Readfield second internet (broadband survey)- focused on improving internet service throughout Readfield.

Please help the Select Board by telling us your thoughts about improving Internet service in Readfield.

Please read this text before you fill out the survey, so you know the current status of this issue.

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| At present, about 94% of Readfield homes can potentially get high speed, relatively reliable cable internet service. People living in other parts of town have slower, unreliable DSL service or no Internet service at all. In cooperation with five other surrounding towns, we have been studying ways to extend and improve internet service throughout our town. We have conducted one prior survey in Readfield; a large majority (more than 60%) said that they want internet access extended throughout our town.  132 Readfield survey comments included:  On the Beans Mills Rd, I have tried everything available. The phone company can't deliver even phone service, let alone reliable internet, which has resulted in us using expensive, but still slow and intermittent satellite internet. With Covid-19 shutdowns, it probably would have been worth moving out of Readfield to run my business.  Extending access to low-income residents as well as remote areas who currently can’t get access would be wonderful!  I would love a non-profit alternative to Spectrum. Probably unrealistic but a wish.  Seems very slow and limited right now. Neighbors with satellite are dissatisfied as well.  Universal Internet access should be like Rural Electrification Agency of the 1900s-Gov run subsidization affordable and reliable for all everywhere. Everyone pays same price. It’s a big package but now it is only a reality where Comm Companies can make a killing in heavily populated areas with enabling BW frequencies and licenses the government sold them on the cheap.  The cable ISP has continually raised their rates while service has not. There is no competition and so there is no choice.  Despite Consolidated Communication's erratic DSL service, we have stuck with them, being distrustful of Spectrum's constant rate creep practices. I'd love a chance to see a municipal internet service with a consistent price plan, even with a big upfront cost.  We need access for everyone and speeds fast enough and reliable enough for businesses and home schooling.  I think we are some of the lucky ones to be on 41 and get a fairly strong Spectrum connection. Yet even then it is sporadic and sometimes out.  There is currently no choice living on Main Street in Readfield. We would like to have other options that are at a cheaper price and faster speed if possible.  I am concerned how the expansion of internet will affect property taxes.  In 11 years of living here it has not improved - not ok  Town-wide 5G would be a blessing. Fast internet is an essential element of society now and will be even more important in the future. Kids will need to go to school virtually at times for years and lots of people will continue to work at home. Property values would soar if this service were available! Currently, the only 2 options I have are both unacceptable. Spectrum has a very deserved reputation for providing horrible customer service and Consolidated is slow and unreliable.  Spectrum has been fast enough and reliable, just expensive.  I think it can be an extremely big role in employment opportunities in Readfield. There is a well-educated population needing job opportunities. It may make it possible for young people to stay in the state as well as encourage those who would like a more rural lifestyle to be able to make that move.  We switched to Spectrum from Consolidated and have been pleased with reliability, speed and price. I am concerned that Readfield, like most Maine towns, does not have more modern tech infrastructure in place as demands for higher speeds and bandwidth are sure to grow.  Bring on the town fiber!  I'm willing to pay a little more in taxes to make sure that all kids have internet access at home for learning purposes. I would like to make sure that all families can get fast internet at a reasonable price for them. It's a necessity for household functioning today.  Internet service is not available to everyone in Readfield. In some places, there is spotty service. In other instances, the resident is not able to afford the service. This makes it difficult to work from home or remote schooling.  It's slow, unreliable, goes out in wind or storms, uploads are too slow if they even work because of interruptions, bandwidth on Chase Rd is way too narrow. What we have now is primitive compared to states south of us. And nowhere near what is possible these days. We need a big upgrade. Soon. With connectivity for all. |

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After much discussion and study, we believe that the best option for improving Internet service in Readfield is a town-owned and town-wide fiberoptic network. If we build a network, we can choose an internet provider to deliver service through the network. We would have the power to change that provider if the service or costs are unsatisfactory. The other option would involve paying an existing provider to extend service to unserved areas, but in that case, we would be tied to that provider. The provider would own the network. That provider could raise rates or provide poor service and we would have no way to correct those problems. Paying an existing provider would be less expensive than building our own network but would provide less value to the town.

In addition, a town-owned fiberoptic network would provide higher internet speeds than current cable internet and would support internet uses which will emerge in the future.

The board plans to apply for all available grants and government subsidies. Given the high percentage of coverage already existing in Readfield, grant funding will be minimal. Government subsidies are being discussed at the Federal level currently and if distribution is given to all communities Readfield will benefit with funding. Even with those monies, it is very likely that building this network would involve either town investment through a long-term bond to be repaid through taxes, or a long-term revenue bond to be repaid through user fees. As with any town expenditure, no money would be borrowed unless a Town Meeting voted to go ahead with this project.

In an effort to better understand the costs of owning and operating a municipal fiber-to-the-home network, the Town commissioned a study to outline a five-year financial plan. This financial plan outlines two cost centers: construction costs and operating costs. The study led to an early estimate of construction costs at $4.4 million dollars. If the construction was fully funded through a twenty-year bond, it would add $16 per month to the taxes on an average (median) home valued at $200,000. We expect to be able to get some government subsidy support, so the actual tax impact should be lower. No vote would be held until we know that actual tax impact.

Operating the network- that is, providing internet service through the network- would cost about $70 or less per month for full Fiber-To-The-Home service, 100mbps up and down, per subscriber with only 40% of residents subscribing. The more subscribers the lower the subscription cost per month. We could also pass on the cost of construction to subscribers in an additional fee, but this would raise the cost of the service to the point where some could not afford it. In addition, that fee would go up if fewer people subscribed to the service.

Thank you for helping us chart a path forward. You may skip any question.