

# Minutes

**Broadband Committee**  
**October 14, 2020 at 3 PM**  
**Zoom Meeting**  
**East Longmeadow, Massachusetts 01028**

**Members Present:** Chair Donald Maki, Donald Anderson, Connor O’Shea, Bruce Adams, Ryan Quimby (joined the meeting in progress)

**Members Absent:** N/A

**Others Present:** Mary McNally, Town Manager

The meeting was opened at 3:05 PM.

Don Maki introduced himself as the ELCAT Director and asked each member to introduce themselves.

Bruce Adams introduced himself as a resident in town who works at Sun Gro Horticulture as a marketing manager covering North America and has worked with Mr. Maki for many years, originally connecting to broadcast rugby events, and later on the ELCAT committee.

Don Anderson introduced himself as a Town Councilor and noted that a topic he felt worth exploring when he was first elected was municipal broadband and that we’re lucky that this meeting is conducted only because of broadband. He also noticed that speeds have dropped lately during the pandemic.

Connor O’Shea introduced himself as a lifelong resident in town who went through the East Longmeadow schools, having worked with Mr. Maki during those years at ELCAT producing content. He works as a software developer and was interested in how we can advance technology forward.

Mr. Maki thanked Ms. McNally for being the impetus to start this committee. Ms. McNally commented that her goal as the Town Manager is to try to improve town services as much as possible, equally across the board, and explore the disparity of broadband access and speed in the community. Given that both Mr. Quimby and Mr. Maki had expressed interest in exploring broadband, she felt it was worth exploring through a committee.

Mr. Maki noted that a page for the broadband committee has been created on the town website and that the content that we find, produce, and review will be posted there. He also reviewed the effort by the Commonwealth and the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) to extend broadband access to communities in Berkshire County where they were still on dial-up. Some communities, such as Westfield, operate their own broadband service similar to their municipal light operation.

Mr. Maki felt the most important role of this committee is to establish a process and set of criteria by which to evaluate the question and feasibility of municipal broadband. Given that technology and financial outlooks are changing rapidly, it is important to develop a methodology to answer the question now but also have a starting point when it is revisited again in the future.

For clarification of some public misperceptions, residents generally get high speed internet access through the provider Charter Communications, which operates under the brand or service name of Spectrum. Charter is the licensed cable television provider for East Longmeadow. The town's role in licensing Charter is only for the television service and not internet service. The town has no role in licensing internet service, as there is no licensure or regulation, and it instead operates in a free market.

Mr. Maki noted that the cable license is up for renewal in May 2021 and the draft renewal license is virtually the same as it has been for many years prior. Any competitor could apply for a license and enter the town, but given the infrastructure costs it is unlikely any other operator in 2021 would do so.

Mr. Quimby discussed his role in ensuring service while the town's schools are learning fully remotely. As of this meeting, 76 families were identified as having some sort of issue, whether it be a technical issue, financial inability to obtain internet service, lack of high speed access by a provider to their home, etc. About 10 families were provided with a Verizon MiFi to have broadband access at home that could not obtain service otherwise.

Mr. Maki noted that Wilbraham has a broadband committee, but it seemed to be in limbo.

Mr. Quimby elaborated on the town's fiber network. If you look at the town geographically as a square, our fiber network is an X that travels down the major corridors in town to provide service to most of the municipal buildings. It doesn't have enough saturation in order to provide residential service and the biggest hurdle would be access to the utility poles. He also posed the question of what broadband service might look like in the future, considering that 5G is coming out and provides much faster speeds. However, 5G antennas are backed by fiber as they don't communicate with each other wirelessly. Since 5G operates at a higher frequency than our current 4G LTE, it will need more microcells compared to the few traditional cell towers in our area. The town does have the ability to use municipal space on the utility poles, such as to provide access to a municipal building that we currently don't have fiber to, but it can't be used to provide any service the town would sell.

Mr. Anderson asked if we could use the municipal space if the town didn't sell the service but instead provided it as a service included in property taxes? Mr. Quimby was unsure about the legality of it but thought it would be an uphill battle.

Mr. Maki surmised that once the utility pole issue is solved, whether the town had to lease space or buy them out, the town would have to figure out how the broadband service would be provided. Other communities have contracted with an operator who handles it for them, such as the sales, technicians, and billing.

Mr. O'Shea commented that he saw an article recently that Comcast was trailing symmetrical gigabit speeds over coaxial cable, which hasn't been done before. Mr. Quimby noted that usually cable has much lower upload speeds.

Mr. O'Shea asked Mr. Quimby how utilized the town's fiber network currently is and if there is still capacity? Mr. Quimby said there is still a lot of dark fiber capacity but that a lot of it's not spliced. A strand of fiber is in a binder which is in the main cable. We are only using about one or two binders and all of our main legs are 48 count. We spliced a big more than we needed but some sections are maxed out. Even if we needed more fiber, we could use WDM (wavelength-division multiplexing).

Mr. Maki asked if the dark fiber we have now would be adequate if we had a 60% buy-in from residents for a municipal product? Mr. Quimby said we would probably need to pull additional fiber but we have extra conduit in all of our main legs so it wouldn't be that expensive to pull new fiber through. Mr. Maki noted that when the fiber was installed in 2006, it was thought that there would be plenty of capacity but the fact that we'd likely have to add fiber shows the insatiable demand of data and how it's grown over the years. Mr. Quimby said to do it the right way, we'd want mini hubs, similar to a water and sewer substation, at different points in town where homes would connect to and then those hubs would all connect to our central hub and then go out to the internet.

Mr. Maki asked Mr. O'Shea if he would take the minutes for the meetings and he agreed.

Mr. Maki asked the committee how we should proceed after Mr. Quimby laid out an overview of our current network? He thought that we should develop an analysis tool and then run that tool to yield an answer for the present time.

Mr. Quimby noted that if we went through with municipal fiber and we had to buy the utility poles, a precursor to that would be to operate our own municipal power company (essentially as a reseller), but that this isn't a small undertaking.

Mr. Anderson wondered if we could work collaboratively with another company, like Verizon or Comcast, for them to be the provider but use the town's fiber infrastructure? Mr. Quimby said Verizon was hot on fiber for a while but they never made it past Worcester because it was too expensive to build out.

Mr. Adams asked Mr. Quimby if the most expensive part would be obtaining the real estate on the poles since our infrastructure is mostly underground right now and that we might have some opportunity if National Grid owns them but if Verizon owns them it would be difficult to get? Mr. Quimby agreed.

Ms. McNally asked why they would want to sell the poles to us? Mr. Quimby said they wouldn't and we'd have to take them via eminent domain and pay them for it. Mr. Maki added that we'd still only be competing with internet service but customers in town would still have to use another provider for television and phone, but those customers are likely locked into bundles for a lower cost with Charter today. In some of the data Mr. Maki had previously assembled, some of the returns were estimated to be 10 or 20 years out. Mr. Anderson said that technology could change quickly in that time to something far beyond 5G, given that we were just talking about 4G not long ago.

Ms. McNally asked if the majority of the community see the provision of this sort of utility service as a municipal function or is the general consensus that these are issues that should be left to third party

providers, as doing so would make the municipality take on extra responsibility or new obligations that a large number of people think this is a function not appropriate for municipal government? Do they see it as a service akin to trash pickup or public safety? Mr. O'Shea said that ties in to the overarching question across the country of whether people consider internet service to be a utility like they do light service or whether it's not a utility. Ms. McNally said those questions could be addressed by the public deeper in the master plan discussions. Mr. Maki said the primary concerns of residents in town is to have service that works and have a stable price and that if the town could achieve both then they might find it a good idea. However, if taxes go up as a result to make it happen, they may find it to be a stupid idea, as those are the few criteria they'll use to evaluate it. Mr. Anderson believes the internet is a public utility, considering the example from a prior week when power and internet were out in town and he was unable to conduct operations at his business as everything was online and that schools are now reliant on it.

The consensus of the committee is that municipal broadband is likely not practical or financially viable at this point in time, but we should develop a framework to continually evaluate the figures for the present time. Mr. O'Shea thought that it necessarily be feasible to do one big municipal broadband project that encompasses the whole town, but that there are still a number of things the town could do in the coming years to prepare for the future, such as installing fiber when new subdivisions are built in town while everything is dug up.

The next meeting was scheduled for October 28, 2020 at 3 PM.

**Motion:** Mr. O'Shea moved to adjourn. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken: Mr. Adams - aye; Mr. Anderson - aye; Mr. O'Shea - aye; Mr. Quimby - aye; Mr. Maki - aye.

Respectfully submitted,  
Connor O'Shea