

Broadband Committee Meeting
May 8, 2019

Present:

Broadband Committee Members: Barry Cohen, Charles Gallanter, Una Lee, Charlotte Reber, Rob Rodriguez, Robin Story

Charles called the meeting to order 6:30 PM.

The committee discussed the pros and cons of co-op versus committing to a single company to provide fiber to Johnson. Charles said he talked to Stowe Cable, who said that they would not be the fiber provider for Johnson, since MC Fiber already is set to move into the area.

Una presented a draft of the survey to be sent to all Johnson residents to gather information on their current internet connectivity. Several of the questions were modified for clarity and intent.

Una says she can set the survey up to be filled out electronically and anonymously through the service Jotforms. Charles raised the question of how to survey people who do not currently have internet access if the form is only accessible through internet, and suggested the possibility of going door to door to survey people. Robin suggested having a booth at Tuesday Night Live where Johnson residents could fill out the survey on an iPad.

Una will send a finalized copy of the survey to the Committee for proofreading and review, then prepare the Jotforms electronic version which will be posted in Front Porch Forum. Robin will create an iPad-based version of the survey for use later.

Robin provided an update on potential funding sources. Johnson is effectively not eligible for any grants involving internet access because Comcast's current level of service disqualifies the town. The second funding option, bonds, would require money for lawyers to discuss options.

Barry asked whether the Committee needs to update its current network maps of Johnson and asked how we are defining "underserved" households. He showed on the map that the Committee has a fairly clear idea of where Comcast provides service, but no actual map of their territory.

Charles asked whether it would be possible to get a map that indicates which Johnson residents currently have DSL service. Barry said he wasn't sure.

Charlotte asked which type of area was lowest on MC Fiber's priority list, areas of low residency or areas of competition with Comcast (such as the village). Rob said it would be areas of competition with Comcast.

Charles said that Comcast has no intention of further expanding in Johnson because it's not worth it financially.

Robin said that MC Fiber or a co-op / municipal-owned fiber network are the two main options at this point. Charles pose the question of whether this means the Committee should investigate more options, or start looking in more detail at the two we have. Robin advised waiting to see whether the results of the survey indicate any strong preference amongst Johnson residents with regard to a municipal fiber district.

Rob brought up his independent efforts to get fiber service on French Hill through MC Fiber with enough support from his neighbors. If it moves forward, this could be a good pilot project to see how MC Fiber works out as a fiber provider for Johnson.

Rob also said that after the previous Committee meeting, MC Fiber did put together a proposal for providing fiber to all of Johnson. However, they require signing an NDA in order to read it, so he can't discuss its contents. He offered to provide the link to any Committee members willing to sign the NDA who wanted to read it.

Charles said that Una's survey being sent out over Front Porch Forum would be the next step for the Committee.

Charles adjourned the meeting at 8:00 PM.