

ConnectME Authority

July 24, 2015 – Meeting Notes

1. Introductions

Authority Board Members: Jean Wilson, Chair; Andy Hagler; Ralph Johnson, Dick Thompson, and Greg McNeal.

Authority Staff: Phil Lindley, Executive Director; Lisa Leahy, Associate Executive Director; and David Maxwell, Program Director.

Board members and Authority staff introduced themselves, as did members of the public.

2. Legislative Activity

Phil Lindley reviewed recently passed legislation; specifically, L.D. 1063 (now P.L. 2015, Ch. 284) and L.D. 1185 (now P.L. 2015, Ch. 323), Municipal Broadband Network Fund .

Dick Thompson offered comments on these two bills.

Phil Lindley referenced two other recently passed laws; P.L. 2015, Ch. 222, Municipal Broadband Utility Districts, and P. L. 2015, Ch. 137, regarding telemedicine, which have or could have elements of broadband in their respective requirements. Also, LD 465 (now P.L. 2015, Ch151), which repeals the broadband sustainability fund.

Lisa Leahy described efforts conducted thus far regarding community broadband planning and a pre-certification program (part of P.L. 2015, Ch. 284) for municipalities seeking either planning or infrastructure funding in the future.

Given that the requirement for a ConnectME Authority Advisory Council was stricken from the Authority governing statute, it was suggested that a letter of thanks be sent to everyone who has served on the group since its inception.

3. Strategic Plan

Phil Lindley reviewed documents he had prepared relating to the triennial strategic plan and statutory requirements.

The vote taken at the June 19, 2015, meeting authorizing a sole source contract with the James W. Sewall Company to develop a triennial strategic plan was revisited. It was now decided to bid the work out through the state procurement process. A Request for Proposals (RFP) will be issued on Tues. July 28th.

A timeline for the strategic plan creation, including regional public forums, and process was reviewed, discussed, and endorsed by the Board.

Summary of discussions and decision to issue RFP as drafted with the following input:

- It is important to consider bidders who have experience with strategic plans (SP) and what makes an SP successful vs. something that stays on the shelf.
- The SP should have ties to specific outcomes and deliverables, “roadmap” the “what” we want to do and be on the same page about what we want to get out of this.
- It should be clear to the bidders that the expectations are the vendor will be a support vendor with direction and substance coming from the Board and the Staff.
- The RFP should list specific topics (from the statute) to be considered in the SP.
- A pre-vendor/pre-forum board workshop should be held, possibly at the August Authority meeting; the Staff will provide alternatives and different versions for the Board to choose from which will be included in the draft SP that in turn, will be used to solicit input at the public forums.
- The Staff will produce a “roadmap” for the duties of the Authority (especially the new responsibilities from the new laws) including tasks, timelines, milestones and dependencies/risks for the board to review and comment on before the next meeting (SP, rulemaking, modifications to checklist, municipality planning grant forms, etc.)

4. Revised Infrastructure Grant Application and Scoring Guide

Board members reviewed revised infrastructure grant scoring documents. The members decided to wait until the completion of the triennial strategic plan before launching a tenth round of infrastructure grants. A proposed high-cost exemption for the scoring guide was deleted. At the August 28, 2015, further discussion of the grant program will occur, including allocation of funds between planning and infrastructure grant programs and when to initiate each.

5. Executive Director Report

Phil Lindley presented the ConnectME Fund report and the notes from the June 19, 2015 meeting. There was a discussion of expanded membership of the Authority Board (as a result of P.L. 2015, Ch. 284) will occur at the August 28, 2015 Board meeting.

6. Public Comment

Several members of the audience offered comments, summarized below:

- the sequence of the strategic planning public forums, particularly one which is geared toward broadband providers, should be re-considered (it is currently planned as the fourth and last public forum)

- careful thought should be given to grant application scoring as it relates to the FCC broadband speed tier structure
- grantees should be in compliance with Freedom of Access Act (FOAA) requirements regarding information for the projects
- innovative approaches to providing broadband to increase service and adoption should be considered
- the 10/10 broadband speed standard adopted by the Board is beyond the capacity of much of the infrastructure in the state
- there should be more engineering review in the grant application process and more engineering oversight in the infrastructure build-out
- municipal networks create a competitive market; the intent for competition (broadband providers or users of broadband service) should be addressed
- the grant program should differentiate between residential and business users
- achieving the 10/10 standard will be expensive and will be feasible in only certain areas
- a brief update of the Unity Foundation broadband adoption survey was given
- an educational component is needed to promote the value of broadband

7. Executive Session Regarding Pending Litigation

The board voted to enter Executive Session at 3:48PM to discuss pending litigation. Executive Session was concluded at 4:11PM.

The public portion of the meeting resumed at 4:12PM at which time a report of no action taken in Executive Session was given.

The meeting adjourned at 4:14PM.