

Broadband Committee Meeting  
March 25, 2019

**Present:**

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

Others: Leslie Nulty, Tim Nulty, Jacob Vandorn, Colin Vandorn

Charles called the meeting to order at 10:40 AM.

Charles asked Leslie Nulty and Tim Nulty of Mansfield Community Fiber to explain what MCF could provide to Johnson in terms of fiber.

Tim explained that he and Rob had met previously and discussed the possibility of doing a pilot fiber project for one of two possible areas in Johnson. Tim said that the fiber could be run along the existing power poles. Either Vermont Electric Coop or Green Mountain Power poles would be usable for fiber, but MCF would prefer to use the VEC poles since they have fewer lines currently on them. MCF also does not want to compete with Comcast, meaning they will try to avoid running fiber through Comcast areas. MC Fiber buys its cable wholesale through Stowe Cable. Stowe Cable has two providers, MCF only has one. MCF does not use the VEC's fiber.

Robin asked if Hyde Park hypothetically wanted MCF to provide them fiber, would it go through Stowe? Tim says they would go wherever Comcast isn't. In terms of customer adoption, MCF typically sees 35-40% penetration immediately which rises to 65-70% over the next three years in normal territory. But in Comcast territory, it's as low as 15%. Una asked if they know what reasons people might drop Comcast for fiber. Tim says usually it's just a dislike for Comcast as a company, not for price reason. Leslie explained that how fast they can get people to buy in is critical to a small company like MCF, so Comcast areas are simply not worth it financially.

Barry asked whether MCF's success was tied to Stowe Cable and whether MCF had a contract with them. Leslie and Tim explained that MCF buys the fiber from Stowe Cable wholesale. Barry asked whether Stowe Cable had the capacity to take on a thousand new customers. Leslie explained that fiber by nature has a huge capacity, far larger than Johnson would affect, and furthermore is very easily scalable at the endpoints by simply adding additional boxes at the start point. Furthermore, if scaling up became necessary, it would be both quick and cheap for MCF and Stowe Cable to do. Tim further elaborated that a single strand of fiber's capacity for transmitting information is effectively infinite.

Leslie raised a point of order that company contract specifics should not be discussed during public meetings. Charles said that the meeting would need to move into an executive session to continue that discussion.

Barry expressed concern with MCF's reliance on Stowe Cable, asked who would be on the hook in case of a technical failure. Leslie said it would be MCF.

Charles explained that the Committee has no short-term goals yet, but has a long-term goal of getting 100% of Johnson homes with fiber.

Robin asked about the potential of getting USDA broadband credits for this project. Tim said it was not likely and Charles said Johnson is ineligible for such credits.

Robin noted that Johnson's main advantage going into this project is the presence of the Vermont Electric Coop. Tim agreed.

Tim said that MCF needs 6 customers per mile in order to for it to be financially viable for them to run fiber. The whole of Vermont (not accounting for larger urban areas) is 12 customers per mile.

Robin asked about infrastructure and what crew would set up the fiber. Tim and Leslie said they contract Crossbow Communications (spelling?) who they've worked with in the past.

Robin asked about funding and how the town could contribute to this. Tim said it used to be impossible for fiber companies to get funding but now there are options.

Robin asked about VEC's existing fiber lines. Charles said this fiber only runs from a substation to their headquarters and isn't usable for the Committee's purposes.

Charles asked about Tim and Leslie's succession plans for MCF, whether MCF would still be around by the time the Johnson fiber project was finished. Tim said yes.

Robin said that Una is preparing a survey to give to Johnson residents with regard to the fiber project, and do Tim or Leslie have any questions they would suggest we put on it? Tim asks that we ask about current broadband service, since MCF prefers not to compete with Comcast if possible. Robin pointed out that even in downtown Johnson, where Comcast provides service, the population is dense enough that MCF would likely still get their 6 customers per mile. Tim said possibly. Leslie suggested we keep the discussion to broad strokes for now.

Leslie asked what the Committee's mandate and intention is. Charles and Robin explained that the Broadband Committee was formed as a grassroots initiative but its decisions are made by committee. Tim asked if we brought a good plan to the town, would it be adopted? Charles said yes.

Tim said that Fletcher, Vermont is going through a similar process at the moment and their main concern is funding.

Charles moved for the committee to go into executive session.