

Notes from the Readfield broadband committee meeting April 7, 2021

<https://www.readfieldmaine.org/broadband-internet-committee>

Attendees: Kathryn Woodsum, Eric Falconer, Eric Dyer, Dan Wells and Brian Tarbuck;



Absent: Patrick McCormick, Lee Sandler

The meeting was called to order at 1830.

At 1834 on a motion by Woodsum, seconded by Falconer the minutes of March 17, 2021 were unanimously approved.

18:36 Dyer shared the town of Readfield's website for the Broadband Internet Committee. Dyer suggested someone from the Committee could take over if they wanted to. Dyer will add the notes that Woodsum writes for the Readfield Messenger to the website. The site includes a calendar for the committee which appears on the town's homepage with all of the other events that the town schedules. The site includes agendas for upcoming meetings and minutes from past meetings.

18:45 Woodsum provided an update for the Western Kennebec Lakes Community Broadband Association ([WKLKBA](#)) effort. That group has been meeting regularly. Fayette was the initial driver about 2.5 years ago. Readfield has signed on to this effort for three evolutions. Once the first report was returned it was clear that Readfield had good digital subscriber line (phone based copper aka DSL) and cable internet coverage compared to the other members of WKLKBA. Each town in WKLKBA is really different. Members were trying to figure out what to do. Readfield had decided that that 'fiber to the home' was its best option as it was the most advanced community in terms of internet buildout. Other towns didn't have the same clarity of direction. Three weeks ago the group decided, finally, that 'fiber to the home' was what the WKLKBA wanted to do as well.

Woodsum explained that WKLKBA wanted to use the latest federal money coming to the towns (Readfield's share is \$260k over the next year) and put those funds toward the engineering study so there are firm costs for that project so there can be appropriate funding. Readfield is pretty well built out w/ cable and is likely to not receive much money compared to other towns that have very limited infrastructure. Grant applications require firm cost estimates for proposals for subsequent grant applications so an engineering study will create those firm cost estimates. Readfield's engineering cost is \$123k. That would allow for a town meeting proposal in June, 2022. Each town concurred that this was the best way to appropriate the federal money.

WKLKBA also wanted to have an interlocal agreement similar to the Readfield owned and operated transfer station. Fayette and Wayne pay a portion of the operating cost of the transfer station based on state property valuation. A committee meets to oversee the agreement. This is the model that WKLKBA wants to follow. Creating a joint proposal could save the WKLKBA about 10%. Readfield's estimated cost is about \$3.9M so a 10% savings is attractive. WKLKBA would hire out the operation and maintenance of the fiber. WKLKBA wants the agreement by June 1, 2021.

Engineering is expected to take 8 months with a report completed by January, 2022. Implementation could begin in July, 2022 and light would be activated by July, 2023.

The WKLCBA doesn't want to bring fuzzy costs to their respective town meetings so the engineering study will provide the best available information for decision making.

There's no cost to enter into an agreement w/ WKLCBA.

Spectrum has been working a bit with some of the other towns' broadband committees. Leeds in particular is having some success with their conversations with Spectrum. Leeds is trying to get grant funding.

Wayne wants to 'overbuild' the whole town similar to Readfield's current plan.

The federal money doesn't necessarily have to go to the broadband effort.

Dyer said that there is an opportunity cost to use this money for broadband versus say, roads or trails.

Woodsum will have a questionnaire for the next meeting so the Committee can look at it to mail it out in May along with the absentee ballot mailing.

Dyer showed the committee the warrant article for the question of broadband. Article 40 seeks input from voters to see if people are interested in the fiber to the home project without obligating the Town in any way.

19:29 On a motion by Woodsum, seconded by Falconer, the Board voted unanimously to support town efforts to continue the process of investigating the fiber to the home project.

By the next meeting we'll be able to review McCormick's report, a draft agreement w/ WKLCBA, and the questionnaire that Woodsum is working on.

The next broadband committee will be on April 28, 2021.

The meeting was adjourned by unanimous consent at 19:35.