

Winchester Broadband Committee Minutes 7/5/2022

Members Present In Person: Natalie Quevado, Larry Wood, Leonard Picard; Jennifer Bellan, Nichole Pelkey, Jeannine Hadid, Jennifer Howe

Meeting called to order at 6:58 pm

Guest Speakers:

Mary Ellen Player and Jeff McIver from Consolidated Communications attended to speak to the group.

A \$50 million bond is available and can be executed against. The application for the grant is due 7/22/2022. Winchester is one of the towns Consolidated would put forward on the grant. This is not associated with the infrastructure bill.

CCI is asking for a letter of support from towns that want to be part of the grant. This RFP was unexpected, and one of the stipulations is that it is earmarked for non-profits or municipalities only. This means CCI is not eligible to apply, but they are protesting and attempting to apply. They are asking we share with our reps that we would like a fair shot at the grant – this grant is not attached to any legislation.

The first action CCI needs is a letter of support. Jeff will send a template to Natalie tonight who will share with the group.

The second action is for citizens to notify state reps/senators asking for the grant to be open to for profit entities; to ask for a fair evaluation of applications as they look at how the state can best benefit from this money.

If we cannot apply for this one, there is another round of upcoming grants we can apply for.

The \$50 million will be distributed this year. The second round distribution has not been announced yet. Mary Ellen suspects it will be distributed next year. The state is waiting on mapping. Winchester has already done mapping – the impact to Winchester is timing.

Question from Natalie – if the grant is issued after we put forth the bonding, will we be able to offset the bond? Mary Ellen and Jeff are not sure how that would work.

This is a state based grant – NH State Broadband Bill for unserved and underserved communities. (Connecting NH emergency broadband expansion program). Mary Ellen will email the details to Natalie and will be attached to approved minutes.

CCI is also including letters of reference to highlight why the grant is needed. The towns they are putting forth are Hancock, Winchester, Wentworth, Grafton, Croydon, Eppingham, Madison, Ossipee, Tamworth, Moultonborough, Freedom and a collection of towns in Coos county. The towns span 5 counties – Cheshire, Coos, Sullivan, Grafton and Carroll.

Natalie – have you seen other towns use ARP funds? Mary Ellen – some, but most of the time there is not enough money to complete the build using only those funds.

Natalie – Are there any other takeaways you have seen other towns utilize (what can municipalities apply for)? Mary Ellen – there are USDA grants, but Winchester probably will not qualify for those. They are “frontier” grants.

Larry – read an article about CCI wiring the state of Maine. How did Maine finance this? Mary Ellen – NTIA had a big grant program last year and the funding was awarded in March. CCI applied and put together an \$18 million package.

CCI would like the letter by July 14th to have time to get application materials submitted.

Natalie – In addition to the letter of support from the committee, would it be helpful to have letters from citizens? Mary Ellen – absolutely.

At 7:27 pm Mary Ellen and Jeff left the meeting.

Old Business:

Approval of old Minutes – Jenn Howe made motion to approve 2/5/2022 minutes. Jenn Bellan seconds. Larry, Len, Natalie, Jenn H, Jenn B & Nichole are in favor. Jeannine abstained from voting.

New Business:

Letter of support – we can either use their draft or use our own. Do we want to reach out to residents, reps and senators to see if they will provide letters of support?

Larry will reach out to a state rep in district 7 to see how to get help from other agencies.

Natalie will reach out to Jay Kahn and will put a post on Facebook.

Nichole will reach out to some of the businesses we surveyed earlier in the year.

Jenn H will reach out to Ben Kilanski and the school.

Jeannine will reach out to Jennifer Rhodes.

Letters should be sent to Natalie by July 11th prior to 5pm.

Next meeting will be July 11th at 7pm to draft letter of support to share with selectboard at July 13th meeting.

Natalie made a motion to adjourn. Nichole seconds. All are in favor. Meeting adjourned at 7:39 pm.