

Proposal Establishment of a Broadband Committee

Gentlemen,

I appreciate the opportunity to make this presentation.

I am here today asking the Select Board to approve the establishment of an ad hoc residents committee for the purpose of researching expansion and improvement of broadband throughout our community.

My name is Peter Gabbe. My wife and I have owned property on Damariscotta Lake in Nobleboro for 21 years. In 2008 we undertook a construction project to convert our cottage into a family home/camp and made it our permanent residence in 2015. In fact, I commuted weekly to my office in New York for 3 ½ years so that we could enjoy the peaceful life in Maine prior to my retirement.

Being in a business that required 24 hour worldwide communication, we installed the highest speed internet option (3000 bps) available through Tidewater Telecom - as dial up was not a viable solution and none of the cable companies would bring service to our remote location on the peninsula at the end of East Neck Rd. In 2016, after much frustration, Tidewater proposed making us a “beta site” for a bonded line (2x 3000 bps). While better than our former service, it was/is unreliable due to latent instability and bandwidth pressure from ever increasing content volume. In 2018, I began a “crusade” to get Tidewater to bring Fiber to our and our neighbor’s homes and as we speak, it is in fact finally being installed. My frustration is also the frustration of our neighbors – one of whom actually had to go to the library on a regular basis to download documents and documentary film as his computer would crash or generate download times that were totally untenable

. I could further share the story of Marty Welt on West Neck Rd. a retiree from the technology industry who suffered the same frustration in pushing to get high speed at his home or the case of Camp Kieve who spent significant dollars to obtain fiber at its campus.

So why do I share these stories?

We have a need to improve and expand broadband throughout our community.

Over the last several years we have seen the advent of:

- Tele-medicine – this is a medical care access and transportation alternative needed for our entire population, particularly the elderly.
- Remote/Virtual classrooms are need generated (i.e. Pandemic, mobility issues)
- Remote learning – Many workforce training programs for adults changing careers or upgrading skills are online today.
- Remote/telecommuting employment – the ability of innovative businesses to upload data and products (scientific data, architectural & engineering plans) to their global staff, partners and customers means that rural areas can compete for new jobs with urban areas. Consider the impact on population growth, home values and tax revenue. We become more of a family friendly community.
- Expansion of technology into home based businesses – internet access has become a necessity for purchasing, supply chain management, cost control and sales opportunities.
- Business Enterprise use (I.e. Kieve and Ned Steinberger Inc.)- Has allowed these companies to reach well beyond local borders for marketing and programming, bringing additional revenue to the town.

While there are communities that have made this a local government issue, it is still primarily a private industry matter and rural areas do not generate the ROI (return on investment) found in urban areas, without creating a financial burden for subscribers that cannot be born or justified. Yet the state government - through the ConnectME Authority, is leveraging public dollars and private investment to speed up the improvement of broadband around the state.

After a spontaneous discussion amongst some members of the town’s Comprehensive Plan Update Committee, several of us agreed that the timeline for presentation of a broadband initiative as a Comprehensive Plan Strategy proposal; review by the selectmen; presentation to the town as part of the Comprehensive Plan update; voter approval; and then

consideration by an appropriate town committee, was just too long. However, even our approach to accelerate the process will take time and a public committee is almost a necessity now with any state or federal funding application, thus the desire to move forward now.

After further discussion, some of us agreed to look into establishing a residents investigative Broadband Committee. The committee of not less than 5-10 residents representing the different areas and age groups within our community would include the following interested parties.

- Parent(s) of school age children
- Educator familiar with the challenges of remote learning
- Health care specialist familiar with Tele-health delivery
- Resident with experience in related technology
- Remote worker dependent on internet for business
- Staff member from Kieve or other business using the internet for community outreach
- Select Board member for oversight and advisory support

Two of us –Marty Welt and I) have already agreed to spearhead the effort.

Initially, the committee would be charged with:

- Establishing clear goals for measuring both momentum and success
- Developing clarity as to the level of existing coverage – both basic internet and high speed
- Determining funding options for both planning and execution
- Learning from our neighboring communities (Bremen, Waldoboro, Jefferson, Newcastle, etc.) and working with the LC Regional Planning Commission.

Twenty years ago, cell phone service was spotty in Nobleboro. Today, coverage is robust and we generally depend on our cell phones for instantaneous connectivity. High speed broadband is no longer a frontier. Two decades later it too is becoming a basic infrastructure utility for many forms of communication.

As currently advertised by BroadBandNow.com the four most popular internet providers servicing Nobleboro are Spectrum, Viasat, HughesNet and Tidewater. While the first three state they are 100% available in 04555, the reality is that either due to cost- including potentially line installation or satellite angle, rural availability is questionable. Tidewater on the other hand acknowledges that internet is only available in 87.2% of our zip code and this reference is to internet service, not necessarily high speed.

As stated early on in this presentation, this is still a private industry matter in a large percentage of the United States. We can however work with our private service suppliers to help move this process along through cooperation and potentially with state or federal grant monies. We cannot afford to fall behind other municipalities in our region seeking the same state and federal support.

We are respectfully asking our Select Board to appoint an Ad Hoc committee to be called “The Nobleboro Broadband Research Committee”

Respectfully Submitted,

Peter Gabbe
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