

# CONNECTMAINE

## April Meeting Notes

28 April 2021

Temporary Recording: [https://networkmaine.zoom.us/rec/share/cKRe8QscMffH-7HvfMC6w1jEgTsN-Fu6GF2\\_ZL7AufNKBlm29LrwwggFq0hz6YiP7.umANKw8u1-RDd60](https://networkmaine.zoom.us/rec/share/cKRe8QscMffH-7HvfMC6w1jEgTsN-Fu6GF2_ZL7AufNKBlm29LrwwggFq0hz6YiP7.umANKw8u1-RDd60)

## Authority Members

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

## Introductions of Members and Staff

Jeff Letourneau, Nick Battista, Susan Corbett, Liz Wyman, Fred Brittain, Jasmine Bishop, Peggy Schaffer, Stephenie MacLagan, Emily Atkins, Woodline Gedeon

## Meeting Kickoff

New student able to upload educational content thanks to Connect Kids Now! grant—Nick  
Thoughts from Town Manager of Stonington cites broadband as saving lobster-based community—Nick

Reorder Agenda—Jeff

*Approval of moving Designation of Broadband Service and Decisions on Broadband Planning:* Susan motioned, Fred 2nd, 6:0

## Notes of Last Meeting

*Approval of the March minutes:* Fred motioned, Liz 2<sup>nd</sup>, 6:0

## Designation of Broadband Service

Update from Staff—Peggy & Nick

- Review memo of staff recommendation

Following last board meeting, staff directed to make recommendation on the designation of broadband service. Staff conversed with board members and industry, and researched state of the market within the state broadband leaders network and with consultant support. Rule requires designation of broadband service based on common applications and service networks. Staff recommendation is 100/100mbps. This impacts designation of unserved areas for grants eligibility, and staff recommendation is to use 50/10mbps. This ensures people who have worse service are still prioritized for grants. It's more transparent to have a designation of unserved areas rather than address this in grants scoring. While this would change the number of subscriber locations in unserved areas, it doesn't largely change the estimated cost of universal broadband (\$600 million) and we'll have to figure out identification of unserved areas.

- Discuss timeline and actions

Today's vote is to open up the required comment period, and another vote will be taken at the May meeting. ConnectMaine isn't proving these service levels today, but putting these out for public comment.

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## Board Questions

- Fred: Recommendation in the memo includes more than just 100/100mbps, includes latency of 20ms. How was the recommended latency level determined?

Peggy: We haven't had latency reported, but we can work on adding this. While many factors affect latency, industry is moving in this direction. Latency is really important, because that's what the spinning wheel of death looks like. 20ms is kind of what the industry standard is for certain kinds of electronics, and in terms of use it's the level you need for use. Beginning to look at latency as part of getting away from technology per se.

- Liz: How does it work to have a different designation for unserved areas? Why wouldn't unserved areas be determined by the designation of broadband service?

Nick: We have to first designate broadband service, then we also have to designate unserved areas. One of the key features is that unserved areas can't get broadband service, which would be a significant part of the state. For grants, the recommendation is to designate unserved areas using 50/10mbps instead of 100/100mbps. A family of four should be able to use the internet without worrying for remote work and remote school at the same time. Separately, we're working to have the right numbers of for broadband service while also constructing these in a way that the designation of unserved areas as a geography for grant eligibility is administratively feasible or workable for staff. Considered challenges of served having 25/3mbps or faster service, and desire to increase this without being over inclusive in unserved areas for grants eligibility.

Stephenie: Quotes from the memo are shared in the chat—Yes, historically the designation of broadband service has been the sole criterion for the designation of unserved areas but that is not required and other things can be considered. In fact, because that's the way we had done it, and the designation of broadband service was so low at 25/3mbps, the build standard was created. Also, recent rulemaking ties the designation of broadband service to Common Applications and Network Service, and the 100/100mbps is build around that; then looking at that service level, it was obvious that it'd too greatly affect the designation of unserved areas. Staff leaned on the statute to consider other things than just the designation of broadband service in the designation of unserved areas.

Peggy: I understand where Liz is coming from, because I was stuck there too for a while. We are splitting this into two designations, two service levels now.

- Jasmine: Is underserved between these two service levels? What is the group between 50/10 and 100/100mbps? Can someone who can get 60/20mbps also apply for grants?

Nick: Underserved is a function of geography. This proposal starts to say broadband service is this level of service while unserved areas are designated by looking at other things as well. If you have 60/20mbps, you're not "served" but for purposes of grants eligibility public dollars are targeted to areas that don't have access to 50/10mbps.

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- Jeff: Is 100/100mbps the build-to standard then?

Nick: The 50/10mbps service level isn't the "unserved standard" but rather a factor in how unserved areas are designated which is a geography.

- Jeff: Should the designation of unserved areas be based on something easier to measure than 50/10mbps, such as 100/10mbps? This could be addressed in public comments submitted.

- Susan: Do you want to add to the motion that comment about built-to standard?

Stephanie: Clarifying again, there's a distinction between "build standard" and "designation of broadband service"

Nick: The designation of broadband service is what we're doing, and it'll effectively become the build-to standard. Jasmine agreed.

- Liz: Even though we're hosting a public forum, are we also going to allow written comments to be submitted? Do you need a motion on that?

Stephanie: Absolutely. While you can't submit comments through the website, we'll have information on the website about the public comment period, and written comments can be submitted by email. We don't need a motion on the action item of holding a public forum.

*Approval of the designation of broadband service as at least 100/100mbps, and the use of 50/10mbps for the designation of unserved areas:* Nick motioned, Susan 2<sup>nd</sup>: 6:0

*Action:* Direct staff to host at least one public forum during the required 30-day comment period. ConnectMaine anticipates a vote at the May meeting to confirm these designations.

## Decisions on Broadband Planning – Part I

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

- Debrief changes

For brevity, please read the agenda and draft grants application in the meeting binder.

- Budget for planning grants: \$132,750 available this round

Based on the annual budget of \$200,000 less the last round's awarded grants.

- Review timeline

Proposing to open the window now through May 27, to make decisions at the June meeting.

*Vote on opening application window for community broadband planning grants through May 27, with anticipation of awarding grants at the June meeting:* Liz motioned, Nick 2<sup>nd</sup>, 6:0

## Review of Operations

Executive Director's Report—Peggy

- Community resources and federal funds

There's a tsunami of federal funds coming, but the problem is that we don't know the full size, structure or what's going to get hit. We're still waiting for more certainty, which will unfold over the next several months. Guidelines may come out May 10, but they're being clear that it won't necessarily be a notice of funding opportunity. Many providers have signed up for the FCC Emergency Broadband Benefit, but it is very complicated.

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- External communications

Susan and Jeff did an encore event for the Portland Press Herald last night. Nick and I have participated in Bangor Daily News's four-session series.

- Infrastructure grants & operations

Lots of staff time spent on operations these last few weeks. Many more applications are streaming in, and Tilson Technology has extremely helpful. Woodline as the project manager has been a great help. With her, we're developing Salesforce as a grants platform for us. Keeping track of the connections among these projects will help us develop systems that will be more efficient and for us to be more responsive to constituents and the public. Over \$5 million has been requested in grants in the provider expansion project track alone. About half of the \$15 million bond is available for grants this round.

Board Questions

- Jasmine: Is there a pager on the EBB?

Peggy: With the uncertainty, it's hard to publish information that would be accurate.

Susan: The National Digital Equity Center is working on ways to support people to take advantage of programs, including those who don't have internet access. When the funds for this benefit run out, that's the end of the program.

Jeff: Universal Service Administrative Company is also developing materials.

## Decisions on Operations

Update on Governance—Peggy & Committee (Jasmine, Liz & Nick)

- Debrief meeting with consultant

A consultant was hired to help with governance and has met with staff and board members.

- ConnectMaine required to do Audit

The governance committee will be asked to develop the RFP for the audit this Friday.

- Review timeline

The governance committee will meet this week to go over the recommendations and next steps from the consultant, such as development of bylaws or those kinds of things.

Updates on Data Intelligence Platform—Peggy & Committee (Jeff, Fred & Nick)

- NBRC grant funds

ConnectMaine acquired a grant from Northern Border Regional Commission to cover the cost of the Broadband Intelligence Platform.

- Responses and debrief decisions

VETRO was the only respondent and has been contracted to provide this platform.

Board Questions

- Liz: How much was the contract?

Peggy: I think the contract was for \$940,000 for two years, maybe

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## Update on Industry—Committee (Heather & Nick)

- Debrief meeting with industry

Notes are in the meeting binder. We talked about doing monthly meetings to ensure information flow, and doing reports back to the board. Others welcome to join in the future.

## Updates on Strategic Planning—Stephenie & Committee (Fred, Susan & Jeff)

- Review vision & goals

Committee has been having conversations with the rest of the board and in tandem with other committee work.

- Review timeline

As the committee moves forward there will be additional memos or updates on the ConnectMaine vision and goals, which will be developed to kickoff strategic planning later this summer.

## Annual Budgeting—Stephenie

- Review timeline & expense items

Looking to align annual budgeting with setup of the required FY21 audit. Staff is working with the Controller's Office to align the audit with the federal reporting on coronavirus relief funding. This is a different audit process than has been undertaken in the past. The audit has to be approved by the board and submitted by mid-October, so staff is aiming to have it ready for approval by mid-September. Some of our expenses can't be estimated for FY22 without conclusion of FY21, but staff has begun calculating projected expenses where known. Staff has also created a system for tracking separately our various revenue sources and accounts.

- Discuss board engagement

While staff can work with DAFS and OIT for projected expenses, it would be helpful to have input on what initiatives to include in the draft annual budget and how various revenue sources should be applied. Staff hasn't experience undertaking the type of audit required for FY21, and future audits will also be done external to state government. There isn't a finance committee; do any board members want to volunteer for involvement in the development of the annual budget or supporting the FY21 audit?

## Board Questions

- Jeff: Board wouldn't be involved in the mechanics of the audit, but I have a lot of experience with various auditing processes.

Stephenie: We have a support from DAFS and Controller's Office, but once we get to the point of developing the report for board approval, if anyone wants to be involved more than at these meetings, let staff know.

Nick: Also if you're working on a committee be thinking about any large expenses or needs for contracting, to be flagged for the budget.

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## Decisions on Broadband Planning – Part II

Needed Community Planning Assistance—Stephenie

- Resources and peer learning

ConnectMaine gets a lot of requests for more assistance that we've had capacity to provide. Development of resources and networking support has been backburned.

- Digital inclusion

There's been awareness of needing to address digital inclusion more so in the planning process, what requirements should be included in planning grants, etc.

- Consultants

A while ago, a couple of board members and staff met with an external partner about the development of resources, including a list of consultants or potential consultants, even the possibility of vetting consultants someday. ConnectMaine hasn't dropped the ball so much as to recognize its limited headcount.

- Potential Community Committee (Fred, Susan & Jeff)

Does development of these resources and networking support for communities require a committee? Should staff capacity be focused on this or are we acknowledging the lack of capacity to bring this work from the backburner?

Board Questions

- Liz: You're trying to come up with an approach to provide information in an objective fashion?

Peggy: Whether we can advise on contracting for services, etc. We want to facilitate resources to communities, but it's figuring out who's working on it.

- Fred: Where does this work fit with everything else we're doing? Should we wait to see the result of LD1484?

Peggy: Right, there's still uncertainty since that legislation was just introduced. It'd be helpful to be able to do a frequently asked questions about use of federal funds for example, but we don't know any of that yet.

## Other Business

None

## Public Comments

- Joline Bell, Litchfield: Communities that have been planning could and should share information with other communities.

Jeff: Yes, nothing better than peer learning and networking.

- Elain Higgins, Freedom: Consider new terms such as "minimally served" for the service level used for the designation of unserved areas.

Jeff: Please submit public comments like that.

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

## March Meeting Notes

24 March 2021

Temporary Recording: [https://networkmaine.zoom.us/rec/share/KXGsDgUhwIWTdpR6levZixph-iZKItzuWnRvxcLgaobu1YcQAP9hpBY\\_IzmWb8rV.aFJTfNVYXWx-uQrA](https://networkmaine.zoom.us/rec/share/KXGsDgUhwIWTdpR6levZixph-iZKItzuWnRvxcLgaobu1YcQAP9hpBY_IzmWb8rV.aFJTfNVYXWx-uQrA)

## Authority Members

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Liz Wyman

## Introductions of Members and Staff

Nick Battista, Jeff Letourneau, Liz Wyman, Susan Corbett, Fred Brittain, Jasmine Bishop, Denise Garland, alternate for Heather Johnson, Peggy Schaffer, Stephenie MacLagan

## Meeting Kickoff

Portland Press virtual panel—Susan

- Recording should be posted on PPH website
- Over 300 attendees

ConnectMaine of years passed—Nick

- Digital archives of ConnectMaine's first meeting in 2006

Senator King's reaction to the American Rescue Plan—Nick

“A historic monumental step in the right direction, but the funds aren't enough to get the job done; we need to continue to build on public and private investments and broadband infrastructure.”

## Notes of Last Meeting

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

## Review of Operations

Executive Director's Report—Peggy

- Infrastructure grants

March 10<sup>th</sup> was a grants workshop, which is now available on the ConnectMaine website and Maine Broadband Coalition website.

- Federal programs

Nick and Peggy participated in a webinar on the federal funds applied to broadband. There's still a lot of uncertainty about how the funds will flow from Treasury. There's been advocacy work to ensure the intent of the legislation passed. The opportunities are great for stacking multiple sources of funds over the next four months. Most providers are going to participate in the FCC's affordability program funded by the Emergency Broadband Benefit.

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## Board Questions

- Liz: What does stacking monies mean?

Peggy: capital stacking means bringing in multiple streams of money to maximize or leverage all sources of funds to build broadband to people.

- Liz: Can ConnectMaine give grants for subscription subsidies?

Peggy: We don't have the funds to do that ourselves. We have authority to work on digital inclusion, under which we could address affordability.

- Liz: Are funds intended to address digital inclusion and affordability.

Peggy: The intent was for infrastructure, but we have the view point that without addressing digital inclusion, having infrastructure isn't enough. Nick: There's a leadership opportunity to message these connections among communities and state agencies. Fred: There are affordability programs through the Department of Human Services. Susan: The National Digital Equity Center is working to update its website to navigate eligibility requirements of affordability programs; having a centralized location for all this information will be helpful, echoed by Jasmine. Peggy: We also funded the Community Development Block Grant Program to provide actual laptops to people who are eligible for the the program they're running with the National Digital Equity Center, and who need more than just a tablet. Susan: Folks can learn more about all these programs on the NDEC website. Nick: The 3 statutory goals speak to needs and uses of broadband more so than about infrastructure.

## Operations

ConnectMaine structure—Nick

- Dividing work into committees

This way board members can dig more substantively, receive updates and have the right level of conversations as a board.

- Evolving governance and structure

Seems to be working but observing and listening for feedback on structural needs. Be thinking about how many committees we have and the right number of them as many board members are on many committees.

*Action:* Staff will make a list of committees and board membership.

Update on Governance—Peggy & Committee (Jasmine, Liz & Nick)

- Acquisition of consulting services

After directing staff to find professional assistance, staff investigated at least two consultants, and decided to contract with Starboard Leadership.

- Commitment of committee members

There were several volunteers for this work, and we want to confirm commitment of a committee of three board members. Jasmine, Liz & Nick are committed, and other board members interested in being more engaged should reach out to Nick or staff soon.



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- Timeline of activities

Anticipating a first meeting with committee end of next week. Starting with the committee and expanding conversations with other board members to ensure understanding of board members' visions and governance needs. Revisiting the Board's workplan, making sure we're doing what we need to on the governance front. Anticipating draft by-laws or other documents to help with governance by end of June.

## Board Questions

- Liz: Is Jeffrey from Starboard going to talk to other board members?

Peggy: Yes, the plan is to start with the governance committee and then expand to all board members, to help ensure the right direction is taken. Nick: This is an opportunity to figure out how we have these conversations as a board; now is the time to say you want to be substantively involved.

*Action:* Staff will email doodle to get this meeting scheduled end of next week.

## Decision on Grants Verification & Validation—Peggy

- Debrief background and RFP Responses

Tilson Technology voluntarily provided technical reviews during the Connect Kids Now! grants, then presentation from Tilson to the board late last year; Tilson responded to RFI this past winter; Tilson was sole response to recent RFP

- Recommendation

RFP response seemed to address the aspects staff expected, recommend contracting.

## Board Questions

- Liz: Is the \$175/hr the rate regardless of the number of hours, or is the amount of time they expect going to determine the cost?

Peggy: Yes, the rate is the proposal, and the number of hours may be different, so the total cost may be different. Liz: Right, I think that 20 applications would be light. The hourly rate is very reasonable and their plan of work is very responsive. Peggy: We can ensure there's a cap to the cost of the project in the contract, echoed by Liz & Jeff. Jeff: should also include periodic reports on hours work, milestones built into the contract.

- Fred: Verification seems to be on the mark, but is the cost estimate reasonable or accurate with regard to Validation activities?

Peggy: Proposal would be to sample projects for field validation. The contract will clarify the process of developing the validation process. Liz: The response reflects the vagueness of the RFP, but proposal would be to develop the validation activities we need, and they have experience to give guidance on what will work for us. Nick: This is a collective opportunity to learn, and for rapid improvements to our work. Peggy: It's more likely we'll have 40-50 applications for verification. Liz: There would be some economies of scale, so maybe \$300,000 as a cap in the initial contract. Fred: We can always amend the contract if needed.

*Approval* of accepting the Tilson proposal and direct staff to negotiate the initial contract at the blended hourly rate of \$175 per hour with a cap of \$300,000 and appropriate milestones built into the contract to assess progress: Liz motioned, Jeff 2<sup>nd</sup>, 7:0

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Updates on Data Intelligence Platform—Peggy & Committee (Jeff, Fred & Nick)

- Status of RFP

RFP was reviewed by OIT to include accessibility language. It's posted on our website. There's a virtual meeting for potential bidders' questions on Monday. Proposals are due mid-April. If we have one response, we'll bring that to the board; otherwise, this committee will review proposals and make a recommendation. With big federal funds coming in, this feels very helpful to move in a positive direction for our work.

Board Questions: none

Update on MOU for NECEC Broadband Fund—Nick & Peggy

- Memorandum of understanding signed for first half of 2021

The MOU is very similar to conversations in the winter; the only change is that this MOU is for only the first two quarters of this year, to get the money following and work happening. The MOU also went through our legal counsel. Initial funds should land end of this week, and another disbursement will occur next month.

- Status of planning the use of the Broadband Fund

Does putting this into a committee make sense to manage it and provide the right level of oversight? Should it be a subcommittee of the Plan Committee, since some of this would evolve during the strategic planning process? In addition to the funds available, there's also considerations or opportunities from the infrastructure itself.

Board Questions

- Jeff: NECEC should be addressed in the next triennial plan, echoed by Peggy, and some board oversight or involvement would be good.

Nick: so consolidate this with the plan committee? Jeff: Yes, given the amount of work and activities coming down the pike. Heather: NECEC comes with stipulations and doesn't need or can't be over-programmed, echoed by Nick & Peggy. Jasmine: Having the governance committee define committees and work so we know where to put these types of things, a goal of the governance committee. Nick: It might be worth considering a group to look across all the sources funds, making recommendations on making the most of opportunities. Without a fully formed structure yet, this could be a group or couple of board members for now, potentially changing it based on governance work later. Peggy: It would be really helpful to have standing committees; there's only seven board members. This broadband fund is prescriptive at this point, so it seems like this conversation should be folded into strategic planning.

- Fred: Need to establish the plan for the Broadband Fund based on timing of funds and level of certainty.

*Action:* The Plan Committee will own NECEC work at least in short-term.

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## Discussion on Triennial Plan

Updates on Strategic Planning—Nick, Staff & Committee (Fred, Susan & Jeff)

- Background

There's a memo on this; we have to do strategic planning every three years. Plan Committee considered how they'd like to do strategic planning as a board, opportunity for its own visioning and opportunity externally for engaging the public in ConnectMaine activities.

- Preparing for strategic planning over next couple of months to kickoff this summer

The starting point will be what are the vision and goals, taking those out to the public for input. This would be building on what we learned over the fall, having conversations on adjusting our programs and defining value for the state. Now's the time to flag for staff if board members have thoughts desired to be included in the process or plan.

- Recommendations

The Plan Committee would engage other board members over the coming months, on the visioning and goals that are in the statute, rule and action plan. This would be preparations for kicking off strategic planning this summer.

Board Questions: none

*Action:* The Plan Committee will engage all board members on background material, vision and goals to develop ideas and direction for the strategic planning process.

*Action:* Staff will create space on the website for information about the strategic planning process and how public input can be provided.

## Other Business

Discussion of broadband service, unserved areas and build standard—Jeff

- Debrief Background

In early 2020, ConnectMaine stuck with the designation of broadband service as 25/3mbps. These are designated annually, with a 30-day comment period, so it's time to set a process; recommendation to have staff prepare a discussion for the April meeting. This is a lot of work, but it's helpful to have staff look at the connections among these three things.

- Proposed timeline

Discussion and possible approval of process at the April meeting. Targeting May vote on the designation of broadband service.

Board Questions:

- Fred: What's the urgency?

Jeff: I've thought about this before the pandemic and driven by the pandemic—the current designation of broadband service grossly understates the lack of broadband in the state. We should get input on the designation before making it. Nick: Unsure whether annual review is frequent enough or not. There's opportunity to take lessons learned from pandemic about the needs are. Susan: We're seeing significant funds coming to the state; if not now, then when? It's a great time to make significant changes, echoed by Fred.

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- Nick: Staff can do this?

Jeff: The build standard isn't in statute or rule and it was needed simply because the broadband service designation was so low no one would build to only that. There's urgency to avoid having our hands tied by the designation of broadband service; we don't want the legislature to define it for us.

Liz: Support having staff come up with recommendations and background information about the relation to federal standards for broadband and how the pandemic has changed our perspectives on broadband needs. Jasmine: Senator letter to set modern broadband standard, <https://www.bennet.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/press-releases?id=2C769043-69ED-426B-B30A-57981A4BA333>. Stephenie: thumbs up on action.

- Nick: Whether now or later, how should the designation of broadband service be determined, considering the use of broadband—it's a functional definition not a technical one.

*Action:* Staff will propose a process for designating broadband service with public engagement, and the relationship to designating unserved areas and determining the build standard, for board discussion at the April meeting.

Discussion of April Agenda—Nick

- Community broadband planning grants

Balancing staff capacity and encouraging community planning. \$200,000 was budgeted, and less than \$100,000 was awarded so far. The application materials could be improved with regard to clarity. Targeting an application window that would open at April meeting and close in late May for June awards.

- Annual budgeting

Maybe not April but in the May-June timeframe for approving a FY22 budget

*Action:* Staff will work with grants committee to revise applications materials, determine available funds, for the board to open an application window in April.

## Public Comments

- Peggy: Appreciate the participation of Ben Sanborn and Melinda Kinney during the legislative worksession on LD 83.

Nick: It was a good explanation for the committee of the various intricacies involved.

- Ben Sanborn, TAM: Are committee meetings and work open to the public?

Peggy: Memos capture committee work for discussion and action at the monthly meetings.

- Sanborn: Memo sent to ConnectMaine on grants program; will all applications and scoring materials be made public?
- Sanborn: TAM pitches for an open dialog, echoed by Melinda Kinney, Charter.

Nick: Transparency and accessibility is also on the list of tasks for the governance committee. Welcome further conversation about structuring an open dialog meeting.

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

# CONNECTMAINE

## Designation of Broadband Service

28 April 2021

Staff Recommendations

## Authority Members

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

### Summary

The staff recommendation is based on Common Applications and Network Service as defined in the ConnectMaine rule. Staff considered the capability for a family of four to use those applications to work, learn and access services online, without trouble. The recommendation is also based on what private investment is occurring across Maine and the country, having considered the “state of the market” in accordance with the rule.

To that end, staff recommends a designation of broadband service that is at least 100/100mbps with a latency no more than 20ms, made possible by a XGS-PON at a minimum; and recommends a separate designation of unserved based on slower speeds than 50/10mbps.

The construct between broadband service and unserved is a critical element. At least annually, the ConnectMaine Authority is required to determine the minimum performance criteria for broadband service in accordance with its statute.<sup>1</sup> Designation of unserved areas includes but isn’t limited to consideration of the designation of broadband service. Importantly, the designation of unserved areas is separate from the designation of broadband service.

Reviewing the greatest relative improvement from current service is a critical element of the broadband infrastructure grants program design. ConnectMaine has and will continue to ensure that projects in unserved areas remain priority for grants, so worse networks get better. We feel it is critical to be clear and transparent about what we consider to be the priority for grants; because of that, staff recommends using 50/10mbps to designate unserved areas.

How we operationalize this is troublesome because of the federal standard for broadband, a minimum of 25/3mbps. Recognizing there is a variety of implementation issues with changing the speeds by which broadband service and unserved areas are designated, working through these issues will take the next few months. ConnectMaine recognizes that the datasets available aren’t great for identifying areas by a service level of 50/10mbps, but changing these speeds now allows these challenges to start being addressed.

The recommendation of 100/100mbps for the designation of broadband service ensures that the broadband infrastructure is capable of 100/100mbps service being delivered and helps ensure the infrastructure is scalable overtime, by only having to switch out the electronics. Deploying taxpayer funds necessitates setting strong standards.

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## Process

ConnectMaine staff chose these levels of service based on consideration of many factors, including: common use applications for households with multiple devices, what level of service is needed for a family of four who are all working and learning from home; what private investment is occurring currently in the marketplace in Maine and nationally, and what level of service is being built across the country with private, federal and state dollars; the technology used for the majority of ConnectMaine projects in the past 5 years; a forward look at demands based on the life span of infrastructure, how taxpayer funds should build networks that make use seamless from the network perspective; and conversations with communities and providers across Maine.

After research, staff developed a recommendation that emphasizes the importance of building this infrastructure so that it will meet the demands of the users for 20 or more years without being rebuilt, other than switching out electronics that support the network. Those recommendations include ensuring that areas of the state with the poorest broadband service will be prioritized for state investment, as well as helping drive private investment to improve service overall in better-served parts of the state.

## Timeline

The pandemic has illuminated the urgency and severity of Maine's broadband needs. Demand is high for grant funds, and significant federal funds are available to be leveraged at both the state and local levels. These are some of reasons for designating broadband service and unserved areas ahead of the next round of infrastructure grants. The timelines of designating broadband service and then unserved areas, the following opportunity to review unserved areas, and then infrastructure grants, are all intertwined.

To align these timelines, the staff recommends the following:

1. Vote on the designation of broadband service at the April meeting
2. Solicit public input on the designation of broadband service during the 30-day comment period required by statute
3. Vote to confirm the designation of broadband service at the May meeting
4. Further engage the board and public in identifying unserved areas in June & July
5. Vote on the designation of unserved areas at the July meeting
6. Solicit public input on the designation of unserved areas during the 30-day comment period required by statute
7. Also announce an Opportunity to Review Unserved Areas at the July meeting, using the same process approved in January
8. Determine performance criteria for projects using grant funds, June-August
9. Comment periods close before the September meeting
10. Open application window for broadband infrastructure grants at the September meeting

The timelines of designating broadband service and then unserved areas, the following opportunity to review unserved areas, and then infrastructure grants, are all intertwined. If votes on designations occur sooner, then ultimately opening an application window could occur sooner. If any votes are delayed, that could delay the timeline for the next round of grants, while forgoing the opportunity to review unserved areas could shorten it.

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## Background

ConnectMaine raised the designation of broadband service to 25/3mbps in 2018, increasing the number of locations in unserved areas to about 11% of the state, estimated to be 85,000 locations. In early 2020, ConnectMaine maintained the designation of broadband service as the availability of 25/3mbps or faster speeds. The statute and rule<sup>ii</sup> require ConnectMaine to consider market conditions and minimum performance criteria needed for common applications and network services.

At the March meeting, ConnectMaine expressed interest in a process for designating broadband service which includes

- having a more robust conversation about this and engaging the public,
- illustrating the relationship to unserved areas and the build standard, and
- researching or observing the federal and other state standards for broadband.

Past practice has been to use the designation of broadband service as the sole criterion for the designation of unserved areas; however, the ConnectMaine rule doesn't limit consideration to only the designation of broadband service. Because of this practice, ConnectMaine then established a build standard for broadband as part of the performance criteria for projects using grant funds.

Designation of unserved areas includes but isn't limited to consideration of the designation of broadband service. ConnectMaine may consider the extent to which service meets the criteria governing Common Applications and Network Service.

ConnectMaine recognizes the state's broadband vision and goals, which are articulated in its statute, rule and state action plan. ConnectMaine encourages communication among stakeholders, and seeks public engagement and research opportunities, to improve our understanding of broadband availability and needs in the state.

## Research

Based on research and conversations thus far, and for the purpose of providing direction for additional conversations, staff recommends the following be considered for minimum performance criteria for broadband service in accordance with the rule:

- The state of the market includes the increasingly common industry standard of XGS-PON—10 Gigabit Symmetrical Passive Optical Network.
  - While all applicants haven't provided network capacity or backhaul information, those that have are upgrading 1G to 5G or even installing 10G; even our cable companies, in expanding broadband using DOCSIS 3.1 (Data Over Cable Service Interface Specifications) have taken the opportunity to upgrade both download and upload. Although the build standard for broadband using state funds has been a minimal service offering of 10/10mpbs, most providers have offered 100/20, 100/50 or even 100/100mpbs as base service offerings.

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- Nationally, few cable companies have bothered to upgrade the upload portion of the network when they upgraded to DOCSIS 3.1. Cable companies that stuck to the older DOCSIS 3.0 technology won't have the capacity to provide these higher upload speeds. AT&T and other companies are increasingly announcing and implementing plans to replace networks with fiber, due to customer demands for faster speeds. AT&T will deploy fiber-to-the-premise to an additional three million locations across more than 90 metro areas in 2021 and will continue its aggressive fiber push in 2022 by adding four million more locations. Verizon has moved to fiber to provide symmetrical service or to allow for 5G expansion. It expects to offer up to 1G/1G peak speeds to 250 million Americans by 2024 by spending an extra \$10 billion on its network over the course of those three years. Conexon, a fiber builder for electrical co-ops, is only building fiber and has just announced a significant investment in very rural areas, including a massive investment in rural Georgia. Conexon only builds and invests in fiber networks with electrical co-ops and invests in some very rural (low density) areas. They have been using federal funds to build out fiber for several years
- From research within and beyond the state of Maine, staff determines that the minimum sustained bandwidth for both upstream and downstream transmission in Common Applications and Network Service is more commonly greater than required for 10/10mpbs service. While the priority of expansion is greater in urban areas, the need and demand for faster speeds aren't unique to urban areas.
  - Historically: When the FCC set the federal definition of broadband at 25/3mbps, it was almost entirely based on a thought experiment. It'd be harder today to conduct even the same thought experiment, let alone actually measure usage, and near impossible to estimate the future needs that have grown exponentially. Some families now have adults that work remotely from home. Even before the pandemic, there were people in a lot of homes that were pursuing education and training online. Many basic functions that used to reside on our computers have migrated to the cloud. In fact, cable companies have been increasing download speeds exponentially as well. **Of the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund awarded projects, 85% are for gigabit service.** By looking at the behavior of the cable companies, using 25/3mbps as a definition of broadband is badly obsolete. It's expected that NTIA programs will require construction of networks that can deliver 100/20mbps service.
  - Other states have also been updating their broadband standards: South Dakota uses 100/10mpbs as a baseline but encourages up to 1G symmetrical service upon completion of funded projects. New York uses 100/100mbps as its standard for broadband. MN's goal is 100/20 by 2026; WA, 150/150 by 2028; and IL, 100/100 by 2028. NC's goal is that 50% of state will have fiber by 2021. VT has pending legislation to fund Communication Utility Districts for 100/100 service.
  - Within the past year, private investment in Maine has been announced by Charter, Consolidated, UniTel, Premium Choice, GWI, Pioneer, FirstLight and TDS, all of which building fiber networks capable of delivering 100/100mbps service. Since 2016, the vast majority of applications to ConnectMaine have been for fiber networks. While some of these projects are not currently configured for symmetrical service because of their electronics, most could with a switch out of those electronics, be able to provide symmetrical service. Consolidated and Pioneer, two of Maine's RDOF winners in the Gig tier, will be building gigabit symmetrical service to those very rural areas of the state over the next 6 years.



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- The maximum monthly throughput on a flat rate service offering should be sufficient to meet the demands for Common Applications and Network Service.
  - The average household has 12 connected devices now, and that is expected to grow to 20 by 2025. This will increase the demand for the quality and quantity of service to locations.<sup>iii</sup>
  - By the end of 2020, the monthly usage of an average household was 482 gigabytes or nearly 4,000G of data, about 8G per waking hour. That amount has increased 224% over only three years.
- Besides capacity, speeds and bandwidth, other performance criteria necessary for the use of common broadband applications and network services include latency—the lower the better—and affordability—price of service offerings.
  - While many factors affect latency, fiber-based internet service rarely results in latency greater than 10ms, and cable-based internet service may struggle to stay below 20ms.
  - While all applicants haven't provided pricing data of services offered, those that have helped ConnectMaine choose target prices, around \$65 per month, for current infrastructure grant applications, which will help ConnectMaine collect more data on broadband affordability.

## Actions

Vote to approve the designation of broadband service as at least 100/100mbps.

Vote to approve the use of 50/10mbps for the designation of unserved areas.

Direct staff to host at least one public forum during the required 30-day comment period.

ConnectMaine anticipates a vote at the May meeting to confirm these designations.

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### <sup>i</sup> Statute:

§9204-A. Duties of authority:

1. Establish criteria defining unserved and underserved areas. The authority, by rule adopted pursuant to section 9205, subsection 3, shall establish criteria to define unserved and underserved areas with respect to broadband service. Criteria established by the authority to define unserved and underserved areas must include the percentage of households with access to broadband service within a municipality or other appropriate geographic area. The authority shall use these criteria to determine those areas of the State that are unserved or underserved.

### <sup>ii</sup> Rule:

5.) Designation of Broadband Service and eligible areas

A. Broadband Service. At least annually, and subject to a thirty (30) day comment period, the Authority must determine the minimum performance criteria for broadband service, for the purposes of this Chapter. The Authority must base its criteria on the state of the market as well as the performance necessary to meet the current broadband needs of common applications and network services in use in the State.

1. Criteria Governing Performance. To determine minimum performance criteria, the Authority may consider:
  - a. Minimum sustained bandwidth for both upstream and downstream transmission in Common Applications and Network Service;
  - b. Maximum monthly throughput on a flat rate service offering; and
  - c. Any other performance criteria necessary for the use of common broadband applications and network services.

<sup>iii</sup> [https://www.wfmz.com/news/pr\\_newswire/pr\\_newswire\\_business/parks-associates-us-households-will-have-an-average-of-20-connected-devices-by-2025/article\\_6e4fb246-e853-5746-b0bc-464b745caabe.html](https://www.wfmz.com/news/pr_newswire/pr_newswire_business/parks-associates-us-households-will-have-an-average-of-20-connected-devices-by-2025/article_6e4fb246-e853-5746-b0bc-464b745caabe.html)



# CONNECTMAINE

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

28 April 2021

## Press Release

### BROADBAND GRANTS ANNOUNCEMENT

The ConnectMaine Authority seeks Community Broadband Planning Grant applications from groups interested in expanding broadband service to their communities.

Broadband service enables civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning and access to essential services. These grants are funded through assessments or surcharges on certain communications, video and internet service bills. Along with other sources of funds, ConnectMaine anticipates awarding about \$130,000 in this round.

Planning grants are awarded to develop plans for expanding the availability of broadband service, and to produce strategies for digital equity and inclusion. Municipalities, groups of municipalities, counties, or community organizations that provide local or regional economic development programs, are eligible to apply.

The planning grants program incentivizes collaboration among multiple communities, in part because the community planning process is a significant undertaking. Collaboration can bring additional resources, volunteers and community support to the planning effort, and it also improves the viability of eventual expansion of broadband networks in the area.

Communities that go through a community-driven broadband planning process are situated well to apply for future infrastructure grants. Significant federal and state funds are anticipated for broadband later this summer and fall, at both the state and local levels. Communities should take this opportunity and timeline into consideration as they outline their plans.

The planning grants program is designed to get communities ready to respond to these opportunities, by committing to firm milestones to expand broadband in a way that reflects the community's vision and goals. Community-Driven Broadband Projects seek to widely expand infrastructure for equitable access to affordable and reliable internet service that meet the current and future broadband needs of Mainers.

More information and applications can be found on the ConnectMaine website: [www.maine.gov/connectme](http://www.maine.gov/connectme). Please direct any questions to ConnectMaine staff. The mission of ConnectMaine is to facilitate the universal availability of broadband to all Maine households and businesses, and to promote the valuable role it can play in enriching their lives and helping their communities thrive.

# CONNECTMAINE

## Planning Grants Application

### 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

This application binder is for community broadband planning projects, which involve developing plans for expanding the availability of broadband service. Phase I projects are intended to begin the process of building community-wide support for expanding broadband service; Phase II projects are intended to take the community to the next step in planning for expanded broadband service. Other projects may be considered based on progress to-date, specific challenges, and the need and capability to overcome those challenges. Successful grant applications outline processes for producing the broadband plan or feasibility study proposed, and that will likely lead to expanding the availability of broadband.<sup>1</sup>

This application window is April 28 through May 27. Please submit your application materials by emailing [Connect.ME@maine.gov](mailto:Connect.ME@maine.gov) with the subject heading Grant Application.

### **Instructions**

Please don't include attachments or reference attachments; please insert evidence in the order requested. Any information that may be deemed confidential must be submitted as separate files to remain confidential. Please note that applications submitted are made publicly available; please submit confidential information as separate files. Some details of projects funded with grants, including the plans and studies produced, are posted on the ConnectMaine website.

If any elements of the application can't be completed, then in those locations demonstrate how those elements will be developed as part of the proposed project. The ConnectMaine Authority reserves the right to request additional information necessary to evaluate applications for planning grants. Precertification is an eligibility requirement, and this application contains the elements of precertification in case prior submission and approval haven't been obtained.

Please contact ConnectMaine staff for any assistance. Please note that the score of an application is only one factor considered by ConnectMaine in awarding grants, among many other factors required or allowed to be reviewed in accordance with the statute and rule, including that planning grants are equitably distributed throughout unserved and underserved areas of the state; additionally, ConnectMaine considers its statutory goals and policies, including that infrastructure be forward-looking to meet future broadband needs.

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

# CONNECTMAINE

## **I. Applicant Information**

Applicant Signature:

Date Submitted:

### **A. Fiscal Agent**

Entity Name:

### **B. Grant Requested**

Amount:

### **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 proposed project.

Point of Contact for each Affected Community and any community broadband committees:

Community	Name	Title or Role	Email or Phone

### **D. Applicant or Agent**

Name:

Title or Role:

Mailing Address:

Phone Number:

Email Address:

### **E. Partner, if any, excluding any consultants hired**

Company Name:

Point of Contact Name:

Title:

Phone Number:

Email Address:

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## F. Applicant Eligibility

The applicant may be any general-purpose local government, including a municipality or county; groups or regional partnership of general-purpose local governments, including multiple municipalities, local government authorities, counties, and joint or multi-county development authorities; any broadband utility district or corporation, wholly or partially owned by local government(s); or any nonprofit local or regional community organizations that are providing local or regional economic development programs. State the legal entity of this applicant, or partner if applicable.

Name and type of entity:

If any, list the most recent planning grants awarded by ConnectMaine to any of the entities of this application.

Date of last award	Entity receiving funds

## II. Executive Summary

Provide a five-sentence executive summary that identifies the applicant; which phase of activities will be conducted; where in Maine; whether a broadband plan or feasibility will be produced, or what challenge will be overcome by this project; and when completion is anticipated. This serves the purpose of quickly identifying the proposed project among applications and past projects. This summary will also be used when announcing awards of successful applications.

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## **III. Community Support**

In total the community support scoring category accounts for 20 points. Five of these points are available in the scoring of precertification elements, requested in Section V below.

Describe participation by affected residents in the application process and the amount of economic support to be provided by the community.

### **A. Petitions or Letters**

The strong desire of residents and businesses to subscribe to broadband, a community support factor, is demonstrated through lists of those interested in supporting the community's efforts to expand broadband or in subscribing to broadband service that becomes available. For Phase I projects only, insert any petitions or insert other similar material to serve as evidence of broad community engagement. For Phase II projects only, insert any letters from businesses, or similar material, as evidence of economic support. For projects other than Phase I or II, demonstrate how community support is building.

Broad community engagement and economic-sector support help ensure successful projects and help demonstrate sufficient community support; 10 points, if evidence is submitted, or 0 points.

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## **B. Surveys or Votes**

For Phase I projects, list any relevant survey question(s) with response rate(s) and the resulting percent of respondents in support of expanding broadband. For Phase II projects, list any warrant article(s) with voter turnout(s) and the voting results(s) in favor of supporting broadband expansion. For other projects, demonstrate how financial support for broadband expansion is building.

Positive willingness-to-pay survey results or positive votes to support proposed projects help ensure successful projects and help demonstrate sufficient community support; 5 points, if there were positive outcomes, or 0 points.

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## IV. Project Focus

In total the project focus scoring category accounts for 30 points.

Describe the focus of the proposed project. How will proposed Phase I activities develop a community broadband plan; how will Phase II activities develop a broadband feasibility study; or how will other activities following Phase II address a specific challenge to broadband expansion? How will proposed activities lead to expanding the availability of broadband?

Applicants may apply to fund proposed activities that must be completed within one year:

- Phase I activities;
- a project that combines Phase I and Phase II activities, and any grant funds for Phase II activities will be contingent upon completion of Phase I activities;
- only Phase II activities, if the application demonstrates that Phase I elements have been completed; or
- other activities beyond Phase II to continue the community broadband planning process, if the application demonstrates that Phase I and Phase II elements have been completed.

Elements of Community Broadband Plans produced by Phase I activities:

- a description of local broadband needs and goals;
- an inventory of the existing infrastructure assets;
- a gap analysis defining the additional broadband infrastructure necessary to meet identified needs and goals;
- an assessment of relevant municipal procedures, policies, rules and ordinances that have the effect of delaying or increasing the cost of broadband infrastructure deployment; and
- a strategy to promote digital inclusion that addresses affordable internet service and equipment, digital literacy and public computer access.

Elements of Broadband Feasibility Studies produced by Phase II activities:

- the community's broadband needs and goals identified in Phase I activities or similar community broadband planning process;
- the inventory and gap analysis of broadband infrastructure conducted during Phase I or similar process;
- the assessment of relevant municipal procedures, policies, rules and ordinances conducted during Phase I or similar process;
- one or more network designs and cost estimates based on input from broadband service providers;
- operating and business models based on input from broadband service providers; and
- information from any other parties that submitted a network design solution during the project.

Following Phase I and Phase II activities, the result of continuing the community broadband planning process may include but isn't limited to any of the following:



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- producing other elements toward a request for proposals to expand broadband,
- building community support toward financial commitments to expand broadband,
- increasing potential subscriptions or take rate, and
- completing elements of applications for other grants.

Applicants are held accountable for funded projects producing compliant plans or studies.<sup>2</sup> Contracts for awarded grants hold applicants accountable for producing required elements or results of their proposed projects. The degree to which the application proposes a project that is likely to lead to broadband expansion is a factor considered in the project focus scoring category, up to 15 points.

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<sup>2</sup> ConnectMaine statute, 35-A M.R.S.A. Ch. 93, §9217, lists the elements required.

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## A. Project Area

Describe the areas covered by the proposed project or included in the proposed activities. Are these areas unserved or underserved?<sup>3</sup> What areas are proposed to be included in eventual broadband expansion?

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/>
- The ConnectMaine Unserved Reports: [www.maine.gov/connectme/communities-resources/Broadbandmapping](http://www.maine.gov/connectme/communities-resources/Broadbandmapping)
- Community Broadband Plans posted on the ConnectMaine website: [www.maine.gov/connectme/grants/planning-grants/awards](http://www.maine.gov/connectme/grants/planning-grants/awards)

## B. Project Collaboration

Describe any collaborations or partnerships for broadband among communities, local or regional nonprofits providing economic development programs, or private-sector stakeholders.

Indicate the number affected communities (including municipalities, local governments or local government authorities, and local nonprofits providing economic development programs) as applicable to this project.

The number of communities collaborating on the proposed project is a factor considered in the project focus scoring category, with greater collaboration scoring higher, up to 15 points.

Number of Communities	Points
>5	15
3-5	10
>1	5

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<sup>3</sup> At least annually, and subject to 30-day comment period, ConnectMaine designates geographic areas that are unserved. Currently areas are designated as unserved where internet service is less than 25mbps/3mbps, and areas are designated as underserved where less than 20% of the households have access to internet service of at least 25mbps/3mbps.

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## **C. Project Engagement**

Describe how local leaders, residents and businesses of affected communities will be educated and engaged in the proposed project.

## **D. Timeline and Milestones**

While planning is an on-going process, for the proposed project for which a planning grant is sought, insert a timeline that lists the milestones and anticipated completion date.

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## V. Project Preparation

In total the project preparation scoring category accounts for 30 points.

Describe the contact made with existing service providers regarding any current or impending plans for expanding broadband infrastructure in the affected community; describe how internet service providers in the region will be engaged in developing the community broadband plan or broadband feasibility study components, or in overcoming the specific challenge to broadband expansion.

Completeness of precertification and the application is a factor considered in the project preparation scoring category. Narratives outline how the project will involve the affected community and internet service providers in the region; 10 points, if those narratives are completed, or 0 points.

To be eligible for planning grants, precertification must be completed and approved. Precertification is a process of engaging stakeholders and gathering information, and which encourages adoption of best practices for community broadband planning. Either complete Section V, or indicate when precertification was previously submitted and skip to Section VI below.

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## A. Community Preparation

A community-driven broadband process relies on broad engagement and support. These activities aim to generate participation in the planning process, build understanding and eventual adoption of broadband, and spur economic support. A community broadband committee is formed with members from varying backgrounds and who bring to bear diverse expertise or roles for the planning process. The community broadband committee must be committed for the duration of community broadband planning; committees that are committed into and through eventual expansion of broadband further ensure community vision and goals are met. List the community broadband committee members, their backgrounds and the roles contributed.

Relevant backgrounds:

- an official representing the affected community, including a local elected official with political will to support broadband;
- an educator who cares about educational opportunities around broadband;
- someone in economic development, including a local business owner, including someone from an industry that's important to the affected community;
- someone who depends on broadband, including a teleworker, including a student, including a healthcare provider; and
- a key individual to any such project, including someone who's integral to the fabric of the affected community.

Members with these backgrounds then provide expertise or fill roles:

- a deep dive into broadband, including someone with information technology expertise, including someone with policy expertise;
- a finance expert, including someone with banking expertise, including someone with public-private partnership experience;
- a communicator, both within the committee and from the committee;
- an energizer, who diversifies and brings together the group; and
- a visionary, who drives the process forward and keeps it upbeat.

Name	Background	Role

Involving relevant backgrounds and essential roles helps ensure successful projects and helps demonstrate adequate preparation; 5 points toward the community support scoring category, if the list is deemed complete, or 0 points.

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The broadband committee is intended to be active in guiding the planning and the efforts that address broadband availability and adoption. This can begin with convening residents, businesses and providers to inform and involve these stakeholders. List attendees to at least one community meeting that engaged the existing internet service providers.

Name of Attendee	Title or Role	Community or Affiliation

The broadband committee creates a vision statement that describes the role of broadband in the community's future. It is created with input from the affected communities and from meetings with internet service providers and other stakeholders. The vision articulates specific priority areas or purposes of broadband in the affected community. Include the community vision as it currently exists or describe how it will be created.

Communication plans help ensure consistent, transparent and inclusive communication that reaches all stakeholders. Describe the communication plan as it current exists or how it will be developed by the broadband committee.

Making a plan for outreach and communication helps ensure successful projects and helps demonstrate adequate preparation; 5 points, if a plan is developed, or 0 points.

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## B. Gaps Identification

Conversations among communities, providers and experts will help determine the location of gaps in broadband availability in the affected communities. List the local or relevant elected officials of the affected communities, who are being engaged in broadband conversations.

Name of Official	Title or Position	Community or Affiliation

List the institutions (such as but not limited to libraries, healthcare centers, schools, business districts and large employers, and governmental facilities) that support expansion of broadband in the affected communities.

Name of Facility	Type of Facility	Community or Patrons

List local and regional nonprofits providing economic development programs, the electricity providers and private-sector stakeholders, who are being engaged for potential collaboration in broadband efforts.

Name of Contact	Title or Affiliation	Community or Affiliation

Describe the areas of the affected communities where broadband service is and isn't available; include the estimated number of premises that have access to broadband service and the estimated number of premises that could be served by expanded broadband infrastructure.<sup>4</sup>

Understanding the extent of broadband service helps ensure successful projects and helps demonstrate adequate preparation; 5 points, if a lack of broadband service is identified, or 0 points.

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<sup>4</sup> Currently, ConnectMaine promotes use of the Maine Speed Test, accessible here: <https://www.mainebroadbandcoalition.org/>

# CONNECTMAINE

## C. Planning Preparation

Preparing for broadband planning and expansion involves identifying entities that may be working to address gaps in broadband availability. List the internet service providers who are currently serving customers in the affect communities, and any internet service providers who might be interested in knowing about broadband efforts.

Name of Contact	Title or Affiliation	Community or Affiliation

Meetings among communities and providers can compare service maps with customer experiences, identify future projects to improve service and better understand the broadband needs of customers. List the occurrence of these meetings, which providers attended and any results.

Date of Meetings	Providers Attending	Actions or Conclusions

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# CONNECTMAINE

## **D. Financial Preparation**

Financial support may come from any number of public and private sources. Building up to that support involves understanding how the internet is currently being used or valued. List the municipal services that residents and businesses can access online; describe how the municipality depends on the internet for its activities; list any municipal services or activities that would benefit from expanded broadband service.

If the municipality has a franchise agreement with a cable provider, describe any expectations for expanding infrastructure and the expiration date.

Describe any tax increment financing or economic development grant for the affected communities in part or in whole.

Describe how this broadband planning process will align with other visioning or planning activities of the affected communities. List any local or regional economic development plans, comprehensive or capital plans, or other similar plans that may or could identify broadband as valuable to the affected communities.

Describe evidence of project benefits to students, remote workers, telehealth patients and support facilities, and small businesses.

Ensuring successful expansion includes addressing the adoption or use of internet service available through digital inclusion efforts and projects focused on closing the digital divide. Digital inclusion may include affordable broadband service including internet subscription subsidies, affordable equipment, digital literacy or computer-skills training including digital education programs for students or adults, and public computer access. List any digital inclusion efforts, other information technology activities, or other adoption and affordability efforts. List community commitments and strategies to increase the subscription rate and maximize the use of the proposed broadband infrastructure, or describe how these strategies will be developed.

Digital inclusion strategies and efforts help ensure benefits from broadband availability are realized with expansion of infrastructure; 10 points, if efforts are underway, or 0 points.

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## VI. Financial Commitment

In total the financial commitment scoring category accounts for 20 points.

Describe whether or not the proposed project would occur without this grant being awarded.

### A. Budget

List all costs of the proposed project and the secured, financial commitments from the applicant and other sources. Itemized costs may be estimated at time of application; applicants who are awarded and receive funds are required to itemize all actual expenses. Include expenses associated with activities proposed to produce the plan or study, or proposed to overcome a specific challenge. Either list the costs covered by the proposed project or list \$0 for costs to be covered by in-kind contributions. Committed dollars cannot consist of in-kind contributions. Committed dollars include all secured matching funds and may include other grant funds awarded for the same project.

Anticipated Expenses	Total (\$)	Committed (\$)	Grant (\$)
<b>Totals</b>			

While many factors affect costs, ConnectMaine may use these guidelines and others to award the very limited grant funds available:

- Activities that the applicant, broadband committees or affected communities have the capability of conducting should be covered by in-kind contributions or committed dollars;
- Most Phase I activities could and should be conducted by broadband committees and community members;
- Only activities that the applicant, broadband committees or affected communities aren't capable of conducting on their own should result in consultant expenses;
- Grant dollars should be reserved to cover expenses associated with other activities that aren't typical for the applicant, broadband committees or affected communities to conduct on their own, or that can't be covered by in-kind contributions;
- Grant dollars for Phase I projects shouldn't exceed \$5,000 for the first community, with added costs but also economies of scale for each additional affected community;
- Phase II projects will likely cost more, and will likely involve consultant expenses, given the engineering designs and business modeling required; however, in-kind contributions for fieldwork, mapping and conducting RFP processes should be explored; and
- Grant dollars for projects following Phase I and Phase II shouldn't exceed \$10,000, because activities target a specific challenge to expanding broadband and the applicant has demonstrated a defined need.

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## B. Grant

Calculate the percentage of total cost covered by the financial commitment, including secured municipally-authorized funds, private funds raised and the financial commitments from any other sources; and the percentage of total cost covered by grant amount requested.

Committed/Cost	Grant/Cost

The amount of financial support provided by members of the affected community is a factor in the financial commitment scoring category, with lower proportions of grant funds scoring higher, up to 20 points.

Grant/Cost	Points
<50%	20
50-74%	11-19
75-99%	1-10
100%	0

# CONNECTMAINE

## Executive Director's Report

28 April 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

Franklin County planning grant report is overdue; all other projects are active, with progress report due by July. Most Connect Kids Now! grants are still in progress, with reports next due mid-June.

Staff developed a grant application for the NECEC Broadband Fund, of which two quarters worth of funds are encumbered. These funds are available for projects through Somerset Economic Development and Greater Franklin County Economic Development.

### Local and regional planning support

Staff has been promoting federal funds that will become available directly to municipalities; while we have the estimated amounts, we don't know when the funds will land.

Communities and counties will need to assess priorities including broadband. Staff started basic conversations with Kennebec County, at least to let them know the funds they are getting, ~\$23 million, can be used for broadband, and that there are several communities actively planning who would like an opportunity to present to the County Commissioners. We are working with Maine Broadband Coalition on the potential of a statewide outreach strategy to talk about the potential of the American Rescue Plan funds.

There's been demand for resources, guidance and expertise support toward community broadband planning that leads to expansion of broadband infrastructure. Staff and interested board members have been aware and periodically strategizing how to prioritize the work to address local needs. With more capacity, there's much more that could be done to be supportive; although, Community Concepts, Island Institute, Northern Forest Center and others have been excellent partners. There's an agenda item to discuss this.

### Operational management

Starboard Leadership has meet with all board and staff members. They have identified common themes, and opportunities for consistency and improvements, on which staff and board will continue to work, and to develop policies and processes going forward.

Project Manager II hire Woodline "Lynn" Gedeon started April 7. She's starting her work by mapping out certain activities of ConnectMaine, including our grants program, scopes of work for the grants verification and validation project and the broadband intelligence project, and including communication and work flows of these activities. Turns out Project Management is a thing, and a very useful thing at that.

# CONNECTMAINE

Staff received about 25 applications for infrastructure grants. Most were incomplete with regard to eligibility information about communications service providers, applicants and project areas, as well as incomplete with regard to maps of the extent of broadband service and project value information requested. Applications for community-driven broadband projects are due at the end of the month; staff shared common errors from this track with those potential applicants.

Stephenie has done extensive work to reach out to applicants to get additional information. We have started our contract with Tilson on Grants Verification and Validation. They are a very good team and are setting up much needed processes to help us organize this effort. Last week alone we had over 10 hours of meetings on grants administration.

## **Mapping and data update**

Responses to the Request for Proposals for a Broadband Intelligence Platform were due April 15. VETRO was the sole respondent, and we have prepared and executed a contract to engage them. This work is a critical part of our grants evaluation, so it will be good to get them up and running. There's an agenda item on this topic.

In the meantime, communications service providers who have more refined data than submitted with their FCC 477 forms have been connected directly with the Sewall Company, which is the current contractor for collecting the required data filings from the industry. The Broadband Availability Map is based on these datasets.

Staff has enlisted professional assistance and used the State Broadband Leaders Network for research toward the designation of broadband service and other broadband models that could include a return on investment by the state. There's an agenda item on the former, and such efforts will continue into strategic planning this year.

## **Federal funding update**

There is a ton of federal activity between the NTIA funding provided in December (webinar tomorrow), the ARP money, and the Biden Administration Jobs Act. Treasury and NTIA have held several meetings with the State Broadband Leaders Network, in which we have provided input as well as directly to Treasury. Timeline for any guidance is May 10<sup>th</sup>.

I sat in on an NGA session on broadband last week, and along with several other state broadband leaders continued to make the case for state block grants with any new funding that Congress is considering.

I continue to sit on the Broadband Connects America Coalition, and have worked with NDIA on comments for the USDA ReConnect Rules around digital inclusion, met with Senate staff who oversees infrastructure, and a variety of other activities around spectrum, shutting down of 2g and 3g networks, and more.

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## **External communications**

The legislature is working diligently on a number of bills from pole attachment to tax credits to reorganizing ConnectMaine and a rather large bond proposal. We have provided testimony on probably 10 bills, including 4 yesterday. I have attended the Broadband Caucus to talk about ConnectMaine programs. That caucus meets every other Wednesday and is hosted by the Maine Broadband Coalition. It's on zoom and open to the public, and sessions are posted on the Maine Broadband Coalition webpage.

Maggie Drummond, Andrew Butcher and I presented at Rural Rise on the partnership we have developed in Maine based on grassroots action to support broadband expansion. Jeremy Hegle of the Kansas Federal Reserve Bank moderated the panel. About 100 people "attended" and it will be posted on the Rural Rise website.

I also presented for GrowSmart with Judy Cooper-East, Land Use Planning Commission, and Kendra Jo Grindle, Island Institute, on broadband and sprawl. That webinar is posted on the GrowSmart and ConnectMaine websites.

I also presented with Anna Reid from Pew Charitable Trust and Michael Butera from Swan's Island on a BDN forum on what is next for Maine. That will be posted on the BDN website.

Susan Corbett and Jeff Letourneau did an encore presentation with the PPH on broadband on April 27<sup>th</sup>. Both sessions are available on the PPH website.

# CONNECTMAINE

## Provider Meeting Notes

12 April 2021

Industry Committee

## Authority Members

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

## Background

Nick Battista and Heather Johnson facilitated a meeting with Maine's internet service providers and consulting community in response to requests at the March board meeting for additional opportunities to have a dialogue between ConnectMaine and the industry. About 40 people attended the meeting, including representatives of many of the providers who regularly engage with ConnectMaine.

## Overarching Themes

- A recognition that while different entities may be approaching broadband in Maine from different directions, the overall trend is heading towards wanting to make sure everybody is connected.
- The timeframe it takes to go from grant award to connected homes matters, particularly for addressing remote work and school.
- Supply chain and workforce will present challenges – modems, fiber, contractors.

## Suggestions and Considerations

- Working with the Congressional staff could be more efficient and optimized, possibly considering more formal hosting of conversations to better understand and coordinate federal activities and share information about what is happening in Maine.
- Strengthen the connection between other agencies and staff – including Maine DOT around empty, accessible conduit as part of bridge construction and the appropriate entities about an impending broadband workforce shortage.
- New York's broadband program was very successful in helping TDS roll out fiber there, 11,000 miles in three years. Touching base with them might be helpful – Scott Rassumusan? Is a good POC. Jeff Nordhouse is no longer there but did brief the ConnectMaine board a few years back.
- Upfront conversations between communities and providers are helpful, and the request from providers is to be engaged early on in the process. ConnectMaine may be able to help play a role in supporting or structuring these conversations.
- Many of the hard to reach areas State only have one provider, and this has implications

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## Topics for Further Discussions

- How does the State avoid paying companies to do work they were already planning to do? The consensus is that unserved is a good proxy.
- How do we have a better conversation about upcoming capital budgets? In particular, where plans extend beyond 12 months and where there may be opportunities to enhance or expand planned buildouts.
- How do we measure what the State gets for providing a capital subsidy? What are the suitable measures of success?