

Selectboard Minutes
September 6, 2017

Meeting opened at 3:00pm

Present: David DiNicola, Chair; Judith Hoag; Albert Sirard
Duane Pease, Town Administrator

Bill Ennen and Ed Donnelly representing MBI were also present.

Dave welcomed Bill and Ed and gave a brief recap of Middlefield's quest for high speed internet to date. The Communication Committee (CC) had recommended a wireless system that would not cost the tax payers any of their dollars as the cost would be under the MBI grant allotment. When the bids for the tower came in way over the estimated cost the CC looked to use a guyed tower. This proposal raised some zoning issues as the by-laws prohibit guyed towers. If the town were to pursue this as a By-Right legal issues could be raised and additional costs incurred by the Town. The Town needs a clear path to obtaining high speed internet.

Bill Ennin said he is the grant manager and liaison to the 44 towns that do not have high speed internet. Currently, there are 8 towns that do not have a path forward, including Middlefield. A RFI (Request for Information) will be issued some time this fall to hopefully aid these towns. This will require less than the 96% coverage initially specified by MBI.

Ed said that MBI is partnering with towns and the last RFP was directed at established providers and the RFI will be less rigid, broader and look for "out of the box" solutions. This will enable towns to see what they can do with the available dollars and get the best fit for the towns.

Crocker Communications has partnered with Fijuitsu Corp. to design, build own and operate systems. Crocker is a local company and is the main Middle Mile provider for MBI. They have presented plans that would cost \$45/month for 12/3 service, \$70/month for 25/3 service and an additional \$20/month for voice service. These charges are for every house that Crocker goes by whether they took the service or not. These are guaranteed costs for the life of the 15 year contract. Other issues for the towns would be legal compliance, obtaining a home rule petition and funding if a Prop 21/2 override is necessary.

Dave said if the MBI grant can only do 30% of the town, it would not be passed by the voters. Bill said the procurement costs would go down as the percentage number went down. The Crocker design costs would come out of the MBI allotment.

Al questioned who would help the Selectboard with a 15 year contract? Ed said to look at items that jumped out and have the contract checked by Town Counsel. Bill noted that he has contracts that can help "dig out" issues for the board to review. Ed said there

would be 2 phases: Construction and Operation and MBI would be looking to minimize the risk at each step.

Judy asked if the 8 remaining towns did join for this privately owned system, what the town's obligation is if it decides to withdraw. Answer was zero. Ed said the RFI that will be put out will find out who is serious in providing a service and hopefully some of the smaller, more innovative companies will respond.

Marin Laurel-Paine said that Verizon has fiber coming into town on Becket Road but bill advised Verizon has no interest in providing fiber service to anyone in this area.

Howard Knickerbocker asked Ed what his position on wireless was, Ed said he had no position and you have to choose the best path for the town. Howard also questioned the wireless/hybrid system in Royalston and was told that only 8 buildings have fiber and the rest of the town has wireless coverage.

There was continued discussion on systems, neighboring towns providing coverage to adjacent towns where possible. Sherri Venditti questioned the speed of wireless and Bill advised that Warwick's speed exceeds the 25/3 mandated and serves all but on residence in town,

Bill also said that he hopes utilities like Westfield Gas & Electric and Holyoke Gas & Electric would be interested in responding to the RFI.

Board thanked Bill and Ed for attending the meeting.

Meeting continued for a short time and discussion was covered debt authorization, Zoning By-Law exemption, tower options, ect.

Judy felt the Board should offer 3 options to the voters: fiber, wireless and hybrid systems.

Judy motioned to adjourn, Dave 2nd; vote 3-0 and meeting adjourned at 4:55pm

Minutes respectively submitted by:

Duane Pease, Town Administrator

Minutes accepted with/without changes by:

David DiNicola, Chair

Judith Hoag

Albert Sirard

