



CVFiber Policy Committee Draft Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, April 5, 2023 5:00 PM - 6:00 PM
Virtual meeting

Present: Allen Gilbert (Worcester), Linda Gravell (Waterbury), John Morris (Marshfield), Ray Pelletier (Northfield), and Siobhan Perricone (Orange); and Jennille Smith, executive director.

- 1. Call to order.** A quorum being present, the meeting was called to order at 5 p.m. by Gilbert, chair.
- 2. Changes to agenda.** There were none.
- 3. Public comment.** There was none.
- 4. Approval of draft minutes March 1, 2023 meeting.** Gilbert moved, and Perricone seconded, approval of the minutes as presented. Approval unanimous.
- 5. Update on efforts to promote equitable broadband access.** Gilbert noted that at the committee's March meeting, members discussed whether we should be developing a Digital Equity Policy. There was no clear consensus on how to move forward. We discovered that while we may all be in favor of the general principle of not only equal access to broadband but also equal ability to pay a monthly broadband bill, CVFiber is looking at a cash crunch that could affect our ability to build our system as fast as we want to all parts of our district. Building the system has to be priority #1 before we take on subsidy programs.

Gilbert had invited committee members to see if they could come to the committee's next meeting with their ideas for a policy, perhaps building on the

draft statement he had offered, or maybe something completely different. Gravell and he had batted around some ideas in an exchange of emails. Gravell felt that CVFiber's mandate as a CUD is providing access to fiber for the people in our district. VCUDA and EAB should handle affordability on a statewide basis, with CVFiber lending support through funds from our subscription revenue. She felt that our Executive Committee should be pushing VCUDA for statewide solutions and funding for the Equal Access to Broadband (EAB) effort that ECFiber has established; the funding should come from all CUDs and from the legislature.

Gilbert said this struck him as a solid, clear statement about strategy in meeting current (and imminent) needs rather than a policy to reach a certain goal. He then invited Smith to describe the equity work she's been involved in. Smith said a committee set up by VCUDA has been meeting to discuss digital equity issues; it's got a broad membership, she noted, from librarians to veterans to people with hearing disabilities. Discussions among that group has revealed that while income may be a common barrier, there are many other barriers people may not normally consider. Examples are a veteran who faces PTSD, or a non-housed person. This group is trying to reach out to people like this who are simply left behind in seeking, having, and using the internet for a wide variety of things. Perricone said there are many opportunities at Pride events, where queer, gay, and trans people gather and talk about how they often can feel left out of assistance programs. Smith noted how she has realized how we have to change the language we're developing for our website to encourage people to sign up for the federal "ACP" grant of \$30 for low-income households. We shouldn't be describing the grants as "subsidies" but, rather, "discounts." She said that VCBB (Vermont Community Broadband Board) applied for and received a federal grant to address digital equity in the state. Their first step is to create a plan to address equity issues; an RFP has been put out. They also hope to hire a digital equity officer. This person will be responsible for working with all state agencies, as needed, to identify and address digital equity issues. Smith believes the position will mainly be a management role. Gravell wanted to know when all this was going to start, and who would be representing the elderly. The general thinking right now seems to be a bit less dramatic – one step at a time. Everyone agreed that having the VCBB active in the digital equity sphere is a good thing. Gilbert said it didn't sound like the committee needed to develop any policies at this time, but instead should develop a statement to give to the Executive Committee describing the digital equity efforts underway and letting CVFiber board members know that we are supportive of and involved in these efforts. He offered to draft a statement and share it with Policy Committee members before sending it to the Executive Committee.

6. Discussion on need for professional human resources assistance.

Perricone had brought up at the committee's last meeting whether the Policy Committee should recommend to the Governing Board that we need to hire assistance for human resource issues, since we now have paid staff. There was a short discussion about some inquiries various CUDs have made of existing programs, such as VMERs, Vermont League of Cities and Towns, and Regional Planning Commissions. There have also been discussions at VCUDA meetings about collaboration around human resource issues. Gilbert offered to draft a statement to send to the Executive Committee regarding CVFiber's need for assistance in addressing human resource issues. Policy Committee members were in favor of this. Gilbert said that as with the digital equity statement, he will share a draft with them before it's sent to the Executive Committee.

7. Other business. There was none.

8. Adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 6 p.m.

-- Allen Gilbert