

Minutes of the Joint Meeting of the Heath Select Board, the Finance Committee, and the MLB
August 30, 2022 at 6:30 pm
18 Jacobs Road

Present: Select Board: Robyn Provost Carlson (Chair), Brian DeVriese, Sue Lively
Finance Committee: Alice Wozniak (Chair), Ned Wolf, Will Emmet
MLP Manager: Sheila Litchfield
MLB: Art Schwenger (Chair), Anne Emmet, David Gordon, Bill Fontes, and Ned Wolf
Visitors: Greg and Barbara Rode, Cathy Tallen

The Select Board meeting had been in session since 6 pm when Art called the MLB meeting to order at 6:34, and Alice called the Finance Committee meeting to order at 6:35.

Art said that the MLB and Sheila would provide an update on broadband in Heath while asking for questions. He introduced Sheila who spoke of the current status. She said that the construction is finished with no more Eng or Const invoices. There remain policies for network extensions or expansions. She said that the state grant is closed following 8 tranches, the final one a retainage. The total amount that the state has given to Heath is \$2,525,138.

The TriWire company that was working under a contract with Westfield Gas and Electric (WG&E) went bankrupt. The company ITG stepped in and completed the work. We are awaiting the final ITG bill. It will be for retention.

Installations are ongoing with 355 active. WG&E is reaching out to potential customers in Mohawk Estates. The MLB continues to meet weekly with WG&E about installs.

Sheila spoke of protecting our assets. We have a hub security and monitoring system. Our security contract involves several towns.

Twice a year Kohler performs preventive maintenance on the generator. We have one quote for preventive maintenance on the HVAC and are seeking another one.

Robyn, who noted that there are 355 active installations, asked how many more installations there will be. Sheila said that there will be a big push for cold drops in September. The total number of installation could be 410.

Hilma asked who owns the materials in the parking lot. Sheila said that Heath owns the fiber but not the POD. We've been advised to protect the fiber by storing it under cover and slightly off the ground. The

POD will leave town when the installations are over. Sheila said that the POD could be moved over to Mohawk Estates, and the fiber could be moved from the parking lot. Hilma and Robyn said that freeing up more parking space in the parking lot would be helpful. Sheila said she would look into it.

Brian asked whether the fiber is usable. Bill said that it is.

Bill said that the network has been built to allow for expansions such as at the cannabis farm on Bellor Road where the owners bear the cost and for expansions such as what could happen at the end of Flagg Hill Road. Bill reported on the switching over in the hub from Ont A to Ont B and the replacement of Ont A. The Ont B has been performing with good download and upload speeds. He asked to be kept informed of any Muni network problem.

Greg Rode asked what would happen if a falling tree brings down the fiber near the Rodes' house? Bill said that we have insurance. Greg asked, "Does Heath have to do the work?" Sheila said that Whip City Fiber would do the work, and Wired West would be billed. The cost would be shared by the towns.

Bill said that the broadband fiber is the lowest hanging cable on the poles. A falling tree that brings down the fiber will have likely first brought down the electric wire. Art said that our Wired West backup crew can do nothing before the electric crew deals with the electric wire. In the case of a big storm insurance pays some. Wired West pays the deductible.

Sheila told how this year we have worked closely with the Heath Highway Department on tree trimming. We have supplied Jeff Johnston with a list of places needing trimming to protect the fiber line.

David explained the need that motivated MLP representatives from Rowe, Heath, Charlemont, Colrain, and Leyden to meet and work with representatives of Westfield Gas and Electric on a redundancy project for which a Community Compact Cabinet grant was awarded by the state in June. Equipment has been ordered. The grant money must be spent by June 23.

David introduced members to a spreadsheet 'MLP Cash Flow Projection 8-23-22' that Sheila had sent to members by email before the meeting. He explained estimates appearing on the spreadsheet while emphasizing that they are estimates.

He mentioned the 'MLP Statement of Priorities' approved by the MLB in February of 2022. This document had also been sent to members before the meeting.

Alice said it appeared that priorities 1 and 2 had been applied in filling out the Cash Flow Projection. David confirmed that was correct.

Members asked about the contract between Wired West and Whip City Fiber. David said that contract has expired and that Jim Drawe, Director of Wired West, has been in negotiations with Whip City. The process of switching from Whip City to another ISP provider would be a serious matter. Whip City

customer service has been good. The MLB has been attentive in weekly meetings to any short comings in service and has found Whip City responsive to any difficulties customers encounter.

Alice asked in relation to the redundancy project how backhaul would work if the five towns had different ISP providers. David said that they required in the design that redundancy be ISP independent.

Alice confirmed with David that there are 355 active drops and 410 applications, with 410 representing 70% of possible drops.

Art said that it is expected there will be revenue in FY 23 to be transferred from the MLP to the Town. Hilma and Alice said that a transfer would be possible at any time.

Members of the Select Board expressed how impressed and appreciative they were of David's clear presentation of a very complicated project of great importance to the Town. Sheila and MLB members said how valuable teamwork has been.

Robyn said that while the project was in the construction phase it seemed appropriate that the MLP Manager's salary be paid for by the Town. Once the construction is over shouldn't the MLP Manager be paid by the MLP? Sheila said that the MLB is not setup to hire an employee and deal with benefits. We are hoping to send money to help pay the MLP Manager's salary. We may need input from Town Counsel. The MLP Manager's job description is likely to change.

Art took the opportunity to remind the Select Board that the MLB will need space for record storage.

The MLB and the Finance Committee meetings adjourned at 8:02.

Respectfully submitted,

Ned Wolf