



CVFiber Policy Committee Meeting Minutes

Thursday, Feb. 24, 2022 5:00 PM - 6:00 PM

Virtual meeting

Present: Committee members Allen Gilbert (Worcester), Linda Gravell (Waterbury), Alexis Julien (public member), Ray Pelletier (Northfield alternate), and Siobhan Perricone (Orange); Jerry Diamantides, board chair, joined the meeting at 5:30 p.m.

A quorum being present, the meeting was called to order at 5:05 p.m. by Gilbert, chair.

Changes to the agenda. There were none.

Public comment. There was none.

Approval of minutes. The draft minutes of the Jan. 27, 2022 Policy Committee meeting were approved unanimously.

Question list for policies, procedures, or general information needed as we go operational. Gilbert explained the list of materials he had pulled together from the websites of various CUDs, as well as the Vermont Public Service Department and the Vermont Community Broadband Board, and sent to committee members. He noted he had included at the end of the document what's currently up on the CVFiber website. While we have some good information there, we'll shortly be needing to add a lot more. He stressed that at this point the Policy Committee is not trying to make policy or establish rates. Instead, we're trying to identify questions likely to come up that we should be able to answer as our fiber broadband system becomes operational. He said it's likely that the contractors we're hiring will do much of the legwork, but they'll need decisions from us on how many service plans

we'll have, what we'll be charging, whether someone can dig their own conduit, etc., etc. What we need to determine at this evening's meeting is whether there are other items or issues not addressed in the materials that we should be covering in our online information efforts. Gilbert said that many things are covered in the lists and documents, some in great detail, especially on ECFiber's website -- which makes sense since ECFiber has been operating for almost 10 years. He said he was struck, however, that mention of subsidies or other financial assistance to help reduce costs for low-income customers came up only once, and that the information is not particularly detailed. Since we've identified equity as an important goal for CVFiber, he said we'll need to understand the different subsidy programs that are available and get the details of how someone qualifies and applies for assistance.

Pelletier said he wanted to "explore a way forward." He thinks we need to conflate questions we might have in an FAQ (frequently asked questions) section on our website into categories, and then assign development of specific category FAQs to appropriate CVFiber committees, or to others. He also suggested it might be a good idea to contact Carol Monroe of Valley Net and FX Flinn of ECFiber and ask them if, for example, the specifications and rules they've posted on the ECFiber website concerning underground conduits are up-to-date. Gravell said she was willing to help develop FAQs. Pelletier noted it's possible to find videos on YouTube about specific construction processes; for example, he said, an employee of the Eustis telecommunications construction company had developed a "strand and lash" video. This led to a discussion of the possibility of documenting CVFiber's progress in building its network by making short videos of the different steps in building a broadband fiber network.

Perricone turned to the question of a dearth of information about broadband affordability (through subsidies or other programs), which is essential for equal access to digital services. She wished there were a statewide effort to take up this issue, since it affects customers all around the state. She noted that Holly Groschner, head of the nonprofit organization Equal Access to Broadband, is scheduled to give a presentation to the VCUDA board on this topic. Perricone believes what's needed is a team of people operating on the state level to reach out to people who need help in getting connected to high-speed internet as well as paying monthly subscription costs; such a team would be able to provide customers with the information they need, and to make the process of getting financial or technical help as smooth and easy as possible. This isn't something that we individually, in our CUDs, can do, she said. Gilbert mentioned that the details of the various subsidy programs currently offered can be difficult to find, and to understand. The committee was in agreement this effort needs a central infrastructure. Perricone said she will try to find out when Groschner is making her presentation to the VCUDA board, and that she will let committee members know if the presentation can be watched online. It was also noted that Maple Broadband CUD (Addison County) recently sent a postcard to every address in its territory

saying they'll be bringing high-speed fiber internet to their service area soon; the postcard also included some information about subsidies. This led to a discussion of outreach efforts, such as postcards, that we should be planning as we move towards construction of our Phase 1 project. Pelletier suggested a mailer, as well as an online presentation such as the one we did last July.

Board member / alternate responsibilities. Jerry Diamantides, CVFiber governance board chair, arrived at 5:30 p.m. We turned to a discussion of the issue that had recently come up at a board meeting regarding spotty attendance by some town delegates. It's agreed that we need all member towns participating in our work and that regular attendance at board meetings is important. Gilbert explained that he has started thinking that maybe we should provide annual stipends to board members as a means of supporting their attendance at meetings (some, in order to attend a meeting, might need to pay for child care, and that's a burden for them, for example). He said compensation to delegates is a bit tricky, because the CUD statutes say a delegate's town may allot money to help pay a delegate's expenses, but it's silent whether the CUD can do so. Board officers are identified in the statutes as eligible to be paid by the CUD, but there is nothing about other delegates. He noted that the silence doesn't necessarily mean CUDs are prohibited from making such payments, and that regular stipends are commonly provided to other local public officials such as select board or school board members. Pelletier said he thought CUDs could pay delegate expenses. He also said he thought it was important to provide something like an annual retreat around the time the board is reconstituted (April or May) We need to be more upfront in preparing people, he said; we've never had orientations for new board members, and we should.

Diamantides said he plans to make sure select boards in all member towns are getting our monthly board meeting minutes, which contains a list of town delegates attending board meetings. He's not quite sure what actions could or might flow from the regular dissemination of the attendance information, but he's hopeful it will be the start of getting select boards more involved in making sure their town is well represented at CVFiber board meetings. All thought the idea was a good start. Pelletier said we need to keep people engaged and excited about our work. Perricone said the Orange select board has developed more interest in CVFiber's work since the pandemic started; they now understand the need for faster internet. She's not sure that stipends to delegates are a good idea, but she does like the idea of reimbursing delegates' expenses, such as child care when a delegate needs it in order to be able to attend a board meeting. She also feels making select boards aware of whether they're getting good representation (from their delegate on the board) is a good approach to increasing board member involvement. Pelletier also liked the idea of paying delegate expenses, especially for necessary child care. Gilbert asked Diamantides if he was aiming for monthly (rather than twice-monthly) board meetings, and he said yes. Gilbert felt that having only one board meeting a month was a good idea and might help increase board attendance.

Pelletier felt the charters for the committees, and the Rules of Procedure for the board, should be reviewed to ensure we're operating as we would like to be.

Broadband equity issues – continuation of discussion. Tabled for the next meeting due to absence of invited guest.

Vice chair vacancy. Gravell volunteered to be committee vice chair. Unanimous approval for Gravell to be the first vice chair of the CVFiber Policy Committee. Profuse thanks all around.

Other business. None

Adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 6:10 p.m.

-- Allen Gilbert

Approved March 24, 2022