

Four Towns Broadband Committee Meeting

			
Florida, MA	Hawley, MA	Monroe, MA	Savoy, MA

FHMS Four Towns Broadband Committee Meeting

There was a teleconference meeting of the FHMS Four Towns Broadband Committee on Thursday, June 4, 2020 at 4:45 pm. (Note: This meeting was recorded.)

MEETING MINUTES

In Attendance (All via phone conference call):**

- Hawley: Lark Thwing,* Rick Kean
- Florida: Christine Dobbert,*
- Monroe: David Gagne* (Absent)
- Savoy: John Tynan*
- DesignNine: Jack Maytum
- WiValley: Brian Foucher
- OTELCO: Trevor Jones (Absent)
- Interisle: Steve Harris

Minutes
Approved,
FHMS Four-Towns
Committee,
August 28, 2020

*Voting Members

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Note: There may have been one or more persons listening to this call who did not identify themselves.

Quorum, Call to Order:

Chairman Lark Thwing declared a quorum and called the telephonic meeting to order at 4:40 pm.

◆ **Minutes of the April 30th Meeting.**

The Minutes of the April 30 FHMS Meeting were reviewed and accepted by the voting members present without revision

◆ **Report from Brian Foucher on:**

❖ **Status of Phase 2 Completion Date**

Brian said WiValley completed all site construction for Phase 2 by the 29th of May. Some sites are waiting for either electrical power from National Grid or Eversource and/or signal from another site waiting for power.

❖ Here's a list of the sites and their status:

- Florida Town Hall – up and running since February.
- Savoy MEL – Alive on batteries, waiting for power from Eversource, just passed electrical inspection, slated to be lit up next week;
- Whitcomb Hill Summit is live in Florida;
- Monroe Town Hall is live with power but awaits a data link from Rowe, which doesn't have power yet. However, an arrangement has been made to light up the Monroe Town Hall through the fiber link for the Monroe Hot Spot.
- Monroe-Thayer is fully operational – adjustment/alignment for speed and performance between Thayer and Chapel is scheduled for next week.
- Rowe-Monroe Hill Road – up and functional, waiting for power from National Grid – to be completed in the next two-three weeks.
- Florida VSE, Fire Department – operational since the May 25th.
- Florida NHT – north of Hoosick Tunnel – live.
- Florida Whitcomb Hill Extension site (WHE) has a poor link, so the plan is to interconnect an additional 60-ft. pole, with both power and signal coming to it from conduit underground.
- Want to put in a similar 60' pole setup as Thayer-Monroe Hill Road – there are very tall trees in the path – need a new pole location which will sidestep the problem. Electric power and an Ethernet connection will be used to activate a new pole with one antenna.
- Brian said that MBI has agreed to these two modifications, pending testing, and has said the change would not cause a reorganization of or delay in the Phase 2 payment schedule.
- Bryan asked the group for comments. Lark asked about financial impact of two additional poles, and what part of the budget – i.e., contingency funds, would be impacted. Brian said the dollar amount was in the \$10,000 range. The question of where the money would come from was left open.

❖ **Status of Start of Phase 3**

- Brian said WiValley had already started Phase 3 with the pole East of Grout in Hawley, which is live and operational.
 - ✓ A repair is needed on the 900 Mhz. transmitter at the top of that pole to complete the network connection. Brian indicated it may be something as simple as a jostled wire.
- Side Hill Farm (Hawley -- next to Doane Cemetery) – pole is in, waiting for National Grid to set its power pole (Lark commented that this has already been done).
- Pole on East Hawley Road which needed to be moved is now in its new location and is ready to be set.
- Pole on West Hawley Road (near Savoy Road) – waiting for the results of the wetlands study. Lark confirmed that that activity was complete and OK'd.
- Savoy site MLW has been built out and is waiting for the Electrical Inspector.
- Asked by Lark about Stetson Road in Hawley, Brian confirmed that that location is also part of the Phase 3 plan, and that it is waiting to be built out.
- Forge Hollow Road, Hawley – pole is all set up but waiting for National Grid to install an electric meter.
- Haskins & Bannis in Savoy – WiValley will be building out this site the beginning of next week. It is a critical one for the Western part of Savoy and the Savoy MHD and MHA locations.
- Savoy Town Hall and Hawley Town Hall – planning to do all of the electrical work including cabling, etc., in the next two weeks.
- Asked by Lark about the expected completion date for Phase 3, Brian expressed confidence in completing by the end of July or the first week of August. He mentioned that he had just hired two new people, an inside network technical support engineer and a field installer.

❖ **Status of Free hotspots provided by MBI (separate state-funding) for the four towns.**

- Brian said the hotspots are up and running at the four Town Halls as well as several other locations.

❖ **Total number of customers being served now.** (get a list to Rick for follow up).

- Brian said there are 88 who are connected. This includes the two customers down on Whitcomb Hill Summit Extension for whom

WiValley is providing service but not invoicing (because they are not being passed full bandwidth).

- Brian said that they were able to move some customer sites that were near the Florida Fire Department and encountering interference to better links @ Whitcomb Hill Summit.

◆ **Poles:**

❖ **Fully setup but waiting for electrical hookup by utilities.**

- There are three poles from Phase 2 that are completely built but are awaiting power and two from Phase 3. They are being held off until testing is complete for the one in Florida for Whitcomb Hill Extension, North of Hoosac Tunnel, and the one by Thayer Road.
- Brian confirmed in response to a query by Lark that WiValley has all the needed poles.
- Regarding locations for the two workaround sites – in Florida and in Monroe -- Brian stated that he had confirmation on the Florida site, but not yet for Monroe. He said that he thought both poles would have to be moved about 250 feet, but would not know the distances for sure until the tests were completed. Lark responded that @ 250 ft, it would be up to Monroe to decide if it needs a new pole hearing.

❖ **Where locations have not yet been confirmed.**

- Brian asserted that a final location on the two workaround poles mentioned just above would not be determined until the testing was complete.
- How far Out is the end of Phase 4?
 - ✓ End of September – it's a stretch, but Brian said he wants to "keep the fire going."

◆ **Status of getting Hawley Fire Dept set up as customer with a hotspot.**

- ❖ Brian said it's a cable repair, which is a pretty quick fix, so he was hoping to get over there and get it done by the end of next week.
- **Question from Lark:** Necessity of Sidehill Location as compared to the tall pole on Forget near Grout.

- **Response from Brian:** Diminished, particularly now that Legate Hill Road is no longer part of the picture, some of the critical need for the Sidehill installation has gone away.
 - **Question from Lark:** How are we going to reach down Buckland Road and into the Dodge Road area.
 - **Response from Brian:** We will not be able to do that with this design. However, we may be able to put up a relay at the Cider farm that would help get a signal down there. In order to do so, we'd need to have another agreement to cover the network if that farm should be sold -- something to start thinking about.
- ◆ **Status of Borden Mtn site.**
- ❖ Brian said that WiValley met with the fire warden two weeks ago, bringing the lift up there and putting it up to the prescribed height and determining it would not interfere with fire spotting, documenting the same with photos, and got sign off from the warden. They also met with the subcontractor, who is completing the drawings and will be applying to the State for an 80-foot pole to be set there, hopefully within the next two weeks.
- ◆ **Effect of Covid-19 on progress**
- ❖ One customer had erected a solar array in the path of the FMHS signal. Going forward, we would have to charge for fixing this kind of problem. That same customer came out with an oxygen mask that he'd been wearing for a year, which frightened our technician because of COVID. Brian stated that there is definitely a sensitivity to going into people's homes.
 - ❖ In general things seem to be opening up. COVID does slow the process down, however, particularly when some customers schedule an installation visit and then say when we get there that they just want to talk about it.
 - ❖ **Comment from Lark:**
"I think we made it clear and on the OTELCO website that installation would be free when we were working in the area. It was not free if otherwise."
 - ❖ **Response from Brian:**
"That's true, but we're also saying that it's free until the end of the project. Those two things contradict each other. So which one is it?"

- ◆ **Who do potential customers talk to about when they might get connected (Otelco, WiValley, Lark Thwing or town rep)**
Brian – OTELCO, first, with me in the loop. We're working more closely with OTELCO now that more customers are connected. Lark should not have to be involved except with neighbors on certain projects.
- ◆ **Problems or delays, i.e., finances, parts, subcontractors, etc.**
 - ❖ Brian said he was waiting on ordering CBRS equipment until a higher comfort level was reached about the timing of receipt of Phase II funds. "We had a good conversation with MBI today, which increases our confidence about moving forward."
 - ❖ The only other equipment delays WiValley is facing has been digicenters. We now have orders for the next 250 – receiving more every two weeks.
- ◆ **Comments from Design Nine (when does contract expire?)**
Jack Maytum reported that:
 - ❖ The DesignNine contract would be extended until the end of September.
 - ❖ Jack asked Brian to resend him the credentials for the measurement software that was originally sent – maybe there was a case-sensitivity issue.
 - ❖ DesignNine will be using multiple tools to test the integrity of the network and the capability of reaching 96% of the potential customer base required for CAF2 funding and satisfy MBI. Jack said that the way things sounded, he didn't think it would be a problem.
 - ❖ Jack said that, if anything, the current COVID-19 incident has demonstrated the value of Broadband, which should help with future funding.
- ◆ **Feedback from customers or towns.**
 - ❖ Queried by Lark about whether he had been able to reach any new customers via phone, Rick reported as follows:
 - ❖ After gearing up with new, more complete data provided by WiValley
 - ❖ Rick reported he had spoken with about 22 people in the past few days. Most of those were in Florida; a few were in Savoy and Hawley; none yet in Monroe.
 - ❖ For most, the experience was positive. He said all the people he talked to are believers – if they're having glitches, they just want them fixed, and they understand that it will take some time.
 - ❖ For most of them, their standard of comparison is DSL, so they really liked the speed. A couple of them had come from faster systems, but

still liked this one because it was fast enough, lower cost, and easier to use.

- ❖ Queried by Jack Maytum about the “take rate,” Rick said he had no way of knowing that. Brian noted that when they did the initial installation at Chapel in Savoy, the “take” was about 28%. Most of the other sites are still in too much flux -- as different poles come into play -- to come up with useable numbers. A big factor for Florida is Whitcomb Hill Summit, which just came online.
- ❖ Jack asked about Legate Hill. Brian confirmed that the suit has been dropped. He added that the agreement regarding the Lawless property was moving forward in a positive manner. That agreement would soon come back to Lark for review by FHMS’ attorney.

◆ **Other business not anticipated at the time the Agenda was posted:**

- ❖ Brian reported that he has moved forward on the CAFII Performance testing. While not required until the end of the year, WiValley has made progress on it. It’s a quarterly report that provides objective, automated testing of speed and bandwidth.
- ❖ Christine asked Brian how long customers should wait to report slower speeds than they signed up for. Brian responded by mid-August. But that depends on a lot of things.
- ❖ For instance, Brian said that right now, Florida Town Hall, is served by two signal sources. One, which is Fiber and is controlled by MBI, is currently inactive. The other is WiValley’s wireless connection. “If the wireless connection went down right now,” Brian said, we’d have no backup for the Florida Town Hall.
- ❖ Lark said that until the entire network is built, and Brian has signed off on it, we’re not done.
- ❖ The group reached a consensus that CAFII rather than FHMS will conduct the speed tests, as CAFII is a more objective source.
- ❖ Brian answered questions from John Tynan about two poles in Savoy; the answer was they are waiting for power. Meanwhile, they are set up to run on solar power and batteries.

◆ **Set next meeting date.**

Lark set the next FHMS tele-meeting date for Thursday, July 9, 2020 @ 4:45 pm, and subsequently postponed it to a time and date TBA.

Adjournment:

Chairman Thwing adjourned the meeting at 6:12 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,  Rick Kean, 7/1/2020