

Whitingham Economic Development Group

Whitingham Municipal Center, Selectboard Office, Jacksonville, VT 05342

Minutes of Thursday, October 24, 2019 as corrected

Attendees: EDG Members: Gretchen Havreluk, Seth Boyd, Phil Edelstein and Jenepher Burnell. Gig Zboray, Selectboard Office Administrator. Tyler Colford interested in becoming member. Chris Lynch, Director of Business Development for Matrix Design Group. Wayne Wood, Wayne Corse, Scott Reed, and Craig Hammer, Selectboard Members. Ron Pastore, Rod Bemis, Mike Mandraccia, Ann Coleman, and Dan Purjes, residents. Laura Sibilia, state representative. Cliff Duncan, Duncan Cable.

Call to Order. Additions or Changes to Agenda

Gretchen Havreluk called the meeting to order at 6:32pm.

Approve minutes of September 26, 2019 meeting

A motion was made by Phil Edelstein to approve the Minutes of September 26, 2019 as written, seconded by Jenepher Burnell, all in favor.

Presentation by Matrix regarding connectivity

Chris Lynch of Matrix Design Group presented information about their proposal to the Town of Whitingham to provide fiber optic connections to all households in town. They have been in business for over 25 years. The estimated value of Matrix's investment is about \$3 million. ROW on utility poles would be paid for by town. The estimated conservative cost to Whitingham would be \$1.2 million with a minimum to no impact to the taxpayers because much of that cost would be paid back on the user's monthly bill. The modeling and decision would be the towns to decide where to provide the service (\$450 per pole is the estimated conservative cost). Town would be responsible for providing a place to house and power network electronics. Once we have a right of way agreement with utility company, the town will need to pay an annual fee for it.

Laura Sibilia spoke, she feels towns banding together would have stronger negotiating power. She suggested working with the Windham Regional Commission to form a Communications Union District (CUD) with other towns. She cautions getting excited about Federal grants.

Seth Boyd mentioned that he appreciates the idea of combining with other towns but questioned how long does that take and how can we move it forward faster? Laura Sibilia noted that Readsboro would be a natural quick partner because they are ready to move forward now.

The Whitingham Selectboard is considering the need for some sort of Connectivity Committee. Gretchen Havreluk spoke in favor of keeping the subject of connectivity under the purview of EDG and bringing in other members who are knowledgeable on the topic. Rod Bemis suggested creating a co-op with other towns rather than a municipality.

The Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation will be hosting a free webinar on Local Broadband Planning on November 19th at noon. Check their website (www.brattleborodevelopment.com/free-webinar-on-local-broadband-planning/)

Cliff Duncan questioned how the Matrix investment would be taxed by the state. No clear answer was provided.

Continue Strategic Planning Process-Identify projects:

Due to the length of the Matrix discussion this was tabled until ~~Wednesday~~, *correction* Monday, November 4th at 6pm.

Future meeting topics

Review Google Analytics from town website and rewrite Whitingham description for the Deerfield Valley Real Estate magazine.

Next meeting ~~Wednesday~~ *Correction* Monday, November 4th at 6pm to continue Strategic Planning Session.

Adjourn

Gretchen adjourned the meeting at 8:32pm.

Respectfully submitted,

~Gig Zboray