



WIREDWEST CHARGES THAT MBI ACTION IGNORES THE WILL OF THE TOWNS

Northampton, December 4 – WiredWest, the cooperative of towns in western Mass. working together to build and operate a regional fiber-optic broadband network, has reacted strongly to the December 1st statement by the Massachusetts Broadband Institute denying funding to the WiredWest project. WiredWest issued a point-by-point rebuttal (attached) of that statement as being based on distortions, unsubstantiated claims and innuendo in its criticism of WiredWest’s plan for the network.

“WiredWest has been the driving force in moving the last mile project forward,” said Monica Webb, Chair of WiredWest, “starting with having our towns form Municipal Lighting Plants (MLPs), incorporating the organization, conducting market research, procuring early high level cost estimates and network design, completing financial modeling, signing up 7,000 subscribers, helping 24 towns pass bond authorizations, and putting together an exhaustively-vetted business plan and Operating Agreement. And our citizens are impatient to make this happen. We need the state to stop throwing up unnecessary roadblocks.”

The Operating Agreement is intended to govern WiredWest going forward and to provide for ownership of the network by the towns. Steve Nelson, Legal/Governance chair of WiredWest, noted that the Agreement is the product of an extensive interactive process with WiredWest town representatives, town officials and town counsels, town broadband committees and other interested parties. “Just when the Agreement was reaching its final form with an anticipated signing in January, MBI stepped in to block its implementation,” Nelson said. “MBI is trying to control the project, despite the towns providing nearly 2/3 of the funding and repeatedly stating that this is the approach they want to take.”

Jim Drawe, Vice Chair and Finance Chair of WiredWest, has conducted a thorough and intensive process in leading the development of WiredWest’s financial plan. “We began with work done by several MBI consultants and have continually refined it as we got input from town finance committees, experts and others in the region.” Recently WiredWest contracted with CTC, the leading consultancy in the country on municipal broadband networks, to go through WiredWest’s financial model with a fine tooth comb. “CTC suggested several changes which we adopted and which have made the plan even stronger,” Drawe said. The report issued by CTC concluded: “The WiredWest financial model has been well designed and is a reasonable portrayal of its business.” The full report is available at wiredwest.net/2015/12/02/ctc.

The WiredWest Board of Directors, with a representative from each of its member towns, is holding a special meeting to consider what actions it will take, on Saturday, December 5 at 9:30 in the Old Courthouse, 99 Main Street in Northampton.

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Contact: Steve Nelson / 413-623-2221 / steve@wiredwest.net
Monica Webb / 413-717-0703 / monica@wiredwest.net