

**TOWN OF WALPOLE
BROADBAND COMMITTEE
PUBLIC INFORMATIONAL MEETING
OCTOBER 30, 2019**

Committee Members Present:

Paul Looney (Chair), Bob Anderson, Dennis Marcom, Steve Grenier, Dick Hill, Rod Bouchard

Selectboard Representative: Peggy Pschirrer

CALL TO ORDER: Mr. Looney called this Broadband Committee Public Informational Meeting to order at 6:30 PM in the Walpole Town Hall.

Mrs. Pschirrer thanked everybody for coming. They are present to talk about Broadband services in Walpole. Mr. Looney came to the Selectboard about three years ago and urged them to do something. At that time they talked about it because they knew it was needed but the State had passed SB 170 that is now RSA 33 which allows towns to Bond for getting Broadband services. That is when she called Mr. Looney and said the Selectboard was ready and asked if he would be willing to be on a committee. This committee has been working since May. They are all interested in having better service. They need to know how many poorly served properties there are in Town. This is an Informational Meeting but in the future there will be a Public Hearing as that will be necessary before the Annual Town Meeting vote.

Mr. Looney talked about the definition of Broadband. About 58% of Cheshire County does not have Broadband service. A map was displayed indicating properties in Town that are “Underserved – (1729)” and “Served – (271)”. Providers will not get to all the homes in Walpole. Trees and hills are issues that make it difficult. Walpole is just one of approximately 20 towns in NH now looking at bonding for the broadband process. Other towns provided information to Walpole that helped them get started. If you do not have good internet service at your home you might have trouble selling it regardless of the dollar value. A better internet service will improve economic development for small businesses. There is some thought it will help children in school and people who are homebound. It will improve the reliability of the network in Town. Copper wiring is susceptible to problems they have had with some providers.

The first part of this process was to contact providers and request information – Comcast and Consolidated were contacted in August. In early October the Selectboard voted to send Request For Proposals (RFPs) to seven (7) vendors. They are to be back on November 7th.

Mr. Looney explained how Chesterfield decided to proceed. They will do a Bond for \$2,000,000 and Consolidated will put in \$2,500,000. The Bond will be paid by Consolidated not the Town. There is no cost to the taxpayer but there will be fees paid to the provider for the service. In Chesterfield the user will pay \$10/month surcharge to their provider to help pay for the Bond. Mrs. Pschirrer mentioned the Consolidated contract with Dublin raised their monthly fee to \$11.50. Mr. Looney advised Walpole may or may not go with Consolidated as they are waiting for the RFPs to come in.

A resident on Stevens Lane asked about the installation fee to a user’s house. Mr. Grenier explained it is covered from the telephone pole (their phone line) on the main road up to the first 150-feet. An underground service user will have to pay extra. This is what Chesterfield negotiated.

Several residents in attendance raised questions on paying the Bond, monthly surcharges, infrastructure ownership, completion of agreement, etc. Mr. Grenier explained this is just what Chesterfield negotiated. We will not know the exact terms of the contract until after the RFPs have been reviewed. Walpole will

have an opportunity to negotiate after a decision is made on their provider. Mr. Looney said they need to be assured this will not go away. What will happen if the company goes bankrupt or is sold? Mr. Bouchard noted contractual issues will need to be worked out.

Mr. Grenier explained this is a municipal Bond that does not effect a town's ability to bond for capital expense items.

Mr. Looney talked about the public benefit. Mr. Bouchard talked about the economic benefits. We have to demonstrate there is a public benefit to apply for the \$2,000,000 Bond. There was a study of house sales done between 2014 and 2018 across the United States. They were able to quantify a value of houses with Broadband Speed Available as follows: Less than 25Mbps (1148 locations) at 2.50% - Total Property Value Change \$6,928,581; 25 to 50 Mbps (581 locations) at 0.6% - Total Property Value Change \$8,629,930; 50 Mbps up to 100 (271 locations) at 0.6% - Total Property Value Change \$9,740,418; and 100 Mbps and higher (54 locations) were not applicable. This has a significant value change on properties. Looking at City-Data.com these estimates are based on a Median home Value of \$241,414.42 in Walpole and North Walpole. If they have a provider who will provide high speed internet across the Town the public benefit of that is about \$6,900.00. This is all information based on what they received from Consolidated Communications. Comcast did not respond. They estimated that 72% of the homes in Walpole have an internet speed of 50 Mbps. Only 560 households in Walpole would see a benefit from a higher speed. They are feeling comfortable with the public benefit.

Mr. Dalessio asked if it is the selling value of the homes rather than the assessed value. Mr. Looney replied they will do a calculation to justify the value for the Bond. Mr. Bouchard said this is becoming more important.

Mr. Looney said if all goes well they will evaluate the proposals and come back to talk to the Selectboard. Ultimately in March there is the Town Meeting. They have a lot of work to be done with the Bonding. The cost is covered within the Bond itself.

All of Chesterfield will have fiber-optic. They started doing this project in July. The population in Chesterfield is comparable with Walpole. Mrs. Pschirrer reported that Chesterfield has 90 miles of road while Walpole has 70 miles of road.

Kit Bowry asked who owns the poles. Mrs. Pschirrer replied it is Consolidated; formerly FairPoint. Mr. Marcom said Consolidated would be involved in the proposal but they may not take advantage of that.

Mrs. Pschirrer advised the Committee sent a request for an RFP for fiber-optic to seven companies: ARGENT Cable; Otelco (in Maine – they have responded that they cannot help Walpole as they are already too busy); Consolidated; Comcast; WiFi; Matrix; and First Light. The Selectboard spoke to Senator Jay Kahn about companies who have not responded. Specifically it is Comcast. He has now introduced RSA 33 this session. It states that anyone who is asked for information that is required should respond within two months. At this time there is no penalty for not responding.

The Surveys "Internet Usage" were available and distributed at this meeting. They are on the Town's web-site. Kit Bowry asked how she is supposed to respond to the Survey when she does not get any internet service. There is no space for a reply. Mr. Marcom advised on the first page under comments she can note she does not have any service.

Mr. Francis advised that DSL is available at certain junctions. That is the case on Ramsay Hill Road. Mr. Bouchard said Rural Broadband is that some people have it and some do not.

Mr. Ryan Barnes asked if 20 towns are going to string out this process. Mr. Hill advised that Chesterfield was the first and after that everybody wanted to do the same thing. Walpole is trying to move as quickly as they can. Westmoreland and Dublin are ahead of Walpole. A problem is the financing. We are now allowed to have a non-taxable Bond.

Mr. Anderson read the Summary page of Walpole Broadband Advisory Committee’s “Making Walpole a Connected Community” as presented to the Walpole Selectboard in October 2019. There is nothing that says Walpole will get all fiber as it might be a blend. We will hope for fiber. Vendors will tell us what they are willing to do. We have shown a public benefit that it will pay for more expensive options.

- Plan provides Broadband Internet to underserved in Walpole;
- High Speed – True Broadband Speeds
(25 Mbps Down 3 Mbps Up)
- High Reliability;
- Estimated Bond of \$2.0M for 20 years;
Bond payments paid & guaranteed by Provider;
NO TAXPAYER MONEY – NO TAX INCREASE;
Bond paid for by Infrastructure Fee: \$10 max/month;
BOND PAID OFF BY VENDORS.

We will try to protect ourselves with the contract. Keep in mind that all the towns have to go before their voters in March. Mrs. Pschirrer stated there will have to be a Public Hearing on the Bond.

Mr. Barnes pointed out that from the turn-out at this meeting is there something he can do to get the word out. Mrs. Pschirrer felt they will have to hand-out flyers at the Post Office and the Recycling Center.

Broadband Committee Meetings: Mr. Looney advised that Broadband Committee meetings are held every Wednesday at 6:30 pm at the Town Hall. After the RFPs are received the members will review them and then make a recommendation to the Selectboard. Meeting Minutes are on the web-site. They appreciate the Clarion space. This meeting was posted on the Walpoleon.

They appreciate everybody coming to this meeting. A resident thanked the Broadband Committee for all their work.

There were approximately sixteen people in attendance.

ADJOURNMENT: Mr. Looney adjourned this Informational Meeting at 7:35 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Regina Borden, Recording Secretary

(**Note:** These are unapproved Minutes. Corrections will be found in the next Broadband Committee meeting.)