

Town of Longmeadow Municipal Fiber Task Force

Remote Meeting

Monday, November 13, 2023

7:30 PM

AGENDA

1. Open Session / Join Zoom Meeting

This open session of the Municipal Fiber Task Force is held remotely via ZOOM in accordance with the Governors 2023 orders extending the temporary provisions pertaining to the Open Meeting Law to March 31, 2025.

Join Zoom Meeting

[HTTPS://US02WEB.ZOOM.US/J/87162980384?
PWD=U2PWOUJPRTLTVHKXSUG1CHR1EGRRDZ09](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87162980384?pwd=U2PWOUJPRTLTVHKXSUG1CHR1EGRRDZ09)

Or dial by phone • +1 646 558 8656 US Meeting ID: 871 6298 0384 Passcode: 765455

2. Approval of October 26, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Documents:

[FIBER TASK FORCE MEETING MINUTES 10.26.23.PDF](#)

3. Discussion of Task Force's Purpose Statement

Documents:

[FIBER OPTIC TASK FORCE PURPOSE STATEMENT.PDF](#)

4. Discussion of Town Manager's Preliminary Research into Local Fiber Approaches

Documents:

[TOWN MANAGER PRELIMINARY RESEARCH INTO LOCAL FIBER APPROACHES \(1\).PDF](#)

5. Discussion of what information to gather and who we would like to see present at a future meeting

6. Preparation for meeting with Whip City Fiber at December 11, 2023 meeting

7. Adjournment

Municipal Fiber Task Force October 26, 2023

Meeting Minutes

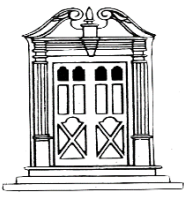
Members present: Vineeth Hemavathi, Peter Wehrli, Benjamin Brown, Estelle Baik Jordan, Henry Lanouette, Kalani Silva, Mike McClane, David Hart, Benjamin Tansky

1. Members introduced themselves.
2. Vineeth briefly explained Open Meeting Laws and reminded members to review Open Meeting Law packet and return the signature page to the Town Clerk's office. Vineeth also said to look out for future trainings.
3. Vineeth Hemavathi was unanimously voted as Chair.
4. David Hart was unanimously voted as Vice Chair.
5. Kalani Silva was unanimously voted as Clerk.
6. Members discussed future meetings. For the time being, meetings will be scheduled on the 3rd Monday of the month at 7:30 pm via Zoom. The group will continue to reassess what works best.
7. Meeting adjourned with unanimous vote.

Fiber Optic Task Force Purpose Statement

As the need to access, distribute, and manage digital data via the internet continues to grow and become almost a new public utility the Board of Selectmen and the Fiber Optic Task Force seek to find alternative solutions that will provide the town's residents with:

- Consistency
- Reliability
- Abundant Bandwidth (future growth)
- Security
- Choice – foster a competitive marketplace.
- Affordable options
- Community Involvement/ Responsiveness
- Economic Development
- Prepare for new and emerging technologies.
 - Remote learning
 - Healthcare



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TO: Chairman Lachiusa and Members of the Select Board

FROM: Lyn N. Simmons, Town Manager

DATE: Monday, August 7, 2023

SUBJECT: Municipal Broadband, Fiber to the Home, Town Wide WiFi

After conducting some preliminary research to provide us with a jumping off point, I offer the following information.

Agawam – Formed a Municipal Fiber Task Force. The Task Force reviewed the feasibility of the Town constructing and operating its own fiber network, partnering with another municipal fiber network, and/or the potential of a private company developing a fiber network to increase competition among internet providers. The Task Force determined that a third party carrier, [GoNetSpeed/OTELCO](#), plans to construct a fiber network system throughout the Town of Agawam and offer residents another alternative for internet services. <https://www.agawam.ma.us/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=362&ARC=578>. This option appears to be done privately with no involvement or agreement from the municipality, essentially, a private enterprise building out the infrastructure and operating.

Belchertown – In July 2023, Belchertown was awarded \$185,000 in Community Compact Municipal Fiber Grant Program funds- <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/about-the-municipal-fiber-grant-program> to support the closing of critical gaps that exist in municipal networks by installing a redundant fiber loop to public safety buildings and add fiber to 2 cell towers to finish public safety radio access. In 2022, Amherst, Easthampton and East Longmeadow received substantial grants through this program to expand or develop municipal fiber networks.

East Longmeadow – East Longmeadow Broadband Committee was charged with researching and analyzing data relevant to current and future availability of access to broadband services by the town's residents and business, and make appropriate policy recommendations to the Town Manager, with respect to the town's rights and responsibilities under federal and state telecommunications law, to advance the access, affordability and reliability of broadband service in the community. The Town Council voted to create a municipal light plant in fiscal year 2022 and affirmed that vote in the following fiscal year, as required by state law. The residents ratified it in a referendum vote at the annual election on June 6, 2023. <https://www.there minder.com/localnews/eastlongmeadow/ballot-question-to-ask-east-longmeadow-voters-to-r/> East Longmeadow is now working with Westfield Gas & Electric/Whip City Fiber to bring fiber to the residents.

South Hadley – [South Hadley Electric Light Department](#) has [Fiberspring](#) that serves many towns. It is not a free service. The Town did use a Regional Economic Development Organization Grant to provide free WiFi in two small areas of Town, the beachgrounds and Town Common. The relationship with SHELD and Fiberspring restricted providing free WiFi to residents. <https://www.mass.gov/regional-economic-development-organization-grant-program-redo>

West Springfield – Voted to create a Municipal Light Plant November 8, 2022. The fiber lines would be owned by West Springfield but the service would be operated under contract with Whip City Fiber. According to a prospective contract between West Springfield and Whip City Fiber, the power company would perform the

“infrastructure development, network maintenance and support services” necessary to build out the fiber network to every address in West Springfield, starting with a pilot program of four neighborhoods. The offering is expected to be available in 2024. I am seeking more information on the build out cost and who is paying for it.

Wilbraham - Wilbraham is pursuing municipal run town-wide fiber. They have a Broadband Advisory Committee (BAC) appointed by the BOS leading the effort. The Town approved the MLP with votes dating back to 2013 and 2014. There have been three iterations of the BAC since the votes, including the present one. The BAC commissioned a study for a Master Plan, now titled "Wilbraham Digital Access Plan." I have a copy of the plan. They used EntryPoint Networks out of Utah. The initial contract was \$200 per hour not to exceed \$20,000. Wilbraham applied for and was awarded a Community Compact Grant that paid for the master plan. EntryPoint is working with other MA communities, including Quincy and Fairhaven. The BAC issued an RFP in February for an OPM to lead the next phase. The fee was not to exceed \$125,000. The BOS approved ARPA funds to pay for this. They received no bids. The BAC has been working on issuing two separate RFP's instead. One for the Open Access Partner, and one for the Network Designer. Once these services are secured and complete, a new RFP for an OPM will be issued. More information is available [here](#). Wilbraham also has a helpful FAQ on municipal light plants, available [here](#).

Massachusetts Municipal Story – while it’s slightly dated, it gives a good cross-section of the different approaches <https://communitynets.org/content/muni-broadband-wave-washes-across-massachusetts>

Recommendation

After reviewing what other communities have done and looking at my workload and that of the Assistant Town Manager, for the remainder of the calendar year neither of us have the capacity to take on leading an Advisory Group.

With that, I have a few recommended paths.

Option #1 - The Select Board could form an Advisory Group to explore Municipal Broadband options with the charge of bringing a recommendation back to the Select Board. I would suggest a 5-member group to be led by a Select Board member to begin meeting in September. A call to residents to express their interest in serving could be put out with interest letters received by August 28. Interviews would be held at the September 5 meeting with appointments made on September 18.

Option #2 - The Select Board could review the information from the other municipalities above, request that the Town Manager prepare a draft scope of work for Longmeadow based on one of the above examples. This scope of work could be reviewed at the September 5, 2023 Select Board meeting, finalized, and then the Town Manager could begin getting quotes. A vendor selection could be made at the September 18 meeting and a formal Master Plan/Study could be developed for Longmeadow.

Option # 3 - A hybrid of #2, a draft scope is prepared and sent to a selected group of vendors, for example, Westfield Gas and Electric/Whip City Fiber, South Hadley Electric Light etc... with a review and discussion of the proposals at an upcoming Select Board meeting.

In order to select the direction to go, we should answer a few questions:

1. Do we know if we want to create a Municipal Light Plant and start that process?
2. Is the goal only to achieve another option besides Comcast? If so, the approach in Agawam may be the easiest.
3. Do we want to construct and own the infrastructure? If so, do we want to maintain it or contract it out?
4. If we don't know have a consensus then option #1 may be the best approach.