



Public Works Department City of Bellingham

Broadband Advisory Workgroup

Meeting Notes

Tuesday, June 7, 2022

6:00 PM – 8:00 PM

Zoom

WG Members in attendance:	Spencer Moore	Michelle Kopcha
	Steve Spitzer	Kristopher Keillor
	RB Tewksbury	Linda Fels
	Milissa Miller	
Ex Officio Members in attendance:	David Brinn	Terry Davis
	Gina Stark	
	Atul Deshmane	
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 welcomed everyone and reviewed the agenda. David noted that Pogozone representatives were unable to attend the meeting as shown on the agenda. Eric Johnston suggested the Workgroup focus on completing their work with the limited time available and not request Pogozone to attend. This was accepted. The notes from the May Workgroup meeting were approved with no requested changes.	
2. Magellan Advisors response to comments on their report	Magellan Advisors staff were not available for the meeting. The Workgroup provided a number of comments and observations regarding the consultant report. Eric Johnston will meet with the Magellan team to discuss the concerns. Eric asked for any additional comments to be sent to him and to David Roberts.	
3. Overview of Report Team Subgroup's draft recommendations	David Roberts introduced the work of the Report Team Subgroup comprised of Steve Spitzer, Milissa Miller, RB Tewksbury, Terry Davis, Gina Stark, Atul Deshmane. The Subgroup's initial draft includes both observations and recommendations; the observations can be used to address the "whereas" statements in an agenda bill and provide both context regarding the work and findings of the Workgroup. The Workgroup's recommendations will be included in the agenda bill as in the section titled "Be it resolved..."	
	The Workgroup members reviewed each of the comments and provided edits which David included in a revised document. See attached. The Workgroup also reviewed and edited some of the recommendations but did not complete	

Engineering

104 W. Magnolia Street, Suite 109
Bellingham, WA 98225
Phone: (360) 778-7900
Fax: (360) 778-7901
TTY: (360) 778-8382
Email: pw@cob.org

Natural Resources

Physical: 2200 Nevada Street
Mailing: 2221 Pacific Street
Bellingham, WA 98229
Phone: (360) 778-7800
Fax: (360) 778-7801
Email: pw@cob.org

Operations

2221 Pacific Street
Bellingham, WA 98229
Phone: (360) 778-7700
Fax: (360) 778-7701
Email: pw@cob.org

the task. There were several suggestions for reorganizing the way the recommendations are listed.

David suggested the Workgroup members review the edits so far and send additional comments to him.

4. Discuss schedule and plan agenda for next meeting

David Roberts suggested adding a meeting on June 21st for the full Broadband Workgroup. In between now and then, the Report Team Subgroup will meet and finalize the agenda bill. They will be meeting on the afternoon of June 14th. Spencer Moore was added to the team.

We will skip the July 5 meeting because Eric Johnston and David Roberts will not be available. Assuming the Workgroup has agreed to the contents of their report, the last meeting of the Broadband group will be July 19th.

The Ex-officios will be given the opportunity to prepare comments related to the Workgroup recommendations and Magellan reports. They were asked to provide their input to David Roberts no later than July 12th for inclusion in the Workgroup Report and agenda bill.

Broadband group plans to present their findings to August 29th City Council meeting. Eric Johnston asked that as many members as possible plan to attend the meeting. He will provide details as we get closer to the date.

Meeting adjourned 8:00 PM.

Next meeting scheduled for Tuesday, June 21st, 2022 at 6:00 PM via Zoom

Attachment: Working draft of comments and recommendations as edited in the meeting.

BROADBAND ADVISORY WORKGROUP

Working Draft - Observations and Recommendations

June 7, 2022

Draft Observations (for our “Whereas” statements):

1. The Workgroup met for approximately 17 months at the request of City Council to address tasks identified in Resolution AB# 22007.
2. The Workgroup established goals for broadband services in the City;
3. Not everyone in Bellingham has access to the internet despite the fact that Internet is available from multiple Internet Service Providers (ISPs) throughout the City;
4. A connected citizenry benefits the whole community;
5. Digital equity is a particular concern and access is the primary challenge.
6. The primary barriers to access include the inability to pay for service, having adequate computer technology and digital skills, and/or relevancy of having internet access in their life;
7. The City of Bellingham provides free public access to computers and the Internet on a limited basis.
8. The current state standard for broadband speeds is 100/20 MBps.
9. Fiber to the home is available in several neighborhoods in the City.
10. The City’s municipal network is not designed to be consumer, enterprise or carrier grade, or optimized for performance, reduced maintenance tasks, and redundancy to enable maximum [network reliability](#) and minimal downtime;
11. The City’s current municipal network reliably:
 - a. supports many critical City services such as fire, police, water, wastewater, streetlights, traffic lights as well as connecting its buildings to a network;
 - b. provides services to Bellingham Public Schools and WTA; and
 - c. supports the Whatcom Regional 911 services and the Whatcom County Sheriff’s EOC.
12. The City has no resources dedicated (staff) to support the City’s fiber network;
13. The City retained a consultant whose report provided information regarding the City’s current network and options for the future.
14. The consultant report provided the following observations regarding the City’s role in providing broadband services:
 - a. A plan to provide a city-wide fiber to the home (FTTH) network would be extremely expensive.
 - b. The debt service to build a city-wide FTTH network is unsustainable;
 - c. Bellingham has a highly competitive marketplace with different types of broadband service;
 - d. There is an extensive network of private ISPs available to most locations in the City;
 - e. Other business models using the City’s current assets should be evaluated;
 - f. The City network provides a “backbone” opportunity with the capacity to increase services to citizens and businesses and generate revenue for the City;
 - g. New taxes may not be required to support improving service and access;
15. The City’s consultant conducted a public sentiment survey of broadband users in the city. From that survey they concluded:
 - a. Nearly half (46%) of survey respondents rated Price as either Bad or Terrible;
 - b. Similarly, nearly half (42.7%) rated Customer Service & Support as Bad or Terrible.

- c. Data from the survey indicates that lower speed connections are dispersed throughout the City and do not point to any specific neighborhoods or areas that are underserved compared to their surroundings.
 - d. Eighty-two (82) percent of the survey respondents are currently served by one private internet service provider (ISP);
 - e. The survey did not provide adequate information regarding business satisfaction with current broadband quality of service;
16. Funding from State and Federal sources may be available to assist the City with achieving equitable and affordable broadband throughout the City;
 17. There are opportunities for the City to collaborate with the Port of Bellingham and the Whatcom PUD to continue to learn, understand, and share knowledge regarding each other's broadband strategies and plans.
 18. There are opportunities for the City to collaborate with ISPs to improve service and generate revenue for the City;
 19. Workgroup identified a need for additional information:
 - a. Data regarding unserved and underserved members of the community, including barriers to adoption and adoption rates, access challenges, and affordability, particularly for overburdened communities;
 - b. A financial analysis sufficient to make an educated/informed decision regarding business models other than FTTH;
 - c. Realistic estimates of anticipated uptake numbers assumed for a city-wide FTTH scenario. (Uptake means: The rate of user/customer acquisition by an ISP as a percentage of total number of users/customers in the service area);
 - d. The potential opportunities of the City collaborating with ISPs to achieve its goals;
 - e. Monitor outcomes of efforts in communities similar to Bellingham to develop community broadband systems providing benchmarks for comparison.
 - f. The concerns expressed by businesses in our community about the level of service or quality of service.
 - g. Opportunities and future plans of private ISPs providing service in the community.

Draft Recommendations (for our "Be It Resolved..." statements)

1. The City establish a vision and goals for its municipal broadband network and its impacts on the community;
2. The City develop and implement a broadband adoption plan to provide the kind of broadband connection and support individuals need with a focus on unserved and underserved members of the community, including the "missing middle;"
3. The City establish the following goals and standards for broadband services in the City of Bellingham:
 - a. A broadband speed for residents (housed and unhoused), visitors, and businesses of 150/150 MBps today, always available, scalable, and a minimum target of 1 GBps symmetrical service by 2028.
 - b. Broadband services are available for residents (housed and unhoused), visitors, and businesses through access points such as residences, libraries, public facilities, parks, schools, shelters, and service agencies and organizations.
 - c. Services should be cost-competitive with reasonable rates based on those achieved by other comparable US cities (by the metric of GBps/month/\$).
 - d. Everyone has access to the information resources necessary to achieve digital equity.
 - e. Quality broadband service for all based on the residents' or business' choice of service level.

4. The City provide additional staffing and resources to support its network planning, development, operations, and maintenance;
5. The City consider pursue or consider developing an interlocal agreement between the City, Whatcom County, Port of Bellingham, and the PUD to support and expand BB availability in the region;
6. The City develop a system plan for managing the future municipal broadband network that expands and improves its broadband capacity and services in a self-sustaining manner through network-generated revenues, grants, and cooperative agreements with the Port of Bellingham, Whatcom PUD, private ISPs, and local non-profit organizations. (This is where we ended off.)
7. The City establish a digital equity plan;
8. The City conduct additional studies regarding the barriers to adoption to identify the unserved and underserved members of the community;
9. The City work with others in the community including non-profits and the library to provide a program for unserved and underserved members of the community to:
 - a. improved internet literacy and access,
 - b. establish a “navigators” program similar to the program in Spokane, and
 - c. help members of the community find ways to qualify for support programs and get access;
10. The City consider installing equipment to make free and open internet access available to citizens and visitors to the City in a variety of public locations distributed throughout the community;
11. The City complete additional analyses to consider the costs and opportunities of City business models (other than FTTH), building on existing assets and with costs suited to meet the long-term needs of the community.
12. The City conduct a survey of businesses in the city to determine their current and future needs for broadband services;
13. The City continue to engage with the Port of Bellingham, the Whatcom PUD, and local private ISPs to identify opportunities to collaborate on improving service and sharing resources;
14. The City consider continuing the work of the Broadband Advisory Workgroup to address the future needs identified.