



**Town of Whitingham
Broadband Committee**

MINUTES OF APRIL 29, 2020

These Minutes are considered a DRAFT until accepted into the public record (with any corrections noted) at a future meeting of the Whitingham Broadband Committee (WBC).

The Whitingham Broadband Committee (WBC) held a regular meeting on Monday, April 29, 2020 at 5:30pm via Zoom conference.

Committee members on the Zoom conference: Wayne Corse, Phil Edelstein, Michael Edwards, Doug Fruge, Mike Mandracchia, Doug Amidon, Rod Bemis, Olivia Kennett

Others on the Zoom conference: Gretchen Havreluk, Richard Carnall and John Leary from Whip City Fiber a division of Westfield Gas & Electric.

Call to Order. Additions or Changes to Agenda.

Phil Edelstein called the meeting to order at 5:30pm.

Hearing of visitors (for concerns not on the agenda)

None

Whip City Fiber

Westfield Gas & Electric (WG&E) is a municipal owned utility in Westfield, MA providing natural gas and electric power to Westfield for 120 years. In 2016, WG&E started offering fiber internet to most of Westfield. Based on the positive experience in Westfield, WG&E formed Whip City Fiber to begin offering fiber internet to other MA towns. Within a year, Whip City will be providing fiber internet to 20 nearby towns in MA with speeds of 1GB download and upload. Unlike some other fiber vendors Whitingham has talked with, Whip City does not provide financing. Whip City has been successful assisting towns with obtaining federal grant funds for fiber projects equal to ~\$2000 per address. Whip City designs the fiber network, manages the pole make ready with the utilities, the building of the fiber infrastructure and acts as the ISP (internet service provider). Whip City has a sophisticated customer portal including online payment. Whip City does most of the fiber line maintenance, contracting out maintenance as needed. In the Whip City model, the towns own the fiber network. Richard and John suggested that Jacksonville Electric is an excellent vehicle thru which Whitingham can apply for federal grant funds. Due to on-going fiber projects in MA, including Heath and Colrain, Whip City would not be available to build in Whitingham until 2021 but the company is interested in lining up new towns for future work. As a publicly owned utility, Whip City takes a long-term view on return on resources so their markup on construction is less than other fiber builders which must report greater short-term profits. This is part of the reason Whip City was selected by so many nearby towns in MA as the builder and operator of the town owned fiber networks. Towns that have a high take rate can generate extra cash which can be put into a reserve fund for future network upgrades or to reduce the monthly customer cost. Rowe has a 70% take rate while some other Whip City towns have a take rate as high as 90%. Based on experience with smaller towns, Whitingham has more than enough population density to support a fiber network. The MA towns serviced by Whip City charge \$70-\$110 per month for internet service. Whip City is considering offering TV packages in the future; however, most customers have learned it is cheaper to stream with Netflix, Hulu and other video streaming services.

Whip City Fiber is one of the vendors that will be meeting with the Deerfield Valley CUD.

Mr. Edelstein adjourned the meeting at 7:02pm.

Respectfully submitted,