



Public Works Department

City of Bellingham

Broadband Advisory Workgroup

Meeting Notes

Tuesday, June 1, 2021

6:00pm – 7:43pm

Zoom

Workgroup Members in attendance:

Linda Fels
Kristopher Keillor
Michelle Kopcha

Milissa Miller
Spencer Moore
Steve Spitzer
RB Tewksbury

Ex Officio Members in attendance:

Atul Deshmane
Terry Davis
David Brinn

Kurt Gazow
David Namura
Gina Stark

City Staff and Facilitator in attendance:

Eric Johnston, Public Works Director
Rush Duncan, Public Works Webinar Support
David Roberts, Peak Sustainability Group, Facilitator

1. Welcome and Approval of notes

David Roberts opened the meeting at 6:00 welcoming everyone and reviewing the agenda. The notes as prepared were approved. David shared that Maximillian Carper had resigned from the Workgroup.

2. Administrative and Technology Items Update RFP Update

Eric Johnston noted that they received two responses to the RFP and expect to make a selection by the end of the week. Eric asked for help developing the scope of work. Michelle Kopcha volunteered to assist him.

Eric also asked for a volunteer to make a presentation to City Council on progress of the Workgroup. Kristopher Keillor volunteered and will work with Eric.

Lastly, Eric asked if someone would like to participate in a conversation on June 16th with a representative from the Department of Commerce who works with broadband issues. R.B. Tewksbury volunteered to participate. This meeting will queue up the topic for a future meeting presentation.

Rush sent a Whatcom County document regarding funding from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 to the Workgroup as an FYI.

Atul Deshmane inquired if Broadband Group members could advise the County Council on technology? Eric responded that the County would likely partner with Port/PUD on the Port's shovel-ready project. The Workgroup's role is clearly defined to advise the City Council, not to deal with the broader issue of the county as a whole.

3. Clarify what the Workgroup wants to hear from Ex-Officio members

The plan has been to offer Ex-Officio members representing ISPs the opportunity to address the Workgroup. Now that the Workgroup has heard from the Port, School District and PUD, the

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second part of the meeting focused on identifying the types of information the Workgroup would find useful to hear from the Ex-Officio members representing ISPs.

RB noted there is a lot we don't know to ask. The Ex-Officio members should share info that they think the Workgroup should know. Where the industry currently is and where they need to go.

Michelle would like to know what synergies our Ex-Officio members look for to get involved in a public/private partnership. She also would like to learn what level of service we are using now? What are we likely to require in 10 years? How has their business model changed with the pandemic? Will this condition be permanent, and should that change how we should be looking at things? Are there any programs currently that address the needs of the underserved? Are there things we should be considering when we think about equity to accessing broadband?

Spencer Moore suggested that Ex-Officio members avoid a sales pitch in their presentations. He would like to know how ISPs are implementing the FCC Broadband Voucher program? How does the new voucher system affect any individual ISP in Bellingham? How has the uptake in Bellingham looked compared to other parts of the country and why? Can we do things beyond the voucher system to lower that cost? What are other ways to lower costs to the end user besides direct aid?

Steve Spitzer pointed out that the Workgroup is an advocate for the general public and the private enterprises are advocates for their shareholders and shareholder value. The Workgroup has hard questions and shouldn't shy away from them. He would like to hear how the ISPs define equity, affordability, accessibility and quality.

Kristopher Keiller noted that the Emergency Broadband Benefit funding from the FCC needs to benefit the end-customer, not companies. He feels the Workgroup needs to ensure this happens and noted the difference in motives: the public good vs making money.

Eric pointed out that our goal is to advise the city council on policy. How ethical/unethical a theoretical company is does not matter. How the voucher program could benefit some customers does matter. Questions like "How is that program administered? What's the uptake?" This is more applicable from a policy standpoint than asking "Why don't you offer that service?"

There was considerable conversation between the members about the roles and intentions of ISPs relative to the public need. How does the workgroup balance the needs of the community with the business needs of the ISPs? How do we have a collaborative effort?

David Namura shared his concerns about the Workgroup's perspective of the ISPs. He noted that the Ex-Officio members value the work of the Workgroup and have invested a lot of time to partner with the community. He hopes their presence is valued and people come to this conversation not thinking that corporations are just out take advantage of citizens. The city will not be successful going at this alone. It will take city, government, citizens, and private industry working together. He doesn't want to be cast as the corporate villain. What incentive is there to come to the table if that was the case? Drive to the solutions and solve the problem.

David Roberts interjected that everyone on the Workgroup is part of one team brought together to solve this community problem. Members need to acknowledge that some are here representing the community, while others are here representing the business interests. You all need to be part of the solution. This has to be a public/private partnership.

R.B. thanked everyone for being here, including the Ex-Officio members. R.B. stated that we're all here for the same reason, which is we all want really good Internet for Bellingham and Whatcom county. And I think the fact that they're spending time with us is a commitment. So any anti-business bias that does exist here in this group, I think we should open our minds and let this process unfold. They have a lot of really good information that they could share with us, so I want to thank David for being here and all the other ex-officios as well.

Linda Fels would like to know about the City's current fiber infrastructure expansion. She would also like to know what a public/private partnership would look like. Also, more about an open access system. Does any other city have experience doing this? What are the pitfalls? What does the Ex-Officio experience tell us?

Milissa Miller pointed out we are looking for a pre-agenda of items for the Ex-Officio members. Did we capture those ideas? Would it be helpful if we all submit Ex-Officio questions for the next agenda? It would only be fair to let them come prepared and know the questions in advance.

Eric shared that free form and general topics are preferred over specific questions.

Milissa also asked if the Ex-Officio members are able to apply a base charge and a consumption charge? Do we need to talk "rails, trains, and cars" or individual metering of household speed and volume as well as infrastructure? Also, how did the pandemic affect the Ex-Officio's businesses? We are consuming at the block level now, not the house level.

4. Definitions discussion –
Affordability, Equity &
Access

The workgroup agreed to focus tonight on the topic of Quality. After some excellent discussion they arrived at the following definition:

Quality

Internet service that provides uninterrupted speed at peak use hours, is reliable, and has latency, jitter, and packet loss low enough to:

- a) conduct clear, natural-feeling two-way teleconferencing with anyone else in the world who also has a high-quality Internet connection, and
- b) to be able to use most—if not all—of the purchased bandwidth, even during peak usage times.

Speeds defined in the broadband definition.

Quality Targets:

- Broadband speeds or higher; 99.99% uptime; world-class customer support as measured by response time, issue resolution success rate, equitability, affordability, and accessibility.
- Specific "quality" targets from the customer premise to the Internet backbone would be:
 - a one-way **latency** of <50ms
 - **jitter** of <10ms
 - **packet loss** <0.5%,
 - end-to-end experience that keeps latency, jitter, and packet loss within acceptable overall limits, assuming all other connected parties also have high-quality Internet connections.

- The system maintains quality attributes under robust network stress tests and is monitored for performance on a regular basis.

5. Agenda for the next meeting. Meeting evaluation.

Suggested topics: update on RFP consultant process, reserve space for a single outside speaker.

Linda, Michelle, Spencer will meet to finalize agenda on 6/2/21.

The Workgroup agreed the meeting went well.

6. Meeting Adjourned

7:43 PM

Next meeting scheduled for Tuesday, July 6th at 6:00pm via Zoom