



COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

Town of Southwick

High Speed Internet Committee Minutes

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AMENDMENT #1

Monday, October 21, 2019

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE: Chairman, Doug Moglin
Vice Chairman, Pari Hoxha
Clerk, Alisha Sullivan
Secretary, Annalia Hanson
Chris Boyd
Marlene Quinlan
James Johnson

GUESTS: Richard Carnall of WG&E
Attorney Daniel McKellick of Bacon/ and Wilson

MINUTES:

1. The meeting began at 6:30 PM. It was the first official meeting, and elections took place. **To begin, Alisha S. made a motion to elect Doug M. as Chairman. Pari seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed. Doug M. made a motion to elect Pari H. as Vice Chairman, and Alisha seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed. Lastly, Pari H. made a motion to elect Alisha as Clerk. Marlene Q. seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed.**
2. **Doug made a motion to accept the minutes of September 30th, 2019 as amended. Alisha seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed.** The changes made to the minutes included the second topic, as there was some confusion on names of committee members. The committee familiarized themselves with James and Marlene who were appointed to the High Speed Internet Committee.
3. Alisha printed a handout from an article which mentioned that Blandford and other towns are entertaining the idea of bringing fiber optic internet into un-served communities.
4. Because we asked one of the guests to come in to talk about fiber optic, Richard Carnall began speaking about the topic. Richard represents Westfield Gas and Electric, whom of which started up with fiber optic in Westfield. He spoke about how towns similar to Blandford are economically challenged. Examples of this included consolidated schools due to lack of families, which in turn has made property values go down. Plenty of families have moved out of town partially because their lack of access to internet, considering how necessary it is to have in homes today. Richard mentioned having a middle mile network in these hill towns and the state funded it. This network gave internet to

these hill towns, but it was very limited. The internet mainly was only available at libraries, main town buildings, and medical centers if they had them. About 3 years ago, WG&E launched the fiber optic option to Westfield residents. Since then, the state was willing to put up 40% of the funding to service the 20 hill towns that didn't have proper access to internet. The towns paid for the rest, and up to 5 of these towns will have internet in the next 18 months. Having internet truly is crucial in this day, especially to the schoolchildren who need to finish homework, and for working adults.

5. Doug mentioned that in Tolland, there are children at the library trying to finish assignments before school the next day, which affects children in Southwick's school system. He also mentioned that we in Southwick do have a service that provides our town with internet access. We have Comcast/Xfinity, which is actually our only option. Due to this one company being our only option, they are able to escalate costs because the demand will be there regardless.
6. Richard then came up and introduced himself. He and his team wanted to test fiber as a 3rd leg of their services in 2014. They built a test area in Westfield, and wanted to see if it had enough participation from citizens, which in turn did pass. They were able to borrow \$15 billion from the town council in bond money to continue the project, which enabled them to build out to about 70% of Westfield. The services are in front of 12,500-13,000 homes and businesses, and about 4,500 customers. The cost so far has been about \$17 million. The services cost about \$60,000 per mile and about \$800/ home to do the installation, and for labor and equipment. About 35-40% of the money used is to create the path (on telephone poles or underground utilities), not building the network. The cost to survey the poles etc. costs about \$700/mile, but is included in the \$60,000/mile that Richard had mentioned earlier. The numbers that Richard gave us were from hill town experience. The cost of the network would rise in communities that have underground utilities, but customers wouldn't see the increase because there would be a lack of incentive to switch from their previous provider. Customers would have a wireless router in their homes, which is part of the WG&E service, though they will need to be replaced every 7-8 years due to updates etc. Pari asked about the benefits over Comcast in which Richard said, better customer service, less expensive, and no rentals of equipment. The cost for customers is a flat \$69.95 total. Telephones would be an app on their internet which costs \$12.95- \$19.95. Richard said that the company's preference if coming to town would include, charging to have contractors come in to do all the work, and do all the applications for the poles. They would basically do all of the design. The company is ahead of predictions for revenue and customers. WG&E has 'taken' 35% of customers from competitors. WG&E is also an unlimited service, meaning there would be no data cap. WG&E has the capability to repair services in emergency situations. Lastly, the services are provided to municipal, commercial and residential homes.
7. Attorney McKellick of Bacon and Wilson stepped up to answer some questions that the High Speed Internet Committee had. Mr. McKellick gave each member a sheet of paper that contained a lot of great information/answers regarding our questions. He started with talking about the Open Meeting Law and how it works. It is important to post an agenda 48 hours in advance for any meetings, not just the High Speed Internet Committee. Doug mentioned how especially in a small town, it is very important to not talk business with others on the board in public, as some may assume they could be having a meeting. Everything meeting related is meant to be spoken about at the meeting. This is to diminish any violations under the Open Meeting Law. The 1934 Communications act brought in the ability for telecommunications to follow into a municipality. There are 41 light plants in the Commonwealth, in which they have agreements in place for them or others to own/rent utility poles. Every homeowner has some

part of their land that is able to be “taken” for utility poles etc. Municipalities can get into agreements for municipal uses. For example, in hill towns, they have communication connections between municipal buildings. So there are special arrangements under the owners of the pole. In residential areas, it can still be considered municipal, but once this goes into commercial, it will no longer be a municipality. This would turn into an MLP to have the proper agreements, licensing or leasing. So when it comes to bringing a new provider to town, everything could be different if we chose just to change municipal buildings vs. all residential buildings. MLP’s aren’t necessarily permanent, but they are needed to have a connection. To start an MLP, there needs to be an authorization to put everything on the poles. Almost no poles in Southwick are owned by the town, and a town meeting would definitely need to take place prior to installing this MLP.

8. The committee is still entertaining the idea of 5G, and would like to have a representative come in and explain to us further about the benefits of 5G.
9. **A motion was made by Jim to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Chris. All were in favor and the meeting was adjourned.**
10. The next meeting is scheduled for Monday, November 4th, 2019 at 6:30 PM.

Public comments:

There were no public comments at this time.