

# CONNECTMAINE

## June Meeting Notes

23 June 2021

Temporary Recording: [https://networkmaine.zoom.us/rec/share/Xp\\_FUmu0INel6z7urGXBZLVIuz-YkCLEcUmaMV30x4AbxcrQo-O6lkfOqsdwYzha.bD8FCSBb62Z\\_Nx0c](https://networkmaine.zoom.us/rec/share/Xp_FUmu0INel6z7urGXBZLVIuz-YkCLEcUmaMV30x4AbxcrQo-O6lkfOqsdwYzha.bD8FCSBb62Z_Nx0c)

## Authority Members

Nick Battista, Chair  
Jasmine Bishop  
Fred Brittain  
Susan Corbett  
Heather Johnson  
Jeff Letourneau  
Liz Wyman

## Introductions of Members and Staff

Nick Battista, Liz Wyman, Fred Brittain, Susan Corbett, Jeff Letourneau, Peggy Schaffer and Stephenie MacLagan, Heather Johnson

## Meeting Kickoff

Support letters for Town of Denmark application to planning grants program—Nick

- Stacy's Burner Service

Use internet to order business supplies and do bookkeeping and payroll, but can't when children have to use internet for school.

## Notes of Last Meeting

*Approval* of the May minutes: Liz motioned, Susan 2<sup>nd</sup>, 5:0

## Review of Operations

Executive Director's Report—Peggy

- Federal funds

State or subdivision has to be the lead applicant to the NTIA Broadband Infrastructure Program grants. RFI posted to gather information from providers and communities. Because this is a federal program and funds, ConnectMaine rule doesn't restrict proposed project, and ConnectMaine anticipates submitting an application that is as competitive as possible. Getting support from Tilson and VETRO, costs of which would be covered by the grant if awarded.

There's a separate program for tribal connectivity, which Four Directions will be the lead applicant, and ConnectMaine will be supportive in their application process.

Board Discussion

- Liz: What's the timeline?

Peggy: Responses due after the holiday and application is due mid August.

Stephenie: Timelines are spelled out in the RFI posted on the website.

- Fred: What about overhead costs to ConnectMaine as well as to the communities?

Peggy: The staff proposed budget would include match, so communities have more flexibility to cover their overhead. ConnectMaine's cost in applying would be covered if awarded and additional costs count as match.

# CONNECTMAINE

## Discussion on Maine Connectivity Authority—Peggy

- Debrief state legislation & work session

The Connectivity Act was passed by the legislature and was awaiting the Governor's signature.

- Update on implementation timeline

Governor is already looking at lists of people for this appointable board. The goal would be to have the appointment day piggy back the legislature's 2<sup>nd</sup> veto day.

Tomorrow, there's an advisory meeting about the structure and strategy for the new entity. ConnectMaine is covering the costs of this stakeholder engagement process.

## Financials and Budgeting—Staff & Nick

- Review of FY22 budget proposal

A few members worked with staff on a few iterations. The NTIA grant is on such a tight timeframe, with town meetings cycle limiting, so ConnectMaine is proposing to cover the 10% matching funds for community-owned infrastructure project proposals, up to \$750,000, which is the same thing we did for ReConnect grants.

The memo covers expanded or new initiatives, including the community broadband planning grants program, to include new support services. Overall strategy is bringing services forth without additional bureaucracy.

The memo also covers how restricted revenue is separately budgeted from administrative and ConnectME Fund, and the bond is a snapshot.

The budget proposes keeping separate accounts, one with the state for those expenses and one separately managed. Also an opportunity to think about the most appropriate home for the NECEC, which is also a snapshot.

### No Board Discussion

*Approval of* the staff recommended budget proposal, understanding that the ConnectMaine Authority may revisit the budget, which is reported to the legislature and triennial plan: Liz motioned, Heather 2<sup>nd</sup>, 6:0

## Decisions on Broadband

### Extension Requests—Peggy

- Review and decide on extension requests for planning and infrastructure projects

ConnectMaine rule and contracts are written for a year, so it isn't uncommon to have to do extensions. Hudson project is progressing and will wrap up within first two quarters. The pandemic affected the Sanford project.

### No Board Discussion

*Approval of* granting the extension request for the Hudson Premium Choice Round 15 infrastructure project: Susan motioned, Fred 2<sup>nd</sup>, 6:0

*Approval of* granting the extension request for the Sanford Broadband Feasibility Study: Susan motioned, Fred 2<sup>nd</sup>, 6:0

# CONNECTMAINE

## Designation of Unserved Areas—Nick

- Debrief emergency June meeting

Memo describes this complicated process and timing. The 30-day comment periods were an opportunity for community members and providers.

- Discuss relationship between mapping unserved areas and data filing

The Broadband Availability Map was updated, unserved areas are colored yellow, orange and red. ConnectMaine is reaching out providers for required data filing, which is also by rule, but will be happening at the same time as the process to review areas.

- Review the new Process for Identifying Unserved Areas recommended by staff

This is similar to what we did in January ahead of the last infrastructure grants round. ConnectMaine is trying to give potential applicants a heads up. Still aiming to award the last of the bond funds in November. Data collection and mapping will be occurring and affecting potential applications for infrastructure grants, so keep an eye on these updates.

## Board Discussion

- Jeff: Can anyone submit a data to improve maps?

Peggy: Yes. Communities should be aware that the ConnectMaine maps are different than those used by FCC or USDA for their grants programs.

Stephanie: Yes, but hearsay won't be sufficient, so have to have the capability to submit data we can use. Also, get on this now, part of transparent communication with providers.

- Heather: How often can we accept data or update maps?

Peggy: At least annually, and we're trying to do it multiple times a year.

Nick: We haven't fully explored the opportunities with VETRO and community plans, for improving ConnectMaine maps, so this will be an on-going process, one that's affecting our competitiveness to apply for the NTIA grant.

- Liz: Do providers have to provide grant tracking reports for each project?

Stephanie: The rule is specific that it is per project, because the requirement is annual for five years, and some providers have multiple projects on different timelines.

*Approval of the designation of geographic areas as unserved, which were identified based on the service speeds of 50/10mpbs being unavailable in those areas: Fred motioned, Susan 2<sup>nd</sup>, 6:0*

*Action: Direct staff to post the new Process for Identifying Unserved Areas and to request data filing from communications service providers and grant tracking reports from recipients of grants in the last five years.*

# CONNECTMAINE

Community Broadband Planning Grants—Peggy & Committee (Nick, Jeff & Susan)

- Review committee recommendations

Continuing to learn round to round, and we saw improvements this round. Recommended awards include Piscataquis County, Greater East Grand Region, and the Towns of Denmark, Ellsworth, Searsmont, Sebago, and Waldo.

- Discuss future improvements

Looking at the applications over the last few years, the Phase I applicants are struggling with this application process, because they're just getting going. These are low-cost projects, for which matching funds are onerous to get ahead of the application windows. Proposing to make Phase I application process a rolling basis or at least more frequent. Staff will also be hosting at least one workshop to ensure peer-learning.

- Annual budget includes carryover of unspent funds and more for an initiative of providing planning services.

The other lesson learned is the value of community champions and facilitation support outside of the work of hired consultants, e.g., Island Institute, Maine West, etc. Figuring out a few strategies, including the budget initiative for planning services; \$60,000 of this year's budget wasn't spent, so carrying that over as part of the \$200,000 budget line next year.

Board Discussion

- Nick: Staff will reach out to unsuccessful applicants on how to still move forward. Echoed by Liz: Feedback to unsuccessful application is important, shown by awarding them in later rounds.

*Vote on* awarding community broadband planning grants as recommended by the review team, which are identified in the planning grants memo: Liz motioned, Fred 2<sup>nd</sup>, 5:0.

## Other Business

Timing for in-person meeting—Nick

- Virtual meetings have broadened participation

Would an in-person meeting be helpful?

- ConnectMaine has authority to meet remotely

While most state boards got authority from emergency order, but ConnectMaine's statute allows us to meet remotely.

Board Discussion

- Susan: Can we do an in-person annual meeting that piggybacks on another event, while maintaining remote meetings for broader engagement?

Liz: Agree; when we are in-person, we should maintain the remote option. Echoed by Fred.

Nick: We talked pre-pandemic about doing field trips to see a successful project.

# CONNECTMAINE

## Public Comments

### Broadband Availability Map

- Brian Lippold, Casco Bay Advisors: Can a schedule of updates be published for those designing and preparing applications?

Nick: That's noted.

- Melinda Kinney, Charter Communications: Proposed, upcoming projects will be listed and shared with ConnectMaine.

Nick: Thank you.

### Community Broadband Planning

- Stephenie: Highlighting a chat comment that communities on Mount Desert Island recognize value of planning services provided by Island Institute and partners.

### NTIA grant

- Sarah Davis, Consolidated Communications: Do we know if FCC data is corrected that would be used by NTIA, or will they be using their own mapping?

Peggy: What we're hearing from NTIA is that they'll be using their maps, which include the FCC data.

- Ben Sanbord, Telecommunications Association of Maine: Can the RFI deadline be extended to include the 6<sup>th</sup>?

Stephenie: Yes, you can expect that change when we post answers to questions received.

*Approval* of adjournment: Susan motioned, Liz 2<sup>nd</sup>, unopposed

# CONNECTMAINE

## May Meeting Minutes

26 May 2021

Temporary Recording: <https://networkmaine.zoom.us/rec/share/m8dhVi8jE1xkX12spkPHdBdSf6DzlBQXqFDL-p8fk2m1GacOKZA9oxbAQvXrbZKV.jgdzmDL.Pb2USQzIN>

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## Meeting Kickoff

Potential rearrangement of agenda for member attendance—Nick

- May need to jump to voting on broadband infrastructure grants before 11am

Recent ConnectMaine successes—Nick

- Magnitude of funds increased over the last year

Remembering back to when ConnectMaine had to push out over \$6 million to connect kids, it was our introduction to Tilson Technology as a consultant to support grants programs.

- Public engagement has greatly increased with new structure and processes

Consultants have been very helpful in scaling our programs. Providing resources and networks for communities to expand broadband has increased.

- Leadership in the national space

The lack of broadband is a multifaceted challenge and much more work ahead.

## Notes of Last Meeting

*Approval* of the April minutes: Fred motioned, Susan 2<sup>nd</sup>, 7:0

## Review of Operations

Executive Director's Report—Peggy

- Infrastructure grants & operations

New structures and processes have greatly improved our programming, and being ready for scaling up the grants program.

- Federal funds

Some more information has been released, but there's more to come.

# CONNECTMAINE

## Board Discussion

- Liz: Regarding the Treasury's interim rules, are there two streams of funds to the counties and another for localities; have we thought about coordinating these?

Peggy: Correct, and one of the places of uncertainty is that we don't know that the state has any authority to restrict the use of the funds streaming to municipalities. Another place is the reference to 25/3mbps for eligibility of funds, which greatly affects cities across the country. We are all trying to make sure everyone knows about the opportunities of these funds and potential stacking.

Heather: This kind of coordination also needs to happen outside of broadband, and Peggy's been helping figure out coordination there, too.

Nick: NTIA deadlines sometime this summer, we should be starting those conversations and what's the roles of ConnectMaine and others.

## Updates on Governance and Maine Connectivity Authority—Nick & Heather

- Debrief decisions and new timeline

Starboard Leadership was hired to help and provided a report of recommendations. Based on that and the uncertainty from legislative bills, we decided to pause this work, but we can pick this up with Starboard as needed after the legislative session. Similar strategic planning efforts are paused, until we can think about the role of ConnectMaine and the new Authority.

- Debrief state legislation & work session

The bill language establishing the Maine Connectivity Authority is being finalized, even with a meeting with the EUT Committee today, which mostly relates to legal elements. Work session has been rescheduled.

- Update on decision to contract for support services

Preparing processes for collective thinking on how to structure the Maine Connectivity Authority and ConnectMaine, especially since the work session is pushed out. Setting aside the statute, we looked at a couple of models for operationalizing the new authority. An advisory committee has been formed to identify key questions and decision points. Hiring Consensus Building Institute after being so helpful in public engagement last year and in setting up other state structures. Additional certainty around the federal funds will become available in June. Goal is to have key questions identified by July.

# CONNECTMAINE

## Financials and Budgeting—Nick & Staff

- Context

Time to look over financials; it's tough to follow the flow of funds, so trying to take the next month to think about how we're presenting financials. There will also be some cash carried forward into the new fiscal year, so now is the time to be thinking about how we use assessment funds versus bond funds versus federal funds as clarity increases.

- Review memo of current financials

Feel free to reach out to staff with questions or ideas around cashflow, initiatives over the next year, as certainty about structures and federal revenue increases.

- Drafting FY22 budget for approval at a future meeting

Even in the midst of uncertainty, we still should be thinking strategically about the use of ConnectME Fund from assessments. Ideas on how to simplify, clarify or visualize the various revenue streams and spending are welcomed.

- FY21 audit update

Bringing on board auditors, and figuring out if some of the coronavirus relief funds can pay for that piece of the audit. It's ongoing work. It's been a complicated year financially, but hopefully won't be as complicated next year.

## Decisions on Broadband

### Designation of Broadband Service—Nick

- Debrief public forum & public comments received so far

Comment period continues this week. Industry comments coming in the last few days have been captured and will be shared with board members end of week. Those still submitting comments should tailor them to address the categories that ConnectMaine can consider. The meeting binder will contain all public comments submitted.

- Discuss timeline and actions

The timeline proposed was to identify unserved areas by the July meeting, but to dig into the comments on the unserved areas we'd have to hold off the vote on this until the June meeting or we'd have to hold a special meeting earlier in June that will still give us time needed to fully consider comments received.



# CONNECTMAINE

## Board Discussion

- Liz: Which providers have filed comments? Generally really pleased with the amount of comments coming in, which are really helpful given the difficult situation the rule puts us in.

Stephenie: In addition to TAM, Redzone, another wireless company, Charter & Comcast, LCI and Axiom Technologies all filed comments.

Nick: There really were some in-depth comments from different perspectives.

- Jeff: If we were to adjust the designations, waiting until the June meeting to vote on designations trigger another 30-day comment period, and going into July is dragging this out too long. Can we see all the comments, and in a couple weeks hold a special meeting to vote to keep up pace?

Fred: I think we can and should do that. Echoed by Liz.

Heather: We might also have more information from the federal government by then.

*Action:* Plan on a one-hour emergency meeting being scheduled in about two weeks.

## Broadband Infrastructure Grants—Committee (Nick, Jeff & Fred)

- Debrief the review process

Applications were reviewed with support from staff and Tilson, which was appreciated by the committee. This improved process led to high confidence in the recommendations, and it'll be easily scaled up as available funds and number of applications increase—the limiting factor will be on the applicant side moving forward. Working with the contractors has been a great learning process, and a lot of effort was put into applicant outreach. We'll be thinking about how to improve the application to hopefully get the information needed upfront. The previous process used wouldn't have scaled up to the level of even this round.

- Review committee recommendations

These are captured in the meeting binder.

## Board Discussion

- Liz: Did the committee find that the two tracks was a successful change?

Nick: I found it helpful, and I look forward to hearing Tilson's recommendations; part of their contract is to provide feedback on the process for future improvements.

- Jasmine: Would the applicants unsuccessful this round be given preference next round?

Nick: There are a number of applications that we've seen before, but we didn't have the funds to award this round, but we'll know more about other opportunities in June and July.

Peggy: Once again, the amount of match had a significant impact on the score.

*Approval of awarding broadband infrastructure grants as recommended by the grants committee, which are identified in the grants committee memo:* Heather motioned, Liz 2<sup>nd</sup>, 6:0, Susan Corbett abstained.

*Action:* Staff to provide feedback on less competitive applications toward future applications for state or federal funds.

# CONNECTMAINE

## No Other Business

### Public Comments

Comments on the designation of broadband service should be emailed. There was a public meeting on that earlier this month.

- Sarah Davis: Appreciation for the effort of staff during the broadband infrastructure grants process. On NTIA federal funds, will ConnectMaine be able to reserve matching funds?

Peggy: There's still a lot of conflicting information, and we're unable to answer questions like that until we get more certainty on how NTIA will funnel those funds. When we get more information in the next week or two, we'll share that.

Nick: We have to work the process to get there, and having Tilson and VETRO on board will also help us.

- Brian Lippold: Will be able to see the scoring criteria? It'd be helpful see the scores broken down by categories.

Peggy: The scoring criteria were in the application.

Nick: There are multiple components to this, including the outreach to applicants about how to be more competitive, work with Tilson, and capturing and incorporating what was learned from this round.

*Approval* of adjournment: Jasmine motioned, Heather 2<sup>nd</sup>, unopposed.

# CONNECTMAINE

## Executive Director's Report

23 June 2021

Peggy Schaffer, Executive Director

## Authority Members

Nick Battista, Chair  
Jasmine Bishop  
Fred Brittain  
Susan Corbett  
Heather Johnson  
Jeff Letourneau  
Liz Wyman

### Active grant awards

Staff sought and got an extension request for one of the Connect Kids project.

Past infrastructure projects are being closed or extended under an agenda item today. The Argyle project is complete and under budget. At least one extension is needed because the final closeout will happen past the July 1 contract date.

Staff sought extension requests from two past community broadband planning projects. Staff continues to work with the planning grant awardees, along with our other partners. These groups are working diligently, but additional support is needed to keep them on track. There are successful national models for doing this, and several of our partners are actively engaged in this work. As with all else, capacity is an issue. There is a discussion item in relation to the budget on this strategy to work with other community-based organizations to embed technical support for community planning as part of our budget for the next year.

### Local and regional planning support

The review team met to make recommendations on awards for the current round of community broadband planning projects. There was a good statewide diversity. Future improvements is an agenda item today: As with every round, we learn from each round and continue to work to improve the process. The next round will likely include a very simple application on a rolling or more frequent basis, for Phase I activities. Combined with the support mentioned above should help more of these efforts to move forward faster.

### Staff and program management

ConnectMaine presented to the Maine Philanthropy Association with the Maine Community Foundation, Island Institute, Maine Broadband Coalition, Northern Forest Center and the National Digital Equity Center on creating partnerships to expand broadband accessibility, as a follow up session to a presentation at their annual conference.

ConnectMaine contractor VETRO is progressing toward the launch of a new FiberMap instance for staff and development of the Broadband Intelligence Platform. NTIA gave them access to the NBAM (National Broadband Availability Map) on our behalf. Though NBAM datasets aren't exportable, having VETRO work with the NTIA team on mapping brings great benefit to Maine and to the NBAM. Staff will start our training on using VETRO the last week in June.

# CONNECTMAINE

We continue to meet weekly with the Tilson & VETRO as we roll out the infrastructure grants and prepare for the next round.

The Salesforce platform is an ongoing work in progress, but ConnectMaine will likely be the first part of DECD to get a grants management process stood up. We will also be using the platform for contact management. This system will make it easier for us and grantees.

## **State legislative activities**

The Maine Connectivity Authority passed, and the Governor is moving quickly to pull together possible nominees for the confirmable board. The Commissioner has convened a group to help define options, and possible work and process, for the entity to consider.

The legislature passed LD 1432, which makes some needed improvements to the municipal gigabyte fund. There is still no funding for the program, but changing the match and grant requirements makes it easier for towns and ConnectMaine to work together if money ever flows into that fund. We did fund three community-owned projects in the last grants round, so municipally led and owned solutions are being funded through our traditional program.

Rep. Talbot-Ross's bill to provide \$15 million to ConnectMaine for an extensive outreach and program design effort to serve traditionally underserved populations is on the appropriations table for possible funding. We have worked with the sponsor to include a headcount for that work. We simply cannot do it without a dedicated person.

Additional assessments are still up in the air as of last week. Part of the Governor's original budget called for including cellphones in the 10-cent assessment per line surcharge. This originally came from a reduction in the e-911 assessment from 45 cents per line to 35 cents per line. When it was drafted in 2019, it mistakenly only covered "communications service providers" or landline phones. We've seen declining assessments over the past year of about \$25-\$35,000 per quarter, because the assessment is based on a shrinking revenue stream.

## **Federal funding update**

NTIA issued a Notice of Funding Opportunity for a national \$288 million infrastructure grant program. The lead applicant must be a state or a political subdivision of a state. Grants requested may range from \$5 million to \$30 million, and the priority for awards is based on number of locations passed, rurality, cost and service built, in that order. ConnectMaine has engaged Tilson Technology and VETRO to help us develop a statewide application. Staff and the grants committee issued an RFI last week, expecting interest from across the state to be part of a \$20-\$30 million state application. ConnectMaine will be the lead grantee and determine which proposed areas will be included in the application based on the federal priorities. Those proposing the projects included in the applicant would be sub-grantees.

# CONNECTMAINE

We are working with the Maine Broadband Coalition to bring together a wide variety of regional partners on Friday to discuss how regional partnerships can use the American Rescue Plan funds to build out broadband to meet communities needs around the pandemic. MBC met with the County Commissioners about using county funds for this purpose and continues those dialogs. Communities are also meeting with their county officials to begin discussions around using ARP funds for broadband projects. The Interim Final Rules do call for funds only being used in areas that lack “reliable 25/3” service.

## **Federal partnership activities**

The National Digital Equity Alliance will be coming out with a searchable map soon on states’ digital inclusion efforts. Maine does not do well on having a plan in place to serve traditionally unserved populations including immigrants, communities of color, tribes, low income, homeless, formerly incarcerated and others. This is the intent of Rep. Talbot-Ross’s bill, that would require additional staff and funds.

I represented at a forum on broadband hosted by the Pew Charitable Trust and the Richmond Federal bank with the director of the VA and TN broadband offices. Staff continues to meet with the Pew Trust and other state broadband leaders on new strategies and ideas on expanding services. Pew Trust is opening a program to support broadband offices and legislators on policy development and implementation. We have signed up and sent in the names of several legislators who might be interested in the program. I also presented at a forum for the Community Broadband Association in Iowa with the Director of Technology from Iowa and the Colorado Broadband office director.

Danny Sullivan, Downeast Broadband Utility, and I presented at a Congressional Hearing held by the Committee on Small Business Subcommittee on Underserved, Agricultural, and Rural Development Hybrid Hearing where Representative Golden is the Chair. Also presenting were Matt Dunne from Center for Rural Innovation and a corn farmer from southwestern MN. The hearing went well, and the witnesses all (uncoordinated) presented a united front on defining the problem and offering solutions from different angles. The webcast link to the two hour meeting is: <https://youtu.be/YertdWavZdk>.

# CONNECTMAINE

## Financials

23 June 2021

FY21 Audit & FY22 Budget

## Authority Members

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## Background

The ConnectMaine Authority is required to conduct a single audit for its fiscal year 2021 ending in June. Staff is engaging the same auditing firm used in the last audit, and ConnectMaine has received approval to cover the Connect Kids Now! grants audit portion with coronavirus relief funds remaining from those awarded grants. The audit has to be approved by the board and submitted by mid-October, unless a waiver is approved, so staff is aiming to have financial statements ready for approval at the September meeting. Auditing activities will pick up after the holiday weekend.

The ConnectMaine Authority is required to include a budget in both its annual report and triennial plan. Staff recognizes that it's tough to follow the flow of funds and is trying to figure out how best to present ConnectMaine financials. Feedback on the enclosed budgets is welcomed, regarding both the presentation and the possible initiatives. For discussion by the ConnectMaine Authority, staff presents this memo and enclosed budgets. ConnectMaine may approve this annual budget today or at a future meeting.

## Administrative Budget

The assessment and surcharge collected to generate revenue for ConnectMaine are managed by a business management company. A state account also exists from which expenses are managed by staff of ConnectMaine and the Department of Administration and Financial Services, e.g., salaries and state fees. Along with a Northern Border Regional Commission grant, administrative expenses are well covered for FY22. Specifically, NBRC covers the Technical Services and Broadband Intelligence expense lines, with a contingency of \$110,000 remaining.

Staff recommends maintaining the two separate accounts at least for another fiscal year. The state account provides convenience for expenditures such as staff salaries and collaborating on projects with the Department of Economic and Community Development. The outside-managed account provides flexibility and efficiency for deploying grants and accomplishing other initiatives. Outside of restricted revenue, ConnectMaine may consider purposes for the balance of about \$275,000, in addition to the possible initiatives.

## Coronavirus Relief Funds

The ConnectMaine Authority received approval to use remaining CRF to cover the pro rata share of the audit. Most of the nearly million dollars left will be expended at the end of this fiscal year, with the remainder being spent through the end of the calendar year.

# CONNECTMAINE

## **New England Clean Energy Corridor**

The proposed NECEC Broadband Fund would be \$10 million over five years. The actual amount released for FY21 and projected for FY22 are included, and possible expenses are listed. A plan for the broadband fund must be approved by parties to the NECEC memorandum of understanding, and the current memo applies to the first million dollars; the parties will need to make future agreements as additional funds are released. The plan for the first \$1 million addressed possible expenses and prioritized infrastructure grants. Once agreements with eligible recipients are reached, ConnectMaine can award about \$1 million.

## **State Bonds**

A \$15 million bond was passed in July 2020, but the state issues the bonds in allotments; the current allocation of \$2 million will cover initial disbursements of broadband infrastructure grants that were awarded in May. Future bond issuances will cover the remaining disbursements of those grants. While this bond was deemed tax-exempt, staff is proposing a contingency of \$10,000 for possible bond fees. ConnectMaine anticipates awarding the remainder of the \$15 million in the next round of infrastructure grants later this year.

## **National Telecommunications & Information Administration**

ConnectMaine has issued a request for information of internet service providers and communities interested in a partnership to apply to the NTIA Broadband Infrastructure Program funded by the Consolidated Appropriations Act. For community-owned infrastructure, staff recommends matching up to 10% of the project cost, similar to other recent initiatives. The revenue, if awarded, is yet unknown, but the possible initiatives in the Administrative Budget consider this opportunity and would count as in-kind match to the grant. Specifically, staff recommends the following:

- Projected \$50,000 for support services to apply, covered by the grant if awarded.
- Initiative of \$51,000 for support services for tracking grants, by extending the project manager position beyond quarter one.
- Initiative of \$750,000 for grant matches to cover up to 10% of community-owned projects, similar to previous matches on USDA ReConnect grants.
- Initiative of \$200,000 for support services for auditing grants, based on the cost associated with the \$15 million bond.

## **Other Initiatives**

In addition to projected expenses, new or increased initiatives could include the following:

- Operational services include \$20,000 for conference fees, travel, etc., e.g., State Broadband Leaders Network in October in Colorado, and for sponsorship of conferences, e.g., Maine's broadband conference.
- Support services include \$10,000 for consultants, e.g., governance work, and \$40,000 for partnerships that support communities, e.g., infrastructure cost-estimation.
- Planning services include \$200,000 for the full cost of contracting support of at least 3 people to work with communities, of which \$60,000 will carry over from FY21.
- Digital inclusion includes \$100,000 for devices and programs, increasing from the \$70,000 budgeted this fiscal year.
- Miscellaneous includes \$50,000 for new or different expenses that come up, e.g., contracting for services outside of the FY21 budget.

**ConnectMaine Authority Financials**  
**FY22 DRAFT Administrative Budget**

Includes ConnectME Fund and State Account

Rev. 06.14.21

BUDGET	DETAIL	FY20	FY21	ACTUAL	PROJECTED	INITIATIVES	PROPOSED
REVENUE	Carryforward	\$0.00	\$1,451,280.05	\$1,469,620.69	\$886,455.65	\$0.00	\$886,455.65
Fund	Assessment Fees, interest & NBRC	\$2,975,000.00	\$1,800,000.00	\$1,630,122.61	\$3,050,000.00	\$0.00	\$3,050,000.00
State	Refunds, excluding Assessment Withdrawls			\$525.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>		\$2,975,000.00	\$3,251,280.05	\$3,100,268.30	\$3,936,455.65	\$0.00	\$3,936,455.65
<b>EXPENSES</b>							
Financial	DAFS, Solix, audit, bank charges	\$35,951.00	\$28,296.00	\$33,696.00	\$81,600.00	\$0.00	\$81,600.00
Website	InforME, OIT & Sewall	\$81,234.68	\$34,992.00	\$36,162.42	\$79,275.00	\$0.00	\$79,275.00
Administration	Salaries, etc.	\$258,700.17	\$232,910.22	\$214,583.58	\$263,563.00	\$0.00	\$263,563.00
Cellphones		\$830.24	\$1,124.74	\$983.22	\$1,080.00	\$0.00	\$1,080.00
Travel	Central Fleet	\$7,278.85		\$630.02	\$3,000.00	\$0.00	\$3,000.00
Operational Services	subscriptions, conferences	\$3,536.33	\$15,000.00	\$2,700.00	\$1,300.00	\$20,000.00	\$21,300.00
Support Services	excluding technical and intelligence		\$133,030.00	\$48,874.25	\$75,500.00	\$301,000.00	\$376,500.00
Technical Services	grants verification & validation		\$86,970.00	\$22,225.00	\$277,775.00	\$0.00	\$277,775.00
Broadband Intelligence	data collection, analysis & mapping			\$0.00	\$940,000.00	\$0.00	\$940,000.00
Planning Grants			\$285,410.00	\$64,375.00	\$46,125.00	\$200,000.00	\$246,125.00
Planning Services				\$0.00	\$0.00	\$200,000.00	\$200,000.00
Digital Inclusion			\$70,000.00	\$10,000.00	\$0.00	\$100,000.00	\$100,000.00
Grant Matches		\$50,000.00	\$1,000,000.00	\$75,000.00	\$0.00	\$750,000.00	\$750,000.00
Infrastructure Fund	separate from restricted grants	\$932,128.68	\$762,790.85	\$420,937.50	\$125,312.50	\$100,000.00	\$225,312.50
Miscellaneous	covers likely deviations		\$20,000.00	\$1,452.34	\$50,000.00	\$0.00	\$50,000.00
<b>TOTAL</b>		\$1,369,659.95	\$2,670,523.81	\$931,619.33	\$1,944,530.50	\$1,671,000.00	\$3,615,530.50
<b>BALANCE</b>		\$1,605,340.05	\$580,756.24	\$2,168,648.97			\$320,925.15



**ConnectMaine Authority Financials**

FY21 into FY22

DRAFT Coronavirus Relief Funds

Rev. 06.14.21

BUDGET	DETAIL	FY20	FY21	ACTUAL	PROJECTED	INITIATIVES	PROPOSED
REVENUE	Carryforward				\$922,548.96		\$922,548.96
Coronavirus Relief	CARES	\$12,000,000.00	\$6,201,842.08	\$6,151,362.25	\$5,000.00		\$5,000.00
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>		\$12,000,000.00	\$6,201,842.08	\$6,151,362.25	\$927,548.96	\$0.00	\$927,548.96
<b>EXPENSES</b>							
Financial	pro rata share of audit	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$5,000.00		\$5,000.00
Digital Inclusion	affordability program	\$2,000,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00			
Infrastructure	Connect Kids Grants	\$10,000,000.00	\$6,201,842.08	\$5,228,813.29	\$922,548.96		\$922,548.96
<b>TOTAL</b>		\$12,000,000.00	\$6,201,842.08	\$5,228,813.29	\$927,548.96	\$0.00	\$927,548.96
<b>BALANCE</b>		\$0.00	\$0.00	\$922,548.96	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00

**ConnectMaine Authority Financials**  
**DRAFT NECEC Broadband Fund**

Rev. 06.21.21

BUDGET	DETAIL	ACTUAL	PROJECTED	INITIATIVES	PROPOSED
REVENUE	Carryforward		\$1,000,333.94		\$1,000,333.94
NECEC		\$1,000,000.00	\$2,000,000.00		\$2,000,000.00
Interest		\$333.94			\$0.00
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>		<b>\$1,000,333.94</b>	<b>\$3,000,333.94</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$3,000,333.94</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>					
Planning Assistance					
Digital Inclusion	affordability program				
Infrastructure Grants	matches or direct allocations	\$0.00	\$1,000,000.00		\$1,000,000.00
Infrastructure Loans					
Miscellaneous	covers likely deviations				
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$1,000,000.00</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$1,000,000.00</b>
<b>BALANCE</b>		<b>\$1,000,333.94</b>	<b>\$2,000,333.94</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$2,000,333.94</b>
<b>ALLOTMENT</b>	Deposits to Solix account	\$1,000,000.00	\$3,000,000.00		\$3,000,000.00

**ConnectMaine Authority Financials**

FY22 DRAFT State Bond

Rev. 06.21.21

BUDGET	DETAIL	FY20	FY21	ACTUAL	PROJECTED	INITIATIVES	PROPOSED
REVENUE	Carryforward				\$2,000,000.00		\$2,000,000.00
Bonds	FY21	\$0.00	\$15,000,000.00	\$2,000,000.00	\$13,000,000.00		\$13,000,000.00
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>		\$0.00	\$15,000,000.00	\$2,000,000.00	\$15,000,000.00	\$0.00	\$15,000,000.00
<b>-</b>							
<b>EXPENSES</b>							
Bond Fees		\$0.00	\$10,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$10,000.00	\$10,000.00
Infrastructure Bond		\$0.00	\$14,990,000.00	\$0.00	\$8,671,323.16	\$6,318,676.84	\$14,990,000.00
<b>TOTAL</b>		\$0.00	\$15,000,000.00	\$0.00	\$8,671,323.16	\$6,328,676.84	\$15,000,000.00
<b>-</b>							
<b>BALANCE</b>		\$0.00	\$0.00	\$2,000,000.00			\$0.00
<b>-</b>							
ALLOTMENT	excludes fees			\$500,000.00	\$2,000,000.00		



**ConnectME Authority**  
Grant Program  
Request for Extension

**Shall be filed 30 days prior to the original completion date**

Grant Recipient:	Premium Choice Broadband
Project Title:	Hudson Fiber Project
Authorized Representative of Grant Recipient:	William Varney

**Reason for extension and length of extension requested**

Waiting for CCI and Versant Power to do the make-ready on the poles.

Original completion date: 06.30.2021  
Proposed termination of state contract and execution of new contract with ConnectMaine for remaining \$75,000 of grant award to complete project by 12.31.2021.

# CONNECTMAINE

## **Progress Report/Request for Extension**

### **Contact Staff**

[Connect.ME@maine.gov](mailto:Connect.ME@maine.gov)

207.624.9894

### **Authority Members**

Nick Battista, Chair

Jasmine Bishop

Fred Brittain

Susan Corbett

Heather Johnson

Jeff Letourneau

Liz Wyman

The ConnectMaine Authority awards planning grants to develop plans for expanding the availability of broadband service and infrastructure grants to support investments in expanding the availability of broadband service. Before ConnectMaine releases additional award funds, a progress report is required if the project has commenced and is on schedule, or this report may be used to request an extension if the project won't be completed within one year of when the grant was awarded.<sup>1</sup> For assistance with reports, please contact ConnectMaine staff.

### **Instructions**

Please don't include attachments or reference attachments; insert information and documentation in the order requested. Project cost information may be attached or submitted separately. Any information that may be deemed confidential must be submitted as separate files to remain confidential. Some details of projects funded with grants are posted on the ConnectMaine website and contribute to reporting required of ConnectMaine.

By signing this completion report, the applicant certifies that the project is being conducted and completed in the affected communities as proposed in the contract agreement. If the project is being conducted or completed differently in any way from the application or contract, then indicate those differences and demonstrate compliance with the grants program where relevant in this report. The ConnectMaine Authority reserves the right to request additional information necessary to evaluate project compliance and completeness.

**Progress reports may be submitted anytime during the project timeline by emailing [Connect.ME@maine.gov](mailto:Connect.ME@maine.gov) with the subject heading Grant Funding Request.**

**Any request for extension must be submitted within one year of when the grant was awarded or within one year of the initial payment of grant funds if the project has commenced, whichever is later, by emailing [Connect.ME@maine.gov](mailto:Connect.ME@maine.gov) with the subject heading Extension Request.**

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<sup>1</sup> Evaluation of projects is conducted in accordance with the ConnectMaine rule:  
<https://www.maine.gov/connectme/about/statutes-rulemaking>

# CONNECTMAINE

## I. Applicant Information

Applicant Signature: *J.F. Nimon*

Date Submitted: June 15, 2021

### A. Fiscal Agent

Please use the same mailing address and entity name that were provided on the W-9 Form submitted with the contract agreement.

Entity Name: City of Sanford

Mailing Address: 919 Main Street, Sanford, ME 04073

Contact Name: James F. Nimon

Phone Number: (207) 608-4155

Email Address: [jfnimon@sanfordmaine.org](mailto:jfnimon@sanfordmaine.org)

### B. Grant

At the time of commencement, the applicant may request up to 25% of the infrastructure grant awarded or up to 50% of the planning grant awarded. For infrastructure projects, up to two additional amounts may be requested, up to 75% of the total grant amount awarded.

Grant Amount Awarded: \$25,000

Grant Amount Received: \$12,500

Remaining Amount Requested: \$12,500

Applicant informed that remaining 50% of award will be released upon the completion of the project, if the extension is approved.

### C. Affected Communities

List each affected municipality, local government or local government authority, or a local nonprofit providing economic development programs, as applicable to the project.

Points of Contact for Affected Communities and any community broadband committees:

Community	Name	Title or Role	Email or Phone
City of Sanford	James F. Nimon	Executive Director	(207) 608-4155
		Sanford Regional Economic Growth Council	

# CONNECTMAINE

## **D. Applicant**

Name: City of Sanford

Title or Role: Executive Director, Sanford Regional Economic Growth Council

Mailing Address: 917 Maine Street, Suite D, Sanford ME 04073

Phone Number: (207) 324-9155

Email Address: jfnimon@sanfordmaine.org

## **E. Point of Contact, if different**

Company Name: Same as above

Point of Contact Name:

Title:

Phone Number:

Email Address:

## **II. Executive Summary**

Review the executive summary of the application, and revise if necessary.

A Phase II planning grant would fund next important steps toward a full feasibility study to refine the cost estimates and test the financing structure for expanding an existing 45-mile fiber-optic network to the entire city. The two key elements of the analysis would be a “take rate” survey and plan for improving digital literacy in businesses with the highest broadband-driven growth potential.

# CONNECTMAINE

### III. Project Scope

Explain unforeseen circumstances and reason for any **extension being requested**.

For a number of months COVID-19 limited our access to the “near-fiber” companies identified along the 45-mile SanfordNet Fiber route. This delayed the initial “take-rate” survey process which slowed our next step for completion of our digital literacy planning for the near-fiber companies.

#### A. **Milestones**

List the project timeline with milestones expected.

July-December: tweak proposals and select consultant, identify sample of near-fiber companies to be assessed, determine what and how Internet applications are being used at selected companies, and recommend business applications and training to enhance Internet usage and business profitability.

#### B. **Commencement**

Project commencement date: **July 1, 2021** Correction: Project commenced on 06.15.2020

#### C. **Completion**

Original completion date: **June 30, 2021**

Anticipated completion date: **December 31, 2021**

#### D. **Cost**

As attachments or separate file(s), submit copies of all invoices, receipts and supporting documentation for expenses, if incurred. **Two invoices attached.**

Grant recipients are required to itemize all expenses. List actual expenses, and the amounts of costs covered by the grant and other financial commitments.

Capital & Operations	Quantity (#)	Unit (\$)	Total (\$)	CDBG (\$)	CMA (\$)
Take-Rate Survey # 1	1	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$0
Biz Depth Interviews	1	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$0	\$5,000
Take-Rate Survey # 2	1	\$6,500	\$6,500	\$0	\$6,500
<b>Totals</b>	-	-	\$36,500	\$25,000	\$11,500



## Designation of Unserved Areas

23 June 2021

### Authority Members

Nick Battista, Chair  
Jasmine Bishop  
Fred Brittain  
Susan Corbett  
Heather Johnson  
Jeff Letourneau  
Liz Wyman

### Background

The ConnectMaine statute and rule requirements include timelines around the designation of unserved areas, data filing and the opportunity to request review of areas.

On 4.28 the ConnectMaine Authority voted on the designation of broadband service, and on 6.9 that decision was confirmed. ConnectMaine proposed using a broadband service level of 50/10mpbs to designate unserved areas, and that decision was also confirmed. ConnectMaine has determined boundaries of unserved areas based on that service level<sup>1</sup>. A 30-day public comment period begins when the ConnectMaine Authority votes to designate geographic areas as unserved<sup>2</sup>.

### Considerations

The Broadband Availability Map is largely based on data submitted by providers to the FCC, and providers often have more refined data. Staff recommends that the ConnectMaine Authority vote to request data filing and grant tracking reports. Staff would coordinate with contractors to plan these requests and the management of incoming data. Filing of data is required to be eligible for the next round of infrastructure grants, and any grant tracking reports are required to be in good standing. The deadline for all data and reports would be three months after the request, according to ConnectMaine rule.

A separate memo considers when and how the opportunity to request review of areas could occur since rulemaking became effective in March 2021. ConnectMaine continues to progress activities on timelines that would allow the next round of grants to be awarded at the November meeting.

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<sup>1</sup> The Broadband Availability Map depicts areas designated unserved: <https://www.maine.gov/connectme/communities-resources/Broadbandmapping>

<sup>2</sup> ConnectMaine Authority Rule, Ch. 101, §5.B: <https://www.maine.gov/connectme/about/statutes-rulemaking>



# CONNECTMAINE

ConnectMaine Authority Members: Nick Battista, Jasmine Bishop, Fred Britain, Susan Corbett, Heather Johnson, Jeff Letourneau, Liz Wyman

23 June 2021

Dear Communications Service Provider:

Thank you for contributing to the state's understanding of the extent of broadband service availability in Maine. Following new designations of broadband service and unserved areas, and ahead of the next round of broadband infrastructure grants, the ConnectMaine Authority has requested the required data filing in accordance with its rule, Chapter 101, §3: [www.maine.gov/connectme/about/statutes-rulemaking](http://www.maine.gov/connectme/about/statutes-rulemaking).

Required data must be filed by the end of September 21, in order to be eligible for the next round of broadband infrastructure grants. Where ConnectMaine lacks data to show broadband service as being available, those geographic areas may be identified as unserved, and potentially eligible for grants.

Additionally, eligibility for grants includes being in good standing with ConnectMaine. Any infrastructure grant tracking reports due or past due must be filed by the end of September 21.

The designation of unserved areas is the key consideration in whether or not the ConnectMaine Authority can provide funds for a project, and the primary source for identifying unserved areas is the Broadband Availability Map, which is largely based on data submitted to the FCC, but providers often have more refined data. Now is the time to file any data that show broadband service as being available. This helps ConnectMaine ensure that state funds are directed to places where the private sector hasn't made, or alone can't justify, investment in expanding broadband service.

The enclosed pages include the lists of required data and the grant tracking report form. To maintain confidentiality, the required data must be filed through secure electronic transmission to the Sewall Company. Please submit one grant tracking report per project awarded, following the instructions in the form. Information collected from grant tracking reports shall be considered confidential pursuant to ConnectMaine statute, 35-A MRSA §9207.

If you have questions about this request, feel free to contact ConnectMaine staff by emailing [Connect.ME@maine.gov](mailto:Connect.ME@maine.gov) with the subject heading Requested Data.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Peggy Schaffer".

Peggy Schaffer, Executive Director

# CONNECTMAINE

Required data filing includes the following components:

Pricing data for advertised retail pricing for broadband services offered in the State:

1. Narrative description of any affordability option and the relevant qualifying criteria and the number of subscribers who have taken advantage of this provision within the prior year;
2. Narrative description of range of pricing and service options available in the State;
3. The cost and speeds of the most subscribed to standalone internet offering;
4. The cost, speeds, and other components of the most subscribed to bundle or package that includes internet service;
5. Cost range for 100mbps/100mpbs or faster service; and
6. Revenue data for the purpose of assessing communications service providers subject to §7.

Data to help the authority determine extent of broadband service in Maine:

1. Address level data that includes the technology and maximum speeds available; or
2. A map that depicts the extent of broadband service provided by the provider and delineates the availability of different service speeds, including areas where 25mbps/3mbps is available; where 10mbps upload is available; and anywhere where 100mbps/100mbps or faster is available; or
3. Other information that shows the extent of service lines, the type of broadband service provided and actual delivered maximum service speeds and latency.

# CONNECTMAINE

## Infrastructure Grant Tracking Report

### Contact Staff

[Connect.ME@maine.gov](mailto:Connect.ME@maine.gov)

207.624.9894

### Authority Members

Nick Battista, Chair

Jasmine Bishop

Fred Brittain

Susan Corbett

Heather Johnson

Jeff Letourneau

Liz Wyman

The ConnectMaine Authority awards infrastructure grants to support investments in expanding the availability of broadband service. Annually for five years from the date of the grant award, grant recipients must report data on broadband infrastructure projects.<sup>1</sup> For assistance with reports, please contact ConnectMaine staff.

### Instructions

Please don't include addendums or references; insert information and documentation in the order requested. Except for the requested map and mapping data, please don't submit separate files.

Information reported shall be considered confidential<sup>2</sup>. Aggregated information contributes to ConnectMaine reporting on its activities and progress toward state goals. The ConnectMaine Authority reserves the right to request additional information necessary to track and report on broadband infrastructure projects.

Communications service providers are also required to file data, which include accurate mapping, cost and speed-level data; address-specific, availability data of actual speeds; and verification of performance criteria as applicable. Please contact ConnectMaine staff for any assistance needed.

**Please submit your grant tracking report annually, starting one year after project completion, by emailing [Connect.ME@maine.gov](mailto:Connect.ME@maine.gov) with the subject heading Grant Report.**

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<sup>1</sup> Infrastructure grant tracking is conducted in accordance with the ConnectMaine rule:

<https://www.maine.gov/connectme/about/statutes-rulemaking>

<sup>2</sup> Confidentiality is maintained in accordance with the ConnectMaine statute, 35-A MRSA §9207:

<https://www.maine.gov/connectme/about/statutes-rulemaking>

# CONNECTMAINE

## **I. Applicant Information**

Applicant Signature:

Date Submitted:

### **A. Applicant**

Name:

Title or Role:

Mailing Address:

Phone Number:

Email Address:

### **B. Point of Contact, if different**

Company Name:

Point of Contact Name:

Title:

Phone Number:

Email Address:

### **C. Project Title**

Community-driven or provider expansion project:

Communities affected:

# CONNECTMAINE

## II. Cost-Benefit

Of the potential subscribers that were unserved, indicate the number now served by the broadband infrastructure project:

## III. Community Support

In the affected communities, indicate the total number of households that were unserved, and of those households the numbers now subscribing to service levels that are lower than 10/10Mbps, less than 100/100Mbps, and 100/100Mbps or faster:

Previously Unserved (#)	<10/10Mbps (#)	<100/100Mbps (#)	≥100/100Mbps (#)

## IV. Project Scope

ConnectMaine requires filing of data of the extent of broadband service; please indicate how this required filing of data is occurring:

Check One:	
Broadband service availability data in SHP (preferred) or annotated KMZ files were filed within three months of the last request or since the last grant tracking report, whichever was more recent; or	
A map of the geographic area now served that is at a fine enough scale to identify street-level data, and the GIS data behind the map as separate SHP (preferred) or annotated KMZ files, are now being filed.	

### A. Service

In the project area, state the service level offering subscribed to by the largest number of customers:

### B. Customers

In the affected communities, indicate the total number of businesses that were unserved, and of those businesses the number now subscribing to service:

Previously Unserved (#)	Now Subscribed (#)

# CONNECTMAINE

## V. Project Value

ConnectMaine collects data on service levels and prices per customer for various offerings provided in the state; please indicate how this data is being filed:

Check One:	
The service levels offered and the prices per customer to receive service were included in the SHP (preferred) or annotated KMZ files that were either filed within three months of the last request or since the last grant tracking report, whichever was more recent; or	
List all the service levels offered and the prices per customer to receive service in the following table.	

Service (mbps/mbps)	Price (\$/mo)	Details (if any)

### A. Affordability

Describe any affordability offering available to potential subscribers in the project area, including the criteria or requirements for eligibility.

Service (mbps/mbps)	Price (\$/mo)	Eligibility

### B. Subscription Rate

Of the potential customers in the project area, state the subscription rate estimated in the application, the current subscription rate now realized, and if applicable the take rate still anticipated:

Estimated (%)	Current (%)	Anticipated (%)

## Opportunity to Request Review

23 June 2021

### Authority Members

Nick Battista, Chair  
Jasmine Bishop  
Fred Brittain  
Susan Corbett  
Heather Johnson  
Jeff Letourneau  
Liz Wyman

### Background

The process of identifying unserved areas used last January conflicts with the rulemaking that became effective in March 2021, including when and how the opportunity to request review of areas would occur<sup>1</sup>. The prior process allowed 14 days for anyone to submit areas, a few days for review and publicly posting them, and then the required 30-day comment period. The rule now specifies that the list of geographic areas come from applications to the infrastructure grants program, which are then posted for 30 days to confirm any broadband service availability.

### Recommendation

Staff recommends that the ConnectMaine Authority consider deciding on this process, ahead of the next round of infrastructure grants, so that providers can submit data and grant tracking reports, and so that potential applicants are prepared for this new step of the application process.

Staff recommend announcing the next round of infrastructure grants and the opportunity to review areas at the same time, setting a 14-day deadline for applicants to propose project areas. Doing so at the August meeting, would fit the timelines, including the required 30-day comment period, for being able to award the next round of grants at the November meeting. Deciding on this process today would give providers and applicants additional notice before these announcements are made at a future meeting.

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<sup>1</sup> ConnectMaine Authority Rule, Ch. 101, §5.D: <https://www.maine.gov/connectme/about/statutes-rulemaking>



## Process for Identifying Unserved Areas

23 June 2021

### Authority Members

Nick Battista, Chair  
Jasmine Bishop  
Fred Brittain  
Susan Corbett  
Heather Johnson  
Jeff Letourneau  
Liz Wyman

### Background

The designation of unserved areas is the key consideration in whether or not the ConnectMaine Authority can provide funds for a project. Given the investment in broadband infrastructure by the private sector, and the clear intent of the ConnectMaine statute and rules to direct state funds to support expansion of broadband availability in places where the private sector alone can't justify the investment, going forward the ConnectMaine Authority will use the following process for identifying unserved areas.

### Process

Areas designated as unserved may be identified in any or all of the following sources:

- The ConnectMaine Broadband Availability Map: <https://maps.sewall.com/connectme/public/>
- Community Broadband Plans posted on the ConnectMaine website, if geographic areas are delineated based on a service level of at least 50/10mbps being unavailable: [www.maine.gov/connectme/grants/planning-grants/awards](http://www.maine.gov/connectme/grants/planning-grants/awards)
- The 2021 Reviewed Areas, if these weren't awarded infrastructure grants since: [www.maine.gov/connectme/communities-resources/Broadbandmapping](http://www.maine.gov/connectme/communities-resources/Broadbandmapping)

If areas for a proposed project aren't identified as unserved in the above sources, there is opportunity to review such areas:

1. The ConnectMaine Authority announces a round of infrastructure grants, and a deadline for requests that is no less than 14 days later.
2. The potential applicant make the request, which must include a map of broadband service availability in the geographic area at a fine enough scale to identify street-level data, and also the address level data and other data behind the map as separate SHP (preferred) or annotated KMZ files<sup>1</sup>.
3. From requests deemed complete, lists of the geographic areas are posted for the required 30 days in which comments on the broadband service availability, or lack thereof, in those geographic areas may be submitted.
4. ConnectMaine will consider comments that include a map of broadband service availability in the geographic area at a fine enough scale to identify street-level data, and also the address level data and other data behind the map as separate SHP (preferred) or annotated KMZ files.
5. Without comments and sufficient information that the areas are in fact served, the areas shall be confirmed as unserved by this process.

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<sup>1</sup> ConnectMaine Authority Rule, Ch. 101, §3.A.2: <https://www.maine.gov/connectme/about/statutes-rulemaking>

# CONNECTMAINE

## Community Broadband Planning Grants

23 June 2021

### Review Team Recommendations

#### Authority Members

Nick Battista, Chair  
Jasmine Bishop  
Fred Brittain  
Susan Corbett  
Heather Johnson  
Jeff Letourneau  
Liz Wyman

#### Awards

On April 28, the ConnectMaine Authority opened an application window for community broadband planning grants. Aligning with the ConnectMaine rule and state broadband action plan, projects were proposed as Phase I, Phase I & II, Phase II, or beyond II. The application window closed in May, and the review team scored eleven applications based on the guide provided in the application. The review team recommends awarding the top seven scoring applications. Of the more than \$160,000 requested, \$72,300 in grants are recommended. These applications also maintain diversity across unserved and underserved areas of the state.

#### Improvements

Like the infrastructure grants program, ConnectMaine continually applies learning from past rounds. Because of what was learned last round, and the guidance provided to communities during this application window, recommendations are for full awards and no partial awards. The grants committee and staff anticipate making recommendations ahead of the next round of planning grants, continuing to evolve the grants program. These future changes would aim to get more communities engaged sooner, more fully and faster.

Of the less competitive applications, ConnectMaine staff plans to provide guidance for continued planning. Assistance provided to applicants lacking secured financial commitments to be competitive in this round would help prepare for grants available later this summer or fall from other programs in the state or the next round of ConnectMaine planning grants. Lower scores mostly resulted from failure to demonstrate essential components of the community-driven broadband process, such as adequate and broad community outreach. Finally a couple of the applications proposed engineering a network design in areas that are identified as mostly served.

This is at least the third event this year, in which significant need for technical assistance in community broadband planning has been highlighted. Reoccurring from conversations is the theme that “with a little bit of support, our project could be more focused or occur faster,” and the type of support referenced isn’t that which can be or should have to be provided by the consultants hired to produce elements from the planning process. While ConnectMaine continues to seek solutions with partners, staff anticipates hosting at least one workshop for all communities planning, to encourage the peer learning that is so critical. The FY22 budget will include carryover and additional planning funds for building capacity.

**ConnectMaine Authority**  
Community Broadband Planning Grants

<b>Awards</b>	<b>Communities</b>	<b>Applicant</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Commitment</b>	<b>Grant</b>
Piscataquis County Broadband Plan & Feasibility Study	Abbot, Atkinson, Barnard, Beaver Cove, Big Moose, Blanchard, Bowerbank, Brownville, Dover-Foxcroft, Ebeemee, Elliottsville, Frenchtown, Greenville, Guilford, Hartfords Point, Katahdin Iron Works, Kingsbury, Lake View, Lily Bay, Medford, Milo, Moosehead Junction, Monson, Orneville, Parkman, Sangerville, Sebec, Shirley, T7 R9 NWP, TR R9 NWP, Wellington, Williamsburg, Willimantic	Piscataquis County Economic Development Council	81	\$60,000	\$30,000	\$30,000
Greater East Grand Region Broadband Feasibility Study	Amity, Bancroft, Brookton, Danforth, Drew, Forest City, Forest Township, Glenwood, Haynesville, Orient, Reed, Weston	Greater East Grand Economic Council	75	\$19,000	\$4,000	\$15,000
Denmark Community Broadband Feasibility Study	Denmark	Town of Denmark	83	\$20,000	\$7,000	\$13,000
Ellsworth Broadband Plan & Feasibility Study	Ellsworth	City of Ellsworth	69	\$10,000	\$5,000	\$5,000
Searsmont Community Broadband Plan	Searsmont	Town of Searsmont	86	\$13,865	\$8,865	\$5,000
Sebago Community Broadband Plan	Sebago	Town of Sebago	60	\$6,000	\$3,500	\$2,500
Waldo Community Broadband Plan	Waldo	Town of Waldo	60	\$3,800	\$2,000	\$1,800
<b>Less competitive applications - not awarded grants</b>						
Peninsula Broadband Coalition Broadband Plan & Feasibility Study	Brooklin, Brooksville, Sedgwick	Towns of Brooklin; Town of Sedgwick	50	\$106,350	\$56,366	\$49,984
Midcoast Community Broadband Feasibility Study	Camden, Cushing, Owls Head, Rockland, Rockport, South Thomaston, Thomaston	Midcoast Internet Development Corporation	55	\$50,000	\$30,000	\$20,000
China Broadband Infrastructure Design	China	Town of China	30	\$10,000	\$2,500	\$7,500
Northport Community Broadband Feasibility Study	Northport	Town of Northport	25	\$12,500	\$0	\$12,500