Broadband Advisory Workgroup
Meeting Notes
Tuesday, January 4, 2022
6:00pm – 7:30PM
Zoom

Workgroup Members in attendance:	Spencer Moore Milissa Miller Steve Spitzer RB Tewksbury	Michelle Kopcha Linda Fels Kristopher Keillor
Ex Officio Members in attendance:	Kurt Gazow Terry Davis David Brinn Atul Deshmane	David Namura Gina Stark
Guest Presenters:	Jory Wolf, Magellan Advisors LLC Greg Laudeman, Magellan Advisors LLC	
City Staff and Facilitator in attendance:	David Roberts, Facilitator Eric Johnston, Public Works Director Don Burdick, Information Technology, GIS Services Administrator Rush Duncan, Public Works Webinar Support	

1. Welcome, Introductions, Agenda Review, Approval of Notes

    David Roberts opened the meeting, reviewed the agenda, and noted there were two corrections to the notes suggested by a workgroup member including one requesting additional detail. **Eric Johnson** explained the reason for the notes and the level of detail expected from all City boards and commissions. The minutes are only required to reflect actions that were actually taken. Notes are intended to be a summary of meetings. **David** indicated that the list of attendees would be updated as requested. He encouraged people to continue to send their comments to make sure that we have our facts of decisions accurately recorded.

    Eric Johnston shared that he will post the Magellan PowerPoint presentation from our December meeting to the Broadband Advisory Group website.

2. Magellan Advisors Update

    Greg Laudeman (Magellan) provided an overview of the responses they received to the survey by zip code. He noted they have received over 1500 completed responses. No one has specifically clicked on the Spanish language link. Any efforts to reach out to those communities and encourage them to take the survey would be helpful. **Eric Johnston** encouraged everyone to reach out to Spanish speaking groups and promote the survey to them. The survey will close on January 31st. It is mentioned in the *Inside Bellingham* newsletter, which is mailed out to all City addresses. There has been good response within

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Bellingham for zip codes 98225, 98226, 98229, but not as many business responses as hoped for.

Comment: There may be a benefit in going beyond January 31st. Many people I have spoken to were aware of this survey.

There was a conversation among participants regarding the Bellingham City Library as a distributor of the survey and whether information distribution there was helpful.

Comment: It would be helpful for people to be able to describe their own experiences on the survey. Speed tests may not provide useful information alone. **Greg Laudeman** pointed out that there is a user satisfaction question in the survey. **Jory Wolf:** The survey is multi-faceted. The speed test is a fraction of what we collect from the data, most of which is sensitive data as well as narrative comments. These survey instruments have been applied to over 600 communities across the country. Magellan has collected excellent metrics beyond the speed test. We don't think the survey needs to be extended beyond the end of January. Some extra efforts need to be made to reach out to the groups we want to hear from, which is typical at this stage of the efforts.

Question: How many paper surveys have we gotten back? **Eric**: None

Question: With the zip codes – do we have the information broken down to the neighborhood level so we can target those neighborhoods? What is the plan to get more businesses on board with the survey? I'd like to know the status of the focus groups. **Jory Wolf** talked about the purpose of the survey and the focus groups. He recommended the best way to improve participation is reach out and engage people, especially anyone that is communicating directly with people that are often on the fringe. If no paper surveys are being received it could indicate that people don't know how to find them. **Greg Laudeman** shared that they can map data to the neighborhoods if we have more information. **Eric Johnston** pointed out that there are 27 "the neighborhoods" identified in the City's GIS. The neighborhoods have representation, but the downtown area not so much. He encouraged everyone to reach out to their groups and tell them to take the survey. There was a huge response in the first month, and he expects to see an incremental response from the City's mailer. He recommended that the survey finish on January 31st, and that we determine if we need more information in February and March. **Jory Wolf** pointed out that all of the addresses will be plotted and we will know where all of the responses came from.

Question: Would a simple handwritten poster on the buses be a way to reach people of low income? Then the downtown people would see it. A QR code could go directly to the City webpage. **Eric Johnston** was not sure if they can make this happen. He suggested reaching out to the Opportunity Council who is in direct contact with vulnerable populations. **Jory Wolf** suggested a wide range of ways to reach people, but the workgroup raised concerns about reaching people in person with the epidemic underway.

Question: Is the survey on the Chamber of Commerce website? **Eric Johnston** indicated he would add that on my list of things to do.

Comment: Several months ago, members were asked for a list of contacts. There didn't seem to be any opportunity for feedback on the lists we were supposed to provide. **David Roberts**: No lists from members were provided. **Eric Johnston** recommended that members go out as individuals and make those contacts. Every home in the City is getting a letter in the mail saying, "go take this survey."

Spencer Moore said he works for the Community College and is in touch with the IT department. They have been talking about sending a survey to all students and faculty that had a loaner laptop or hotspot. He hopes to get to underserved, ESL and Spanish speaking college students. **Greg Laudeman** offered to create a specific URL that Spencer to the college stakeholders.

Question: How many renters or apartment complexes have responded to the survey as opposed to homeowners? **Greg Laudeman** shared that the survey doesn't ask if respondents are renters or homeowners. **Don Burdick** pointed out that the City has the GIS data indicating which buildings and houses are rentals. Some post-process analysis is possible. **Greg Laudeman** suggested outreach to apartment complexes through their management.

Jory Wolf asked if the City has information about utility consumers that are being subsidized in some fashion? **Eric Johnston** shared that the low-income discount is pretty narrowly defined and applies to Senior or Disabled, plus low-income, not low-income alone. **Don Burdick** mentioned that census data can be applied to the geographic location of survey results. **Jory Wolf** indicated they will look at that information as well as socio-economic vulnerability indexes.

The question of closing the survey after January 31 was raised again. **Jory Wolf** pointed out that the schedule for the contract limits the time for further data collection. The project involves multiple tasks, and many are reliant on being able to analyze the survey data which takes time. It is important to end on schedule so Magellan can create our conceptual design, which also includes other data sets.

We discussed waiting until our February meeting to see what the data reveals. **Jory Wolf** said they will let us know if they feel we are missing data. At this point, they feel like we are getting plenty of responses.

3. Update on Port and PUD efforts in the County

Gina Stark provided an update on the broadband activities of the Port and the PUD. The Port, PUD, and the County are working together under an interlocal agreement. They are building broadband projects and working with local ISPs. There is now a Broadband Development Committee made up of staff across all groups. They discuss policies, strategies, funding opportunities, and how to move projects forward. There is constant communication and reporting back. The committee helps them more effectively reach our underserved populations while also being reliable and affordable. They created a mission and priorities which include: rapid deployment, fiscal responsibility, and communication with stakeholders. They also focus on where we are going to build identifying the gaps where others are not building, namely low-density, rural areas where no providers are available.

They work collaboratively with the County who received Federal funding (25/3). This is different from the state funding (100/20). Whatcom County doesn't count as rural or distressed per the Federal standards. So, they to connect with ISPs before they think about applying for funding.

There are two current projects getting ready to build in 2022: North Mosquito Lake Road on Mt. Baker Highway and East Nooksack. This took coordination with ISPs to avoid overbuild. They are now focused on building mid-mile and fiber to the home when we were originally expecting to only build backbone. 464 residents will get fiber to the home. The collaborative recently got funded for another project just North of Lynden where about 450 homes and 12 businesses will have 150 megabits symmetrical service and up to 1 gig in speed.

The key is to be flexible, communicative, and always reach out to stakeholders and partnerships. The partnership with the PUD has grown and continues to do so.

Atul Deshmane: There has been an evolution in Port planning. Initially the group focused on an open-access backbone. The focus today is on getting fiber to the home on nearly-unserved communities.

Question: Are any of those sites in the City of Bellingham? **Gina Stark**: All those sites are outside the City of Bellingham, in Whatcom County.

Greg Laudeman: Is the Port doing retail broadband or wholesale, building the infrastructure, or leasing to ISPs? **Gina Stark**: Those are open-access networks; the Port is not doing any retail. **Greg Laudeman**: Can you speak to the funding? **Gina Stark** replied that both projects are being funded through CURB (Community Urban Revitalization Board) along with funding through the Port.

Question: Did any ISPs express interest in open access? Is Pogozone aware of what you are doing? **Gina Stark** responded that Pogozone is aware, but the projects are still in the planning and design stages, so they need to see more of what is being built before they decide to buy it.

Question: Is any part of your funding going to help people who don't have equipment due to lack of funding or lack of knowledge? **Gina Stark** shared that Pogozone is part of the EBB program and provides assistance to low-income families, including free technology. We can't just build it to homes if they don't know how to use it. Working with libraries, tribal communities, and sharing resources is something we do as well.

There was a discussion of funding programs available and some disagreement about the types of programs that Bellingham might qualify for.

4. Evaluate meeting and discuss future meeting agendas

Due to the length of the earlier agenda topic discussion, David Roberts suggested the discussion part of the agenda be postponed until the next meeting in February. **Eric Johnston** said that he, Jory Wolf, and Greg Laudeman will plan to give an update in the next meeting on the asset inventory.

Based on conversation in the meeting, David Roberts suggested the following agenda items for the February meeting:

1. Survey update
2. Asset inventory
3. Open Conversation on progress and strategy moving forward

Comment - Kristopher Keillor, who presented an update on the Workgroup progress at a recent City Council meeting, shared that the City Council requested him to emphasize that the Council is looking for leadership and recommendations from this group. **Eric Johnston** pointed out that the City Council is looking for a policy recommendation from the Workgroup. He also reiterated that providing a recommendation on what the next steps are for the City should be our focus. Eric said he would send out a link to Kristopher Keillor's City Council Presentation. The Workgroup needs to talk about how that recommendation is put together, and how the Magellan report feeds into that decision. The Council needs the Workgroup recommendation to take action.

Greg Laudeman reminded everyone that Magellan's goal is to give the Workgroup a package and a report to help make that decision and recommendation.

Kristopher Keillor urged the group to come to agreement on the package and not provide a report with multiple options. **Eric Johnston** pointed out that the report will list the entire range of options, but the key is to provide a recommendation based on this body of work. **David Roberts** shared that the Workgroup can list all the areas they have agreement on recommendations, and also allow for minority opinions if there is not complete agreement on any particular element.

David Roberts asked how everyone felt about the conversation today. Comments were generally good. He encouraged members to provide him additional questions for the open conversation at the next meeting.

Meeting adjourned 7:55 PM.

Next meeting scheduled for Tuesday, February 1st, 2022 at 6:00 PM via Zoom