

Southern Vermont Communication Union District (SoVTCUD) - Background Information

“Shall the Town of Sunderland enter into a communications union district (CUD) to be known as Southern Vermont Communication Union District, under the provisions of 30 V.S.A. Ch 82.?”

Summary

High-speed internet is no longer a luxury, but a necessity. In Sunderland, like in most Vermont communities, a large percentage of residents & businesses have reasonable access to internet service. Yet, that leaves many areas where adequate internet is still not available. In very rural locations, internet companies are not willing to invest in infrastructure to serve a limited number of addresses. And, it has become clear that no solution will be forthcoming from the Federal or State government. But, progress has been achieved in some areas of Vermont with a regional solution, where towns have joined together to take on the need. The Legislature created a process to help support regional solutions with Act 79 (2019).

How? And... What is a CUD?

The first step is for interested Towns in our region to form a *Communications Union District (CUD)*. In our area, this CUD will be known as “Southern Vermont Communication Union District”, or SoVTCUD.

A CUD is a municipal corporation formed by two or more towns for the purpose of planning, building & managing infrastructure to provide high speed internet.

What do we gain by joining the Southern Vermont Communication District?

The Town gets a seat at the table in the effort to plan, design and build critical regional infrastructure.

What is the cost, and the risk, to the taxpayer and town?

There are no costs to the taxpayer or the town, though participating towns may be required to make available, for lease, one or more sites for a communications plant required to operate the network. Membership in a CUD poses no financial risk to the town or individual taxpayers. By state statute, the CUD “shall not accept funds generated by a member’s taxing or assessment power”. In other words, member Towns are not allowed to financially support the CUD. The only exception is that the Town can be a customer of the CUD for broadband services, on the same terms as any other customer.

Will it work? And, How long will it take?

Whether it will work is what we hope to find out through the feasibility study. It has worked in some areas of Vermont. ECFiber was Vermont’s first CUD formed in 2015, and it now delivers up to 700 mbps service to 3,500 customers in 22 rural towns and is profitable. But, whether this approach can be successful in Sunderland and other area towns will not be known without significant analysis and study. And, if it is determined to be feasible to build a new system, it may be necessary to do so in stages. Forming a CUD is just the first step in a multi-year process.

How can we join the district?

By voting yes on the CUD Article at Town Meeting, you’re voicing your support for your town’s membership in the CUD. All towns that approve this ballot measure will become members of a CUD.

What’s next?

Each town joining the CUD appoints a resident and an alternate to serve on the CUD board. That board will work to obtain grant funds to commission a feasibility plan. If the plan is deemed feasible and moves forward, no one would be required to sign up for the new service. But, Sunderland residents could have a new and potentially attractive option for broadband availability.

Questions?

Feel free to contact Andrew McKeever at selectboard@sunderlandvt.org, who has volunteered to be Sunderland’s initial representative to the SoVTCUD Task Force. To read the full text of the state statute, visit: <https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/chapter/30/082>.