

Dresden Broadband & Technology Committee minutes 2/6/23

Attending: Judy Tunkle, chair, Don Gleason, selectboard representative, members Joe Styczynski, Dave Hofstader, Richard Brown, Susan Lamb

Judy reported on the committee's recent major success in that the Board of Selectmen voted unanimously to support the committee recommendation by approving a town expenditure of \$130,000 earmarked as the local share of entering a contract with Fidium to string fiberoptic cable and provide reliable internet access to all homes, businesses and public sites in Dresden. Of that amount, Lincoln County will reimburse Dresden \$65,000 from federal infrastructure money commissioners earmarked to help towns achieve digital equity.

"We're in a nice spot. The pressure is off as we don't have to sell this to the town," Judy noted. "But where do we go from here? We want to generate some excitement."

She and Don will attend a Zoom session Feb. 7 involving broadband committee leadership members from Woolwich and Wiscasset with Simon Thorne, Consolidated Communications' senior governmental affairs manager, in hopes of gleaning more information about hook-up timetables and consumer options. Fidium is the fiberoptic division of Consolidated. Staff from Maine Connectivity Authority (MCA) will also attend to shed light on promotional and computer training resources the Dresden committee could offer residents.

Lawyers for the town, Consolidated and MCA are in the process of reviewing a memorandum of understanding that will satisfy all parties before a contract is signed. Fidium expects construction of the new network will take up to two years to complete.

Members agreed to keep track of questions townspeople most frequently ask about broadband access, share the questions via email, and have answers in hand before scheduling public informational meetings. Joe said he suspects full costs associated with signing up with Fidium will be the most important consideration for most residents.

Dave will serve as the committee liaison to the Dresden Facebook page, and can post brief announcements and refer readers to the official town dresdenme.org page for more details. Dick will monitor frequently asked questions. Joe will work on talking points and Don will refine graphics for informational purposes. Susan will continue taking minutes and help with media access.

Don said the committee needs to reach out for information to organizations that help with computer training classes that could benefit residents who have not had

access to reliable internet, and organizations or corporation that could furnish refurbished laptop or notebook devices free to economically disadvantaged people. Dick suggested checking with the Maine State Surplus Property program.

Once the committee gathers this information, it will sponsor public informational meetings and perhaps neighborhood meetings,

The next committee meeting will be at 7 pm Feb. 27 at Bridge Academy. Anyone interested is always welcome to attend.