

Broadband Update

About a year and a half ago, Mansfield Community Fiber (MCF) indicated an interest in installing Fiber To The Home (FTTH) broadband in Fletcher. The Select Board supported this effort by leasing some land at the Town Office building in order that MCF could build their Network Operations Center (NOC) there. MCF has already installed some working FTTH in Fletcher, and early feedback indicates that people are happy with MCF's service.

In the past year, we have worked with MCF to estimate what it would cost to provide FTTH to everyone in Fletcher. MCF's estimates have ranged from a low of \$500K to a high of \$1,430K, with the differences in dollar amounts resulting from different assumptions and goals (like schedule and whether or not to provide service to everyone on unmaintained town roads and on private roads). We also put out an RFP that Consolidated Communications responded to in January with a quote of \$1,600,500.

Given that MCF's high estimate was still lower than Consolidated's quote, we moved forward with our discussions with MCF, and looked into funding avenues, including various grants and a loan through the Vermont Economic Development Authority (VEDA). VEDA was empowered by the State last year, through Act 79, to "make loans that expand broadband service to unserved and underserved Vermonters". This kind of loan would be repaid solely from the net revenues of the broadband service, rather than tax dollars, so it wouldn't affect taxes or the Town budget.

Based on the conversations with MCF, VEDA, and a couple grant sources, on Monday February 17th, the Select Board warned a special town meeting offering the voters a chance to approve funding this effort. In our follow-up conversations with MCF a few days later, we learned that the dollar amount we had used for the official voter warning needed to be revised, due to a misunderstanding about the number of miles that would need to be wired to provide service to everyone in Fletcher. We have since canceled that special town meeting, and are working to come up with an accurate quote and service map, so that we can clearly assess our options with both MCF and Consolidated, before warning a new special town meeting for this proposal.

After that, should the voters approve, we would then move on to apply for a revenue-backed loan and grant funding.