



Public Works Department

City of Bellingham

Broadband Advisory Workgroup

Draft Meeting Notes

Tuesday, April 6, 2021

6:00pm – 7:30pm

Zoom

Workgroup Members in attendance:

Maximillian Carper
Linda Fels
Kristopher Keillor
Michelle Kopcha

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
Marty Mulholland, IT Director
Rush Duncan, Public Works Webinar Support

David Roberts, Peak Sustainability Group, Facilitator

1. Welcome & Approval of Notes

David Roberts started the meeting at 6:00pm.

David noted that no comments or edits were received regarding the draft notes. The notes were approved.

Terry Davis (Comcast) introduced himself as the newest ex-officio member of the Workgroup.

Steve Spitzer asked about David Roberts' role in providing analysis. David responded that his role is to help the group by gathering the input from the group and sorting it into digestible information.

2. Administrative & Technology Items Update

Marty Mulholland confirmed that everyone has access to SharePoint and is receiving communication.

Eric Johnston provided an update on the RFP which is being finalized. Since last meeting, the City learned it will receive \$21 M from the American Rescue Act. The ARA is targeted to housing, homelessness, COVID, economic recovery, and broadband. Specifics on how the funds can be utilized are coming.

Question: What info that is being shared should be posted to the public site? Eric said the more of what we share the better. However, much "news" is opinion, and news behind paywalls creates issues for access. For guidance: share factual news from credible sources and studies. Send links and documents to the Workgroup. Eric and Iris will do their best to get it published and will let the Workgroup know if something shouldn't be posted.

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

Michelle Kopcha asked would it be worth having a disclaimer on the resource page stating that “the articles here don’t reflect opinions of.....” The group indicated this made sense.

Steve Spitzer noted the Hillsboro and Knoxville articles he sent were not available on the SharePoint site. Marty Mulholland will check that.

3. Definitions discussion of:

- Broadband
- Availability/Accessibility
- Affordability
- Equitability
- Quality

David Roberts described the process used to develop draft definitions for the workgroup to consider. He compiled the ideas provided in the SharePoint file looking for key concepts as well as issues that need additional conversation. Agenda Planning Group also provided minor editing of his draft. David shared his draft and the workgroup proceed to discuss several of the definitions suggesting these drafts may be edited once the Workgroup has heard from the ex-officio members, consultants, and other speakers. (Note: Draft definitions are shown with yellow shading.)

BROADBAND:

There was a robust discussion of the broadband definition. Key points included:

- The rapid increase in demand following Nielsen’s Law of Internet Bandwidth
- Whether the definition is tied to a particular point in time
- Whether we are suggesting a minimum service level now
- Developing systems that are expandable and scalable
- The City’s ability to adapt to those needs
- The sufficiency or insufficiency of both the federal and state standard for broadband
- Designing for Bellingham’s needs now and in the future, while considering
- Are Bellingham’s needs different from other similar communities in the US?
- Keeping our definition simple and not boxing ourselves in with too much detail - not too esoteric.
- Including a list types of technologies?
- Thinking in terms of gigabits, not megabits.
- Ensuring equal access over time
- Considering a first-class network and not compromising unless we can’t afford it.
- Do we limit ourselves to fiber?
- Add to our definition: Desirable broadband is....

Draft definition for broadband:

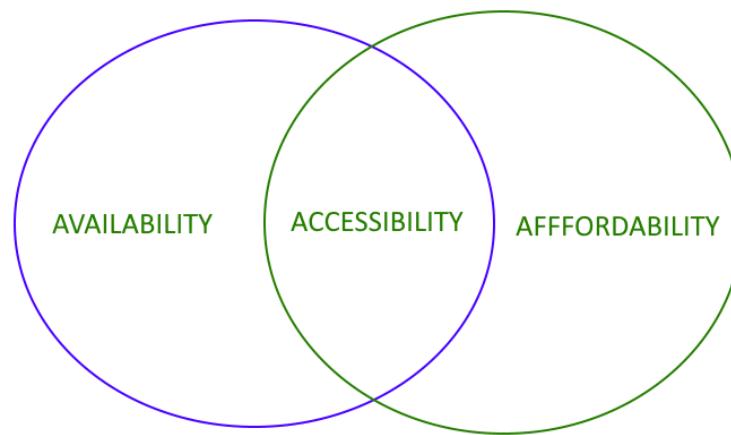
(A) high-speed communication infrastructure service network with a variety of technologies for residents and businesses that is always available and scalable, and providing minimum speeds of: XXXX.

David suggested we start with this draft definition leaving the speed question until a later date.

AVAILABILITY/ACCESSIBILITY

Our conversation about availability and accessibility was very good. We decided that Availability is about whether broadband service is physically available to each home or workplace. Accessibility is more a function of the ability of a person or family to pay for service. Key points from the discussion included:

- Definition for availability of a product: "The product physically present"
- Availability is physical and geographic.
- Affordability is integrally linked to accessibility. If a service is available but not affordable it does not address the societal need for access.
- Should broadband be considered a utility?
- If so, is there an obligation to make it available to all?
- Equal distribution of service around the community
- Should competition vs monopoly be addressed.
- The desire is not the internet, but the quality of the content on the internet.
- As a way of conceptualizing the two definitions, Kristopher Keillor created a graphic like this which he shared with us all:



- A bigger circle encompassing all (the two circles) is the "equity" bubble.
- Equity is when you achieve 100% accessibility.

The Workgroup decided that it was important to separate out the definitions for affordability from availability.

Draft definition for availability:

Every business and resident, housed and unhoused, regardless of demographic or ability, has available a net-neutral, reliable/quality high-speed broadband system, and is not reliant on geographic location.

The Workgroup agreed to work on the definition of affordability next, after which would decide if a definition for accessibility was needed. David confirmed Workgroup members were reasonably comfortable with the definition of

Availability for the time being. Once more information is available the Workgroup will return to this definition.

AFFORDABILITY

The Workgroup ran out of time for this part of our conversation but agreed to pick up where they left off at our next meeting. Before ending for the evening, the following key concepts and ideas were discussed:

- “Connectivity as a right” is being discussed in King county
- The role of PUDs in providing broadband services in Washington
- City Council discussions indicating the Workgroup should be looking at broadband as a utility while not necessarily expecting the City to be the utility owner.
- The role of pricing and subsidies, and how they relate to the high cost of living in Bellingham
- The advantages and disadvantages of means testing and vouchers.
- Looking to the consultant for data and guidance.

Two definitions were still under consideration at the end of the meeting and will be discussed at the next Workgroup meeting:

- 1) Every household and business should be able to afford high-speed Internet that is sufficient for their needs (telehealth, remote learning, remote work, business web apps, teleconferencing), and basic wants (streaming video, audio, etc.).
- 2) Our goal is for a broadband service that is cost-competitive with reasonable rates based on those achieved by other US cities and other countries with high-speed systems oriented toward future growth in communication needs.

4. Items for next meeting

For the meeting April 20th

Presentations:

- City fiber network: Eric Johnston/Marty Mulholland
- School District fiber network: Kurt Gazow
- Port efforts: Gina Stark
- Affordability definition

5. What did members appreciate about tonight's meeting?

Great meeting! It was good to have spirited conversation. We wish we had more opportunities to get to know each other more.

Meeting adjourned at 8:04 pm

Next meeting scheduled for Tuesday, April 20th at 6:00pm via Zoom