

1 **Northwest Communications Union District**
2 **August 19, 2020 Draft Minutes**
3 **Virtual Meeting (Zoom Meeting ID: 878 3079 4519)**
4

5 **Attendance:** Sean Kio, Chair (Enosburgh), Christopher, Cota Vice-Chair (Fairfax), Everett McGinley
6 (Montgomery), Tara Wright (Georgia), Mathew Miner (Enosburgh Alt.), Catherine Dimitruk (NRPC),
7 Brad Docheff (Fairfax), Adelle Brunstad (NRPC), Ian Scott (Montgomery), Shaun Coleman (NRPC)
8 and Jonathan DeLaBruere (Fairfield).
9

10 **Call to Order and Adjustments to the Agenda**

11 Chair S. Kio called the meeting to order at 4:31 p.m. No adjustments to the agenda.
12

13 **Roll Call**

14 See Attendance above.
15

16 **Approval of Minutes**

17 *E. McGinley motioned to approve the amended minutes. C. Cota seconded. Motion carried.*
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19 **Treasurer's Report - NRPC**

20 S. Coleman reported that that NWCUD received the Broadband Innovation Grant for \$60,000 as well
21 as the \$10,000 grant from the Vermont Community Foundation. C. Dimitruk added that she will
22 open a checking account soon.

23 *T. Wright motioned to approve Treasurer's Report. C. Cota seconded. Motion carried.*
24

25 **Acceptance of New Members**

26 S. Kio reported a resident from Bakersfield contacted him about the District. Sean recommended
27 the person contact the Selectboard about joining. He and S. Coleman met with Berkshire
28 Selectboard on Monday night and will meet with the Highgate Selectboard on Thursday night.
29 Berkshire is in process of finding a representative and then will likely vote to join. Representative
30 Hango was at the Berkshire meeting.
31

32 **Vermont's Open Meeting Law**

33 C. Dimitruk provided a presentation on the Open Meeting Law which is defined in Title 1 of the
34 Vermont State Statutes. She also provided a quick overview of Public Document rules and
35 regulations.
36

37 C. Cota asked if using a Slack channel falls under "serial communications". Catherine replied that
38 Slack communications falls within the rules of the Open Meeting Law if business of the governing
39 board is discussed. It's fine to use for sharing information such as reports and studies. She doesn't
40 recommend using the chat feature.
41

42 M. Miner asked, if it was ok to communicate one-on-one via email to a Trustee regarding such
43 things as getting signatures or getting contact information. C. Dimitruk replied that type of
44 communication is allowable under the Open Meeting Law.
45

1 C. Dimitruk noted It would be helpful to discuss where the postings should take place and which
2 newspaper(s) the District should post notices to. Notices don't have to be printed in the newspaper;
3 they just have to be sent to the newspaper under the amended Open Meeting rules in the current
4 state of emergency.

5
6 T. Wright asked about how Executive Sessions are handled for on-line meetings. C. Dimitruk replied
7 that you can move participants into a Waiting Room or similar feature. You may have some
8 confidentiality concerns if you are participating at home and others can overhear you. Having an
9 Executive Session held at the end of a meeting is recommended. You can end the access for others
10 and stop recording. S. Kio and M. Miner noted that Enosburgh uses breakout rooms to manage the
11 public and board members.

12
13 Best practices for Electronic Meetings: each board member and member of the public must be able
14 to hear and be heard. This has been a challenge for many municipalities and many are working at
15 some form of hybrid in-person/virtual meeting. If board members or the public can't hear or be
16 heard then the meeting should end.

17
18 Individual and public rights must be given due diligence or there could be legal action taken against
19 a public body by the public or state. This is addressed in State Statutes under 1 VSA § 320. All
20 records must be open and accessible. She cautioned that use of personal email by District members
21 is part of the public record and related requests for information. The District should discuss having
22 its own email. Reference information is available at the Secretary of State's Website and Vermont
23 League of Cities and Towns. S. Kio added that email will be discussed later on.

24
25 E. McGinley asked to have the meeting format (recorded or not and public postings) as an agenda
26 item for the next meeting.

27
28 Members thanked Catherine for the information.

29
30 **Draft Conflict of Interest Policy**

31 C. Dimitruk reviewed the draft COI policy. E. McGinley noted he reviewed several COIs and
32 confirmed this was as good.

33
34 T. Wright asked about compensation. The idea is that it's the individual person and not the town
35 that would have a conflict. C. Dimitruk said to make sure that an individual is not getting a financial
36 advantage over others.

37
38 *T. Wright motioned to adopt the Conflict of Interest Policy. C. Cota seconded. Motion carried.*

39
40 **CUD Insurance**

41 C. Cota reported that certain levels of insurance are needed to meet grant requirements. S. Coleman
42 added that the insurance requirements for grant funding received are consistent with federal and
43 state grant requirements.

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45 C. Dimitruk stated the Vermont Community Foundation Grant can be used to pay for insurance.
46 C. Cota and B. Docheff offered to look into it.

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COVID Planning Grant Program

C. Cota noted that Rob Fish recommended to apply sooner rather than later. Some eligible costs include feasibility study costs which are well above the \$30,000 allotment in the BIG.

S. Kio added that the funding must be spent by the end of there. There may not be enough time for any planning or feasibility unless an extension is granted.

Other scope of work items could include assisting communities with public Wi-Fi zones. DPS is looking at 911 survey data of underserved and unserved students by Supervisory Unions. This may be an area the District can help by assisting in the delivery of public wi-fi hotspots. Unsure if it something the District can do within a reasonable time frame. Maybe the District can get an engineering firm to do some of this type of work within the limited time-frame?

C. Cota advocated for getting public wi-fi spots in areas where none exist. Also, data collection should be a priority: surveys, GIS analysis, rate surveys. Surveys by mail would be needed for areas that are unserved.

E. McGinley noted the Electric Co-Op had a detailed survey sent out to customers. The results of the survey which should be ready at the end of August.

M. Miner reported that the Magellan report completed by the Governor’s Office has some good demographic data on current services. He will seek permission to share the information.

C. Cota added that Community Networks Quickstart might be a good way to gauge costs. It would give some District visibility given the timeline.

S. Kio stated that it could take months to develop a feasibility study or planning report. He offered to conduct some more resource gathering of information and firms to get a ballpark of how long it will take.

Data Collection

T. Wright reported that last week’s pole data meeting focused on electric poles only and what types of data should be collected. There should be another follow up call regarding pole data. It is a huge undertaking that will require a robust GIS and knowledge of poles. In the past, utilities have had trained summer hires come in. Insurance for the hires was covered. Advance notification to residents is needed. Safety is top priority for those in field performing data collection.

S. Kio added that VCUDA pitched the idea of hiring a consultant to cover the state.

A discussion began on GIS, paper and door-to-door surveying, local utility data, and Burlington Telecomm history. E. McGinley offered to post the results of the Montgomery survey held a few years ago to the Slack channel.

T. Wright also said if we are talking about data collection, we have to include the underground infrastructure as well.

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Municipal Fiber Networks

C. Cota reported that other CUDs have invited ISPs in for information sharing such as how they got started and how they operate. We should begin a dialogue. All agreed it would be of value. C. Cota will start reaching out to some ISPs who are outside the area first.

Member Updates

Fairfax - C. Cota reported that Fairfax fax is working towards bringing service and a public wi-fi hotspot to a vacant public building. He also spoke with some VCUDA members on financial policies and other VCUDA information that he will share with the group.

Montgomery - E. McGinley reported they did install a public wi-fi spot at the public safety building/library.

S. Kio said if a private building is willing to sponsor a public wi-fi spot, maybe the District can offer a stipend.

Georgia – A. Baker had to leave for another meeting. T. Wright said she will bring up public wi-fi hotspots with the Selectboard at their next meeting.

Fairfield – J. DeLaBruere had to leave for another meeting.

Enosburgh – S. Kio reported he has been looking into potential website hosts and domains. Leaning towards Square Space.

Public Service Department - No report.

Other Business

S. Coleman reported that the Local Emergency Reimbursement Grant program is available through the Vermont Department of Taxes. The grant is and is meant to catch many of the municipal expenses not covered by other programs. The grant is due September 4th.

E. McGinley asked that the goals and objective list that was generated be an agenda item for the next meeting.

Adjourn

C. Cota motioned to adjourn. E. McGinley seconded. Motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 6:20 p.m.
