

NEK Broadband

Governing Board Newsletter

August 31, 2020

Activity & Progress Report

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RDOF Partnership

After countless meetings, discussions, and thorough consideration, NEK Broadband is excited to announce that we have engaged in a partnership with Tilson, VELCO, and several others to apply to the RDOF funding opportunity. Our focus is on obtaining assets for the community that they can utilize long-term as leverage to influence how and where broadband is delivered within the NEK region. We are excited to pursue this opportunity and believe that Tilson, VELCO, et al are well-positioned to help us realize our mission to bring quality broadband services to the entire NEK region. There are strict federal requirements around confidentiality with respect to the RDOF auction process to prevent collusion. As a result, we are extremely limited in what we will be able to share about how this project is progressing until after the auction process is complete.

Fundraising

We've successfully secured over \$280,000 in funding, through grants awarded directly to us or in partnership with NVDA! We are thrilled to have been so successful in such a short amount of time, and are grateful that we have resources to put the NEK Broadband effort on a solid foundation.



FY20 Budget Approval.

The Finance Committee, in support of the planned priorities for the year, worked hard to quickly finalize a [FY20 budget](#) which the Governing Board approved during our August 13 meeting. A substantial portion of the budget has been allocated for hiring central staff to help us push our work forward more quickly and effectively. However the bulk of the budget has been allocated for consultants that are developing our next feasibility study and business plan (see the Feasibility Study section below), as well as surveying some of our existing assets to determine what short-term projects might be most effective for us to pursue. See the Hiring/ Consultants section below for more details on immediate expenditures outside of the Feasibility Study.

Initial Policies & Procedures drafted & adopted

A variety of foundational but important policies have been drafted by the Finance and Executive Committees and approved by the Governing Board. Some of these include:

- Temporary Spending Procedures
- Accounting, Auditing and Reporting Policy
- Cash Receipts Petty Cash Returned Check Policy
- Fraud Prevention Policy
- Consent Agenda Policy
- Credit Card Policy


Community Support for the CRF Funding rollout

The Department of Public Service (DPS) rolled out both the Line Extension Customer Assistance Program (LECAP) and the Get Vermonters Connected Now Initiative (GVCNI) in August. NEK Broadband has been working hard to understand how to best support the community with both initiatives.

LECAP

NEK Broadband (in collaboration with the NEK Collaborative) ran a webinar to both publicize the LECAP program and also help answer questions for interested citizens which was well attended and successful. The webinar was [recorded](#) (password mLRBR2d*). A short ["how-to" document](#) was also created from this effort. We also leveraged one of the consultants we hired to produce updated maps and a cross-referenced list of priority addresses that should be eligible for the program. Governing Board members contacted their town selectboards to share this information in the hopes that we could help maximize the effectiveness of the program for communities.

GVCNI



The intent of this program was that CUDs would be able to evaluate proposals and provide input on behalf of the community, primarily through objecting to applications that appeared in conflict with the communities' wishes. Due to the extremely short turnaround time for these programs, the information DPS was able to provide has proven to be extremely minimal (essentially a list of towns that would be served by each proposal and the general technology intended to be deployed). Given this reality, the Executive Committee did not see an opportunity to really lean in with the GVCNI. Instead, we focused on LECAP and turning our attention to our longer-term efforts and putting ourselves on a solid foundation organizationally.

Initiation of the Feasibility Study & Business Plan Project

The Executive Committee selected the Tilson proposal to perform our feasibility study, and a kickoff meeting was held at the beginning of August. The chair and vice-chair have been working closely with Tilson, and the Executive Committee is receiving updates every other week on progress. Currently the focus is on deploying a take-rate survey to help us understand more accurately what the market potential actually is, and on assembling and deploying a team to update map data and understand variables like make-ready costs and middle-mile deployment.

Hiring/ Consultants

We are extremely excited to have the opportunity to work with two extremely talented folks.

[Christine Halquist](#) has been hired as a consulting Project Manager to help us coordinate daily work and drive forward the important and urgent work in a more effective and efficient manner than the volunteer-based Executive Committee has the capacity for. Christine brings years of experience and deep domain knowledge to the table. Already her efforts have been invaluable in terms of driving partnership conversations forward, following up on funding requirements, and starting the hiring process for a clerk and bookkeeper.

[Brian Webster](#) has been hired as a technical consultant to help us better understand our vertical assets. Brian has already helped us make the LECAP outreach more successful by producing updated cable service maps and cross-referenced priority addresses. He is also helping to identify potential high-value, short-term project candidates.