra Jo Grindle, Kierra Reardon and Jenna Ingraham; Tilson's Elissa Tracey; and via Zoom: Don Grinnell, Lowell Freiman, Mary Ellen Barnes, Will Cassis, Will Darton, Kate Grinnell, Michelle Hannon, Nanne Kennedy, Andrew, Kimberly Brooks, J. Petersdorf and Jim Kitendaugh.

Wes Daniel called the meeting to order at 6 p.m. and introduced Sara Bullard as the moderator for the broadband portion of the meeting. Brief introductions were made of those expected to answer questions.

Sara opened the meeting by noting most towns seem to be in a similar situation to Washington's and that many companies are experiencing worker shortages that are slowing projects down. Kendra Jo said there are two new programs beginning at state community colleges to train fiberoptics workers and the option for a broadband training lab also is being explored. Ryan said his company is working with Kennebec Valley Community College as well to get workers trained. Mark pointed out that Washington has previously committed to having a local person trained to respond who will have about three months of training (versus two years of college training). Kendra said there are apprentice programs but many don't allow for working at the same time; Ryan is considering a job-shadow program as well as apprenticeships.

Sara, from a list of prepared questions, spoke about the lack of communication with Central Maine Power Company (CMP) and Consolidated Communications (CCI). Kierra said Tilson and Axiom offer technical assistance and Maine Connectivity Authority can help with roadblocks – the next step above is Maine Public Utilities Commission. Ryan said often, once money has been paid, the process moves faster and Kierra agreed. As well, there is a rapid response process that informally deals with problems.

Elissa said there is a finite amount of time for grant-funded projects and one extension already has been granted. Sara pointed out the project is supposed to be finished by February 2024 but Mark said because of the slow make-ready process, it may not be possible. If CMP and CCI complete their portion of the make-ready work in a timely manner, Mark said, February 2024 could happen. He said Washington is on the leading edge of tens of thousands of poles that need to be licensed. Tom said fire department grants can be additionally extended and he wondered if the broadband grant could be as well. Kendra Jo said Maine is a broadband leader but anticipates several current projects – including Washington – will probably need another extension. She predicted the worst-case would be a year delay and best-case would be a month. Sara asked if the grant money would be forfeited if an extension is needed and Kendra Jo said it would not. Elissa said the extension would be for time, not additional money. Kendra Jo said part of the time was taken up by the NTIA, which provided the grant and Elissa said even the historical preservation piece took longer – it was expected to be complete in the spring but wasn't done until nearly Thanksgiving.

The next discussion revolved around liability insurance, an unexpected upfront cost for the town. Kierra said there is no quick solution but options are being looked into; Kendra Jo said issues like insurance that are a hardship should be brought to the attention of Connect Maine Authority as its staff continues to discover the true cost and process for broadband projects. Tom asked if anyone has looked into the Maine Tort Claims Act and if it could be used by municipalities for insurance for catastrophic failures; Kierra said in theory the Act would apply; however, contracts with the pole owners require a much higher amount of coverage. She said she will continue to communicate with Maine Municipal Association about it. As well, Kendra Jo and Kierra agreed to look into using ARPA money for broadband insurance – a request also twice previously denied when Mary asked.

Sara asked if the NTIA grant is a special/uncommon one. Kendra Jo said the funding offered by Connect Maine Authority and administrative responsibility assumed by the quasi-state agency makes it uncommon.

Tom asked about a census block in Washington that's been excluded from grant-funded installations and broadband service because Spectrum claims those properties located near the Waldoboro line already have the option for service. Elissa said many states are revisiting that issue and Washington should look at it again as well.

Sara spoke of the planning Aug. 12 festival to kick-off sign-ups (\$60 non-refundable fee when signing up) and asked if connection to just one pole is covered by the fee or if multiple poles would be part of the initial fee. Mark said there are three types of free installations: the closest utility pole to home connection, underground in an approved conduit or laying on the ground with the assumption the cable will be buried in the future (fiber can be direct-buried without conduit as well). Homeowners also can install conduit for fiber installation at their own cost. Installations will be coordinated between Hawkeye and the homeowner. Sara asked how far in advance people should start planning for installation and Mark said immediately because not everyone has the same situation and some don't realize what they do or don't have. Ryan said there are no length restrictions for running fiber, meaning no additional charges for connections further from the road.

Tom asked about replacement of utility poles and who is responsible for paying after broadband is installed. Ryan said the maintenance contract would cover items like pole replacements.

Charlotte asked about conduit requirements and Ryan said 2-inch is preferred and the conduit must follow National Electrical Code. Bryan asked if homeowners would find out at installation if additional work is needed or if it could be earlier. Ryan said a site survey can be requested in advance.

Wes Daniel called the Select Board meeting to order at 7:10 p.m.

Select Board members present: Wesley Daniel, Thomas Johnston and Mitchell Garnett

Others present: Town Clerk Mary Anderson, resident Kate Grinnell via Zoom

Approve Summary of March 8, 2023: Motion to approve summary by Tom Johnston, Mitch Garnett seconded; all in favor, motion carries.

Sign Treasurer's Warrants dated March 16, 2023:

P/R Warrant #21: \$4,958.38 (check this number, may have been read wrong)

A/P Warrant #22: \$46,352.42

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

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

3/6: Started to work on P500 (it has three bad hydraulic hoses and leaks); Frank called for springs for P300

3/7: Worked on P500 leaks; started to work on P300 spring; Frank put up spring from Harry J Smith

3/8: Put springs in P300; replaced cutting edge on plow; P500 had a new leak

3/9: Worked on replacing cutting edge on P600 wing; P300 will need to catalytic converter burned out at a cost of around \$1,000; worked on P200 lights

CEO Report: None

Health Officer Report: None.

Town Clerk/Treasurer's Report: Town Clerk Mary Anderson heard from Mike Mayo and he will not be able to moderate this year's town meeting. She will check with Dave Martucci. Mary asked Select Board members to help set up the voting booths on March 23 for the election, and to help set up for town meeting at Prescott at 6 p.m. on March 24. Town Constable Cynthia Bourgeois will post the warrants, ballots and draft ordinance tomorrow. Mitch distributed town reports to area businesses Tuesday.

The checking account balance is around \$524,000 and the school payment will be made next week.

Courtesy letters about overdue taxes have been bringing people in to pay 2022 taxes.

Broadband update: Tom said at one point Hawkeye had asked about a storage/laydown area. He suggested the town garage might be possible. Wes noted a gate key would be needed to get in. Tom said no need to vote immediately but it's something to think about.

Other Agenda Items: None.

Other business: None.

Questions/comments: None.

Mitch made a motion to adjourn, Tom seconded; meeting adjourned at 7:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Stephanie Grinnell