

Lincolnton Broadband Committee
Minutes
October 6, 2022
Lincolnton Town Office

Members present in the town office: Josh Gerritsen, Cheryl Nevius, Steven Koltai, Jay Philoon, Dave Perkins

Members present remotely: Michael Kosowsky

Members absent: Jordan Barnett-Parker, Arlene Jurewicz Leighton, Steve Hand

The meeting was called to order at 7:05pm by Josh.

There was no public comment.

Motion to approve the minutes of the July 14, 2022 meeting was made by Dave and seconded by Steven. The motion passed unanimously.

Discussion with Susan Corbett about Lincolnton's Digital Equity and Digital Inclusion Plan

Susan explained that this is the kickoff of the digital equity plan. Her job is to help us build our plan. We should meet a few times to discuss what is important to us and our community, for example the needs of students, of the elderly, the need for telehealth. The process begins with a deep dive into demographics -- income, educational attainment, number of households below poverty line -- which we will review at our next meeting. Then we'll look at options for affordable broadband, affordable equipment, and affordable public access.

Susan explained that the National Digital Equity Center (NDEC) provides free training to all Maine residents, including both online zoom programs and in-person programs with an online instructor and a facilitator physically present in the room.

Steven asked about the source of the demographic data. Susan replied they use the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) via a subscription service that gives them formatted data, and they also use a dataset of broadband subscriptions. Jay asked where do they find about data showing computer ownership? Susan replied ACS has it.

Dave asked about the FCC affordable connectivity program (ACP). Susan replied you have to be 200% of the federal poverty line (for a family of 4, 200% of FPL is \$50,000), and you can get a \$30/month subsidy. There is currently no sunset date for the program. Dave asked if ACS data can help us identify who may qualify, and Susan replied it will only estimate how many qualify, not who they are. And ACS now has info about remote work, so that should be considered in the plan.

Josh asked if there are providers who offer service for only \$30/month. Susan replied yes, but none in Maine, and generally not for robust speeds. Some communities raise funds to add another amount, say \$30, to the discount, and set their own criteria for the addition, e.g. over 70 or in school.

Steven asked about the NDEC free programs. Susan replied that NDEC was founded in 2018. They have raised \$5MM and offer over 40 classes: MS office products, web site building, QuickBooks, Google Classroom for teachers, internet safety, cutting the cord, aging well with technology (security, fake news, passwords, ...), download books from Maine State Library, healthcare apps (blood pressure, weight, exercise). Anyone can take as many classes as they wish. NDEC also has referrals for hands-on help, e.g. get an email address. There is a State of Maine grant to provide affordable equipment -- tablets, refurbished laptops, desktops -- where someone can take a class and get a device. They work with lots of organizations and can customize their programming. Their instructors are spread all across the state.

Steven said Axiom worked with us, and our preferred strategy going forward is a public-private partnership with LCI to apply jointly for grants. As MCA publishes their rules for funding we want to stay apprised of developments. Can Susan help us keep track of what we can apply for, given her knowledge of what's going on? Susan replied that she is on the ConnectMaine board, and co-chair of Maine's digital equity subcommittee of ConnectMaine. We'll need to figure a budget and determine homes that need service, so we can move when funding rounds become available. Public/private partnerships are important. While there's the altruism of digital equity, the take-rate matters too, and inclusion can mean higher take rate; that's what the providers want to hear.

Josh asked about next steps. Susan said a meeting to do a deep dive on demographics, two to three weeks from now. We should identify who are our most vulnerable citizens and what are our target populations.

Consensus was to meet 6pm 10/20/22.

Susan said she's a resource for us. She was former Axiom CEO and knows the last mile and other challenges. Most important in moving forward with LCI is to ensure every home can be connected, set minimum upload/download rates, agree on pricing. Also, will they provide public hotspots? Will they help with advertising the \$30 benefit?

Discussion about LCI conversation

Josh said that the entire Select Board met with leadership of LCI today at 3pm for a tour of the facility in Nobleboro, held a long conversation under executive session, and will meet again. At the last Select Board meeting they had decided the entire board should be involved to show the depth of their interest and they discussed the process for raising town funds if necessary. Steven

and Dave asked for clarification: if the select board is negotiating, we no longer have to be involved? Josh said that is correct.

Dave asked about the timing. Josh said weeks. He doesn't think we'll be in next round of funding, rather we'll make the February round.

Josh said going forward our committee's main focus will be the digital equity plan. Of course if we have any recommendations for the LCI negotiating process we can pass them along. We set the guiding principles a year ago: 100/100, every home, affordable. Dave asked who will be writing the grant, and Josh replied LCI. Michael said we have great talent on this committee, and worried that without a task it may be wasted, but we're all excited that this will happen. Steven asked about the terms of the current Select Board members, and Josh pointed out that the terms soonest to expire are next June, so the current board will be in place for a while.

Josh asked what other criteria we want in a deal with LCI. Dave said the surveys we did indicated problems with customer service so that should be considered. We'd also like data, e.g. why have folks haven't subscribed to fiber, that will help us with the digital equity plan. Josh asked what would be a reasonable price for 100/100. Michael said Axiom had suggested \$65 all in, and no phone line requirement. Steven shared "national rates" from cabletv.com. He said that what we pay in Lincolnville is the highest price for the lowest speed of anyone surveyed a few years ago by the LBBC. That survey was done with help from ILSR and the Island Institute. Jay said that the grant will set a minimum speed, and Steven said he does not think it will set a maximum price. Cheryl asked about the LCI's requirement that a customer also have a phone line. Steven said that for national security, every home in the US has to be able to have a phone line, and the federal government pays \$15/month per household when that service is provided.

Discussion about MCA grants

Steven said our committee it appears our committee has no further role in the grant process. Josh said it is still good for us to be informed. There will be four grant opportunities. "Reach Me Line Extension" is probably the only one relevant for us; everything else is middle mile. \$20MM available, 100/100, \$700 per installation match. For affordability: must participate in FCC ACP, must offer 50/10 service for \$30; 100/20 must be equal or lower than the "federal benchmark". Steven asked if 100Mbps upload is available from LCI. Josh said it is but it isn't advertised, and because of these grant criteria, some issues no longer need to be negotiated. But the affordability may only apply to those who have their lines extended under the grant.

Dave left at 8:25.

Action items

Josh will edit the Axiom report based on Select Board feedback

Next meeting: Thursday 10/20, 6pm, town office

Motion to adjourn was made by Jay and seconded by Cheryl. The motion passed unanimously.
The meeting was adjourned at 8:35pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Kosowsky