Public Works Department
City of Bellingham

Broadband Advisory Workgroup
Meeting Notes
Tuesday, September 7, 2021
6:00pm – 7:30PM
Zoom

Workgroup Members in attendance:	Linda Fels Spencer Moore Michelle Kopcha Steve Spitzer Kristopher Keillor RB Tewksbury Milissa Miller
Ex Officio Members in attendance:	Vincent Buys Kurt Gazow Atul Deshmane David Namura David Brinn Gina Stark
Guest Presenters: Magellan	Jory Wolf Greg Laudeman
City Staff and Facilitator in attendance:	Eric Johnston, Public Works Director Marty Mulholland, IT Director Rush Duncan, Public Works Webinar Support David Roberts, Facilitator

1. **Welcome & Approval of Notes**

   David Roberts started the meeting at 6:00PM. Notes from August 3 meeting are approved.

2. **Administrative & Technology Items Update / RFP Update**

   Eric Johnston: we will continue to meet remotely through October. The City Council will revisit the topic in the 2nd meeting of October. We will follow their protocol for meeting in person.

3. **RFP Update: Magellan Advisors**

   [Jory Wolf shared a presentation which will be posted to the website. The meeting is being recorded, which will also be posted.]

   Jory Wolf and Greg Laudeman introduced themselves and key. They also provided background on their firm and the work they have done in other similar communities. Jory outlined the project goals as follows:

   1. Cost/benefit analysis for leveraging assets to expand broadband access for the community (Community Survey / Market Analysis)
   2. Assess the current state of broadband within the city (Asset Inventory)
   3. Create a conceptual network design for leveraging existing infrastructure (Conceptual Network Design)
   4. Expand the City's broadband footprint to deploy FTTH or FTTP (Business Model Analysis)
   5. Identify business model and financing options (Financial Analysis)
   6. Provide clear understanding how to sustain a municipal broadband program (Final Analysis & Recommendations)

Magellan's work plan includes the following tasks:

- Community Survey
- Market Analysis
- Asset Inventory
- Conceptual Network Design
- Business Model Analysis
- Financial Analysis
- Final Analysis & Recommendations

The timeline for the project runs from September 2021 to May 2022.

4. Workgroup Q&A

Question: What is your recommendation for how to maintain and newly revise a survey to provide a map that continues to evolve year over year? *Greg*: We are strong believers that these broadband plans are living documents, although our engagement is for a limited time. Community engagement is tough, deploying new services, working with partners – that's the best way to keep them engaged and providing input back into the process. *Jory*: We use several tools we will be leaving with you. We hope we will be working with you on the next phases, should we continue to move forward. We like building things over paper documents. Our interest is to give you the data, and the data will have a life on its own and will be sustained by you. Everything will be in usable formats and will be able to be integrated in your ESRI/GIS. We will give you everything to move forward in a phased approach over 3-4 phases of expansion. We deliver you the data, Base Camp tools, data, reports, and documents within the deliverables.

Question: You mentioned that you get a good response from households. How do you make sure you are catching small businesses that work out of homes and brick-and-mortar? *Greg*: Small businesses often have the biggest crunch with Internet service but are so heads down its hard to get them to participate. We look to your team to get out and engage those folks. One discussion group would be focused on small businesses, and the survey – to the extent that we can get a small business to take 10 minutes for the short survey. It gives us great insight. *Jory*: We work closely with the Chambers and business improvement districts and have done mixers, events, lunch-and-learns with either commercial property brokers or neighborhood groups, or business niches. We rely on you on directing us to those people but will help reach those groups.

Question: What about those that only have a cellphone? Are they a target for paper surveys? *Greg*: They can complete the survey via their cellphone, it is less than 5 minutes. The challenge with that demographic is they are often less connected to local media and the local community. We strongly encourage a range of local media, including traditional. *Jory*: we have an embedded speed test for the wired folks, it happens for them automatically. We do email blasts and will be working with your small chambers that send out email blasts every two weeks while the survey is live for 8 weeks.

Question: I notice hyperbole when you say, "return on the survey". What is your metric for success for the survey? 3%? *Greg*: If you look at it purely statistically, you need 3-400 responses to get statistically valid for a random structured survey. We are doing a convenience survey. So, for Bellingham, we

hope for 500 or more responses. The success factor is more geographic coverage. Broadband is a physically structured phenomenon across a geographic space, particularly to focus on disadvantaged populations.

Comment: Economic and demographic is much more critical than geographic.

Question: What's the possibility we can get a copy of the survey? Greg: We can provide that first thing.

Question: As you are trying to get to specific areas, you are reviewing your collection as the survey is opened. Is there an opportunity to review areas and get input on how to reach that area or business? *Greg*: Yes. *Jory*: We will provide a link to open access of the survey instrument and the information that is collected live.

Question: Could you clarify again, for larger business and organizations, they don't answer the survey, but you have another tool? *Greg*: Discussion groups, basically. We work with you and other stakeholders in the community to identify groups of users, larger corporations, non-profits, small community organizations, small businesses. We are very flexible for identifying who those groups should be and how they work together. Getting small businesses involved is challenging. Discussion groups can increase participation. Health care providers are also challenging to get information from. Traditionally disenfranchised groups – older community members and marginalized folks are difficult to get involved. They often don't trust the system. If we can work through community organizations that are reaching disenfranchised folks – schools also – that can be very helpful. To the extent you can get grass roots organization involved, that can be huge to mobilize participation.

Question: What are the unique challenges in reaching rural, tribal communities, or those without a standard postal address? *Greg*: There's not much of a good solution unfortunately. The closest street address can be helpful. With rural communities, awareness is as much of a challenge as anything. When they are aware they participate better than anyone else. Tribes have cultural differences, but grass roots efforts and getting plugged in with the tribal leadership and discussion groups with the tribes are all helpful. *Jory*: We ran into the same problem with the Navaho Nation. We reached out to the chapter houses and collected survey information through the tribal lines of communication. We had some challenges with the Chehalis tribe as well, but they can be overcome. They just take a little longer to collect the data and in hardcopy fashion. *Greg*: We have considered using latitude and longitude for the survey, which can be challenging, but might be an option to gather information.

Question: Regarding the speed test in the surveys, there has been some concern that the state broadband speed test doesn't really tell what somebody's speeds are. I would like to understand how you work with the state broadband office, the speed test, and how that fits in with the survey. A really good map is a big issue, some of the grants are going back for better data. *Greg*: We work closely with Russ Elliot at the Broadband office. They use GEO Partners with a server based in Ashford, Virginia. They also draw on data from Measurement Labs, a non-profit, open speed test company, which is who we use. All the data is available for analysis. They collect performance information and not data information which is why we have it embedded in the larger survey. That way we can link the geodata with a specific location. We can have a long discussion about Measurement Labs. There is a limitation on the way people do speed

tests in general. You need longitudinal data and segment level data because networks are hierarchal with multiple levels of data. The upload speed can actually exceed the download speed. We feel that overall, the network diagnostic tool from Measurement Labs is the most open, consistent, and able to be compared with other data sources. We have provided our speed test results back to the Broadband office to combine with their results.

Eric Johnston: **Clarification** - The Workgroup as a whole will continue to meet once a month. Broadband members should connect with Eric if you want to be involved in the every-other-week meetings. He will work with Jory to get something on the calendar quickly.

Question: We have been defining the terms accessibility, access, digital equity, and availability. Can I get an overview of those concepts from you? *Greg:* We'd like to see your definitions. Availability means there is a service being offered in the marketplace to a specific location and the price points and performance of the service. It is based on a breakdown of price per megabit per second per month. A competitive price is $.30 per megabit. A non-competitive price is $5-10 per megabit. To the question about access: the access to a network is tested the edge of the network. On one level, do you have a connection, and can you get in? On another, what is the speed, what is the device requirement, and what are the limitations? Access <u>to</u> the network is a technical issue, access <u>through</u> the network is more nuanced and sophisticated to plug into tools to help you live your life better. It's attending school and telehealth, real resources, as well as Facebook and social media. Digital equity is ownership. This is where we see the divide between folks who can work online and protect themselves and those who cannot. One concern is cyber security and having sophisticated users. If you don't have the network to build upon, it's hard to build a culture that is digitally equitable. We can define these terms in rigorous technical terms, but how your community shaping these definitions is a better question.

Eric Johnston: What ways can this committees be most helpful? *Greg*: The key thing is information. We do a lot of information gathering. The more you can help the better. Help us get the word out about the survey.

Comment: The price per megabit per second per month is a great metric – appreciate your definitions!

Question: Regarding population growth, there are a lot of new apartment complexes being built. Is the survey going to anticipate or inform the effects of that growth and how it pertains to broadband buildup? *Greg*: Not really. The survey is really point-in-time study. We recommend you look at capital improvement projects. All of the planners are building telecom into their plans. New apartment buildings should have the technology from the get-go so folks in the complex have options. It's a good point for how to make sure you are planning for a future and accommodating inevitable growth. *Jory:* We look at how Bellingham will look at in the next 10 years and consider opportunities for dig once, opportunities for joint builds with service providers when the ground is open for Public Works projects. Those things are important in our study. Public, private, residential and commercial development are all looked at. The survey will not provide the information, but we have other tools in the toolbox. *Greg:* We appreciate the focus on the future and how the community will change over time. We don't typically see that. We will leave you the tools to monitor what you are doing ongoing. *Jory:* We will provide "what is" as well as "what will be."

5. Items for next meeting /
   Evaluation of this meeting.

Next meeting will include folks representing the ISPs on October 5th. David Roberts shared the agenda and questions and asked that he be contacted if there are additional ideas or questions.

Comment: A member suggested we invite representatives from Whatcom County to speak to our workgroup to ensure equitable outcomes. *Eric:* recommend this group stay focused on advising City Council, and they can forward the information. The Port and PUD are focusing on broadband expansion and are actively participating with the Workgroup. The County is not directly working on county-wide deployment. It is important to regionally coordinate but also work separately and then connect the information. There is great power with having coordinated efforts between regional governments. In addition to things the council is tasked you with, the Workgroup can also provide recommendations to the council such as increased coordination on the regional level. Not having the County here doesn't preclude the County from participating. It is a good point to push for regional interagency coordination, but the focus for the Workgroup is on advising the Bellingham City Council.

Comment: A member encouraged us to think about our areas of influence regarding the survey. We might want to list those out to avoid replicating efforts.

Eric Johnston: Please share your ideas for organizational outreach with Eric Johnston, David Roberts, and Rush Duncan by October 1st with names and contact info. We will compile it and share it back and with the folks from Magellan.

Meeting adjourned at 7:32 PM

Next meeting scheduled for Tuesday, October 5th at 6:00 PM via Zoom or possibly in person at the Fairhaven Library (Fireplace Room)