

REPORT OF THE BROADBAND AD HOC GROUP

Annual Summary, 2018:

2018 was a very challenging but productive year for the Becket Broadband Project. The state's prohibition of WiredWest as the owner of the fiber network for all member towns left each town to construct its own Town Owned Network (TON). Westfield Gas & Electric (WGE) stepped up to assist any interested town and be its state approved project manager. Becket selected WGE to be its project manager. The first task was to prepare an initial fiber network design which would offer service to 100% of town premises which have utility service and survey the town utility poles. This would enable us to validate the initial state budget of \$5.96 million. The town had very little detail on the initial state budget. We were told Becket had only 109 or 119 miles and 3,650 utility poles. Based upon our review it was determined that the town has 152 miles and that an estimated 800 poles would need replacement. This information and many other preliminary factors resulted in a revised budget of \$13.0 million, more than double the initial estimate. One critical factor that was discovered is that the private roads in town (comprising one-third of our roads) were not considered in the initial budget. Due to the changes in the state agencies and personnel, we had no way to validate how the original budget was constructed. This significant increase, which was not funded, caused a very critical review of the design to identify areas of savings. Many iterations of the budget and reviews with the Board of Selectmen (BOS) identified significant savings but still not enough to build a network for the authorized funding. A third party, for profit enterprise, Matrix Design Group, proposed to build the town network if the town provided the pathway to lay the fiber to the homes. This pathway, known as "MakeReady (MR)", was the biggest area of unknown cost in the budget and the town was responsible for it. If a TON was selected, the state would reimburse the town for almost all of the MR cost; if the town selected Matrix, the MR reimbursement was limited. After final project designs, which included the above-mentioned savings, and stripping out all subsidies for individual premise connections, the budget for a TON came in approximately \$500 thousand under the authorized funding. A comparison of the TON to the Matrix proposal showed that a TON offered significant savings to residents over the short and long term, not to mention overall control of decisions affecting the network in the future. The BOS decided to build our own TON. We patiently await the final invoices for MakeReady from the utility companies and the actual work to be performed so we can start the next phase of the project, which is construction of the network. The Broadband Ad Hoc Group will provide updates on the project's progress as it occurs. This information will also be posted on the town's website and will be mentioned in the monthly town electronic newsletter.

Respectfully submitted,

Broadband Ad Hoc Group

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