

BROADBAND COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
Johnson Municipal Building
Monday, October 28, 2019

Present:

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

1. *Call to Order*

Charles called the meeting to order 7:00 PM.

2. *Survey Results*

Robin and Una met previously and worked together to translate the results from the survey into a spreadsheet with visual graphs of the results. They presented copies of this draft of the report to the committee.

Some minor corrections were identified to be made to the draft of the survey results. Una will make the corrections in time for the select board meeting on Monday, November 4th. Una also urged the rest of the committee members to take the survey themselves if they had not.

Robin said that it was worth pointing out to the selectboard that not having broadband access decreases home value. Conversely, having broadband access in Johnson residences has the potential to raise home prices up.

Barry noted that the survey results indicate Johnson residents are neutral on the subject of community control. Robin noted that on the other hand there was great interest in net neutrality and privacy. Una asked how it would be possible for the committee to make a recommendation that addresses both those needs.

Rob asked how community control of a municipal fiber district could guarantee net neutrality and privacy in since the backhaul could still violate these terms. Robin said that backhaul is in less of a position than a corporate ISP.

Barry asked what privacy meant in the context of broadband. Robin explained that an ISP such as Comcast collects and sells its users data, and can also hand over personal data to the government without need for a subpoena. Barry said that some people such as himself want security but not privacy, and that the survey question regarding the two issues lumps them together, making it impossible for the committee to see the difference based on the responses. Una said that privacy by design is the ideal model for tech companies going forward.

3. *Discussion of Municipal Fiber District*

Charles asked for a head count from the committee of those in favor of municipal fiber. Charlotte, Robin, and Una indicated their support. Rob asked how this would work, whether the work would be owned by the town or contracted out. Robin said that it didn't matter which way it was done as long as it was done. Rob said that he was okay with contracting out but not as part of a municipal fiber plan.

Robin noted that in the survey, Comcast actually has fairly good satisfaction results, but that it doesn't mean the rest of the data should be thrown out. She also noted that Comcast was notorious for raising its rates. If Johnson were to go with municipal fiber, Johnson residents would have recourse in the event of price hikes by being able to complain directly to the select board. The select board could then choose not to raise rates.

Charles said he had no problem with a municipal district. Rob said he was not in favor of a forming a multi-town district because it would be more residents to deal with and more Comcast-controlled areas to compete with. For example, Hyde Park has a larger Comcast service area, whereas Johnson's is relatively small.

Charles said that Johnson could make the loan to the provider conditional on them supplying Johnson to the last mile. He also noted that the town of Fletcher is funding to the last mile, and so that Johnson would not be the first to do so.

Una noted that five survey respondents said in the comments that they would be interested in investing in Johnson fiber.

Charles said that Kingdom Fiber was having an informational meeting in Hyde Park on November 12th that the committee members could attend to learn more about them as a provider option. He also said that Kingdom Fiber had indicated an interest in providing wireless internet access as well. Since this is not fiber it does not technically fit the needs of the fiber committee, but it could be an alternative worth looking into if affordability outweighs speed for some Johnson residents.

Robin said that the Electric Co-op could potentially operate as the municipal fiber for Johnson, but are unable to do so currently as both their charter and state laws prevent them from shifting into being an ISP. However, her understanding is that this law could well be overturned in 2020 and that the Co-op would be interested in making this shift if that were to happen.

Rob noted that even if Johnson were to form a municipal fiber district, this would not prevent other companies such as MC Fiber from moving into Johnson. Robin agreed, but that didn't mean the committee should abandon muni fiber and simply hand Johnson over to a corporation because there is no guarantee MC Fiber's pricing wouldn't change.

4. Committee's Recommendation to Johnson Selectboard

Una noted that there seemed to be a committee consensus on going with municipal fiber, even if a provider had yet to be decided on. Charlotte suggested the committee's primary recommendation to the selectboard could be a municipal fiber district, with the secondary

recommendation being which ISP to go with. Robin discarded Comcast since they do not provide fiber and because they wouldn't agree to work with muni fiber, and discarded Consolidated because of their poor ratings on the survey. Charles listed MC Fiber, Kingdom Fiber, and the Electric Co-op as the three remaining viable options for ISP.

The committee nominated Robin to present these options to the town selectboard on the November 4th meeting, each with a few pros and cons identified by the committee. The pros and cons would be somewhat limited as the Kingdom Fiber informational meeting is not until November 12th, and the Electric Co-op is not currently an option.

5. Minutes from previous meeting

The minutes from the previous meeting on July 24th were approved with minor corrections for clarity.