



The Midcoast Internet Coalition (MIC) meeting streamed from and recorded by The Town of Camden, including LiveStream, Broadcast on Town of Camden YouTube Channel.

**Midcoast Internet Coalition Meeting
Draft Minutes for May 12th, 2021, 5:00 p.m.
Zoom (during COVID-19 Pandemic)**

1. Call to Order at 5:02pm

Participants:

Chair: Debra Hall (Rockport); Vice Chair: Matt Siegel (Camden)

Representatives:

Camden: Marc Ratner (SB), Jeremy Martin, Planning Director

Hope: Melissa Foster Hall (BC)

Lincolntonville: Josh Gerritsen (SB), Jordan Barnett-Parker (SB), Steve Koltai

Northport: Ann Frenning Kossuth (BC)

Rockport: Denise Munger (SB), John Viehman

Southwestern Waldo County: Bob Kurak (SB) (Guest)

Thomaston: Brian Doyle, Econ Dev Director

Union: John Gibbons (BC)

Vinalhaven: Gabe McPhail, Janann Sherman

Special Guest: Andrew Hart

Note: SB=Select Board | BC=Broadband Committee

2. Action Item – Motion to Approve April 14th, 2021 Minutes

Motion by Jeremy, second by Matt, all in favor

3. Discussion Item – Report by Rockport/Camden

Chair Hall, Munger and Siegel reported on activities since the last MIC meeting: Special note by Debra: We hope to be an official body when the Interlocal Agreement has been passed by certain towns. After June 8th we will be a Regional Utility with a Regional Utility Board. Until then we are a Coalition with a number of interested towns and representatives of those towns.

Letter to County Commissioners

Debra sent the letter to County Commissioners requesting ARP funds be use for broadband efforts.

Andrew Hart - The County is waiting for funding and anticipates receiving 50% of the \$7.1 million as a direct deposit into the County account, but haven't received it yet. The next 50% will be sent one year after the first disbursement.

The County hasn't determined what will be done with this money and will need to receive guidance. They are open to broadband. He's talked with other municipalities and will work together regarding the ARP funds. He's met with Commissioner Johnson and Hannah Pingree about what the state is doing with their funding. They are trying to figure out how to get the most bang for their buck. The state has created a committee to explore broadband internet. They are now mapping the whole state and working with ConnectME. Andrew wants to reach out to that committee to see what that committee can do.

The next Commissioners meeting is June 8th at 2:00 via Zoom. Letters of support have been received from Owls Head, Camden, Rockport, Union, Washington and Thomaston.

Jeremy Martin - Are these state committees aware of what we are doing at our level? We have an opportunity to accomplish something pretty big regarding economic development for the Midcoast. I'd hate to have our voice not heard or not be at the table. We are providing a different option and would like to be at the table with other industry members.

Andrew Hart - He has reached out to Commissioner Johnson and can ask if she or someone from her department could attend a Midcoast Internet Coalition meeting. They are getting \$129 million which is going to turn into \$400 million for Broadband.

Debra Hall - Another way to leverage a regional utility is that it's recognized and established by Maine statutes which gives us the ability to issue revenue bonds. We can turn that money into something much bigger and allows us to get municipal loans.

Matt Siegel - In the sense of LD 1484, we would be looking to the county to be an active participant and come on with "seed money" to start this project. In terms of L.D. 1484, the seed money would be the base of the larger contribution (25%). The county funds would fit perfectly, making this a reality. The county money would lead us to the ConnectME money.

Marc Ratner - In Camden, high speed internet has always been a priority to support the entrepreneurs and their families that move into the area. We've recognized in this past year how important internet is. We're passionate about what we're doing and where we're going.

Andrew Hart - I work for three Commissioners and I'm trying to get information, to find out what's going on out there in terms of internet and what the possibilities are.

Matt Siegel - We are doing grassroots information, to listen and find out where they're at and give them information. Not a sales pitch, it's just information. It's input to relate to towns and communities on a humanistic level. This is not a luxury anymore, it's like water or electricity at

this point and we need a utility model that we are seeing across the country that people are saying is affordable and we can get this to everyone. We would love to sit down and have a “Zoom” lunch with Andrew and Debra.

Maine State Legislative Developments

Debra Hall – L.D. 1432, the Gigabit Fund already exists and it’s been on the books, but never been funded. This could make some changes to the gigabit fund, so no longer could ISP’s step up and be the applicants for this money. The CARES Act money has gone to entities that got the money for build out which was supposed to be completed by December 31st, but is not finished. We don’t support the idea of taking taxpayer money and giving it to ISP’s. The taxpayer money should go to open access networks that are owned by municipalities and taxpayers, which is what our utility is all about. Multiple ISP’s allow for competition, helping keep the prices for internet reasonable. Gigabit funding would then be available for municipalities, not ISP’s to apply for.

We are hoping a large portion of the \$129 million will go to the Gigabit Fund. There’s lots of support for this. This is no longer a partisan issue. We’ve looked at L.D. 1484, which enhances the authority of ConnectME by giving it administrative responsibilities over the Gigabit Fund.

Federal Funding - ARP and treasury guidance, defines unserved and underserved as one or more households or businesses having less than 25/3. We have many of these in our communities.

Reporting on Midcoast Internet Meetings

Denise Munger - Danny Sullivan Downeast Broadband Utility (DBU) - Has been a model touted in the state for success and we can learn from them. They are happy to talk with communities in the state of Maine. Have done their buildout, but now working on their take rate and expanding to other towns.

Initial funding was a line of credit and are now about to turn that into a 20-year loan (a low cost municipal loan).

Debra - They did this without raising taxes. FAME is possible for state guarantees on loans. Fiber is low maintenance, and once paid back, you’re in a revenue stream mode.

Debra was asked to be a speaker on a Maine Broadband Coalition meeting called “Digital Frontiers” which is a series. Dennis Poppas will be there as well, regarding the story of Longmont, Colorado’s Utility that is now bringing in \$18 million per year. They can now consider lowering the price to their customer and doing more community outreach in the area of digital equity.

We’re learning from these people that did this work before us. We gained information regarding feasibility, take rates, advice, etc.

Kyle Leathers, Katahdin Utility – Denise noted that Penobscot county is very focused on economic development.

Matt Siegel - FAME keeps coming up, they are the top of the list to work with. People are lighting up about the ARP and seed funds, public/private social loans, trying to move to hybrid models so we don't have to reinvent the wheel. Our contact at FAME is Carlos.

Debra Hall - we've been doing lots of meetings in towns and communities. Debra reported on the conversation the leadership team had with Larry Sterrs, Chairman of Unitel and Camden National Bank.

Jeremy Martin – Jeremy noted that Bluestreak (Unitel) is excellent in Belfast and would like to try to get them into the utility as a provider.

Debra Hall – Debra noted that the team is working with Axiom for the feasibility study. We haven't signed a contract since that is a function of the regional utility. We're trying to get funds for planning grants funds if possible, small amounts add up. These small pockets of money put us on the radar and shows we're a player in this thing.

Phase 1 towns are currently being considered to be: Camden, Rockport, Rockland, Thomaston, S. Thomaston, Owls Head But this list is not cast in stone. Some towns may be considered regarding their eligibility for grant funds, and these town may be pushed to the front.

Vetro Fiber mapping - this information is available to us and can give towns an idea of what the build out may look like. Debra or Matt are administering this program, it's free, but we can't give permission to everyone to be administrators. Debra and Matt are happy to work with any towns to walk them through this.

Debra - Reports from anyone who would like to share status of their efforts:

Gabe McPhail Vinal Haven) - Our committee has been active since 2016, but more now due to funding and need. We hired Axiom to do a high-level study, looked at options, launched a broadband campaign. Our Select Board reviewed the survey which included 41% of community members. 70% of these respondents support the municipal broadband. The results of review, the board will hold a public hearing, then we will move to a referendum vote.

Craig Currie - Cushing had a public hearing. Matt answered questions form citizens and Select Board. We will proceed with the town meeting in the Mid to late June, to fund an Axiom study and allow the Select Board to sign the Interlocal Agreement.

Brian Doyle - Thomaston moving ahead with MIC to talk with Select Board and economic development committee. Then we'll do a public forum, in person, to get them to know the coalition folks and have community members learn about what they are doing. We have on the ballot to allow Select Board to sign the Interlocal Agreement. We're trying to educate and move this along. We appreciate that you are meeting with people from in state and out of

state to find out what they learned.

Janann Sherman (Vinalhaven) – I put together a glossary of terms of Tech Speak to help people understand the worlds and terms. And would like to share with everyone.

Debra Hall - We are sharing our knowledge with Blue Hill Peninsula folks, who are a few steps behind us.

Next steps - June 8th vote. Doing open houses (Thomaston, Rockport, Camden, Rockland), press releases

Finances

Have started initially with Bangor Savings Bank, Camden National, The First and Machias Savings. Have to have the right combination of funding and towns and/or state guarantee loans.

Brian Doyle - Has anyone, privately, approached you to support this?

Debra Hall - No, not yet. We have had some people approach us, some coalition people have contributed some money, private investment on the table as social investment. This is going to be a patchwork of funding.

Matt Siegel - Steven Koltai & Matt are trying to create the Finance Committee. Please take the opportunity to join us if you have expertise in this area.

Debra Hall - We'll need to get bond counsel and legal structure in place, and we recommend using Bernstein Shur to help us once we are a regional utility. The Digital Frontier series has a session, or a workshop, being offered by GWI to talk about funding for municipal networks.

Marketing and Communications

John Viehman - We're off and running with social media. We launched our Facebook page and post 2-3 times per week. There's a write up in the Bangor Daily News and Portland TV Channel. We're getting ongoing support from Village Soup and work on on PenBay Pilot. We expect to get follow from posted articles.

Logo - Debra and cohort created the logo which is a "working logo" and we're still fiddling with the name, but we're getting there.

Marc Ratner - Are you boosting your Facebook posts?

John viehman - No, that's a marketing expense and we have no marketing budget, although we know that we could get a lot for \$200 target marketing.

Flyers are going up around Rockport regarding the open houses, and we keep putting them up

in public places.

“Let’s Connect” video spots are being worked on by Josh and Matt.

We’re also supporting presenters with slide decks and Debra will be furnishing John with some information.

Website is operational, but would like to move some things around to make it easy for people to sign up.

Debra Hall - The banks stressed how important it is for “pre-sale” or take rate.

Brian Doyle - Is it okay to ask lenders to help market on Facebook?

Josh Gerritsen - update on ConnectME proposed rule change. The ConnectME Board has recommended to change the definition of high-speed Broadband to 100/100 and a separate definition of underserved to 50/10.

Debra Hall - Symmetrical doesn’t cost any more money to offer when dealing with fiber. The non-symmetrical speeds are as a result of cable / copper.

Matt Siegel - ENDING ON A BRIGHT NOTE

To Hope and Lincolnville, as of this week, there will be more staffing at the FCC. They are considering Title II, which has to do with regulation of the broadband industry. If regulated, this would result in MANDATORY open access. This shows that people at the highest levels are recognizing what needs to be done and what they can do to help.

Andrew Hart - Has received and will respond to Debra’s email. He would like an explanation of the Coalition to present to the Commissioners and needs the terms. Debra will get that together for Andrew.

Motion to Adjourn at 6:30pm by Matt Siegel, seconded by Josh Gerritsen, all in favor.

Please note: Future / Regular Meetings for 2021

The group set future meetings for the second Wednesday of each month at 5 p.m. as follows:

June 16th

Jul 14th

Aug 11th

Sept 8th

Oct 13th

Nov 10th

Dec 8th

Reference guide, names to know, and industry contacts:

- a. Axiom Technologies
 - Mark Ouellette, President and CEO
- b. Bernstein-Shur, Attorneys at Law
 - Phil Saucier
- c. ConnectME
 - Peggy Schaffer, Executive Director
 - Liz Wyman, Attorney, Maine PUC
 - Jasmine Bishop, Director Telehealth MaineHealth
 - Susan Corbett, Director National Digital Equity Center
- d. Downeast Broadband Utility
 - Dan Sullivan
- e. GWI
 - Fletcher Kitteridge, CEO
 - Kerem Durdaq, President and COO
- f. Island Institute
 - Nick Battista
 - Kendra Jo Grindle
- g. Katahdin Broadband
 - Kyle Leathers, President
- h. LCI
 - Randal Manning, VP
 - Alan Hinsey, Dir. Sales and Marketing
- i. Maine Broadband Coalition
 - Adam Butcher
 - Clara McCool
- j. Mission Broadband
 - John Dougherty, VP and General Manager
- k. Pioneer Broadband
 - Tim McAfee, CEO and Chief Engineer
- l. Unitel/Unitek
 - Larry Sterrs, Chairman of Board
- m. State Representatives
 - Rep Paige Zeigler
 - Rep Vicki Doudera
 - Sen Dave Miramont
 - Rep Seth Berry
 - Sen Rick Bennett
- n. Federal Representative
 - Adam Lachman, for Sen Angus
 - King Chris Rector, for Sen Angus
 - King