

Southern Vermont Communications Union District Board

Draft Meeting Minutes

November 10, 2021

Table 1 Roll Call

Town Name	Representative Name	Voting = V Present = P Absent = A	Alternate Name	Voting = V Present = P Absent = A	2 <sup>nd</sup> Alternate Name	Voting = V Present = P Absent = A
Arlington	Cynthia Browning	A	Matt Bykowski	A		
Bennington	Eric Hatch	V	Ron Dubreul	P	Beth Hardesty	A
Dorset	Mike Chase	A	Jim Salsgiver	A	Mike Oltedal	A
Landgrove	Jim Swartzentruber	A	Susan Lenox	A		
Londonderry	Jeff Such	A	John Hanking	A		
Manchester	Terrence Dorsey	V	Kathleen James	A		
Peru	Alex Sheets	A	Peter Bradford	A		
Pownal	Caitlin Randall	A	Karlan Eberhardt	V		
Rupert	Bill Meyer	V	Jed Rubin	P	Arlene Bentley	P
Sandgate	Sheila Kearns	V	Betsy Rathbun-Gunn	A	Logan Weurslin	P
Shaftsbury	Tim Scoggins	V	Michael Corey	P	James Salerno	A
Sunderland	Andrew McKeever	V				
Winhall	Fred Schwacke	A				
Woodford	Michael Charette	A				

Also present: Jonathan Cooper, Callie Fishburn, Jake Gesling (BCRC)

1. Call to order

The chair called the meeting to order at 6:06 PM

2. Roll call

Callie Fishburn took role; a quorum of the board was not present. No official action will be taken at this meeting.

3. Conflict of interest

None

4. Additions to or deletions from the agenda [1 V.S.A. § 312]

None

5. Public comments

None

6. Announcements

Eric Hatch announced that the NTIA grant decisions are tentatively scheduled to be announced on November 15<sup>th</sup>.

Tim Scoggins asked if any of the NTIA funds that the CUD applied for are COVID-related. Jonathan Cooper and Eric Hatch said they did not believe so. Sheila Kearns said that it is not a regularly funded NTIA grant, but its funding that comes in the normal course of business based on Congress's estimate of the need for broadband funding.

Tim Scoggins said that he'd gotten a question about whether the CUD was asking towns for ARPA funds and if some of this NTIA grant money would be funneled to towns through ARPA. Eric Hatch said that as of right now, the CUD has not requested any ARPA funds from towns and Jonathan Cooper confirmed this.

Eric Hatch said he had read a recommendation in a blog post that towns reserve some of their ARPA funds as a potential match for programs created by the new infrastructure bill.

7. Review and approval of draft minutes: [October 27th](#)

Postponed due to lack of quorum.

8. USDA ReConnect Program Discussion/Webinar Debrief

Eric Hatch and Jonathan Cooper reported on the recent USDA ReConnect Program webinar that they attended. Jonathan Cooper noted that ReConnect grant requests had a higher success rate than loan requests. The grant focuses on fixed wireless service, and past grants focused specifically on areas that were not served by broadband, making many parts of Vermont ineligible. This is no longer the case in the latest iteration of the grant, and this could be a good alternative to NTIA. The grant deadline is February 22, 2022.

Eric Hatch added that there is a very fast turnaround on funding, and streamlined reporting.

Jonathan Cooper added that there can't be overlapping service areas which could be relevant to towns that are part of two CUDs

Tim Scoggins asked what the total amount of funding is for the ReConnect Program this year. Eric Hatch responded that he believes the total amount is \$45 billion this year.

9. Conversation with CCI (possible Executive Session)

The executive board met with CCI on Monday to get an update on the contract. CCI needs a bit more time to have their legal department review the contract and refine the ownership conditions.

Jonathan Cooper added that the contract review is taking extra time because CCI is also an RDOF recipient and needs to keep the two projects separate.

Eric Hatch said that once the contract with CCI has been finalized and the NTIA decision is known, the CUD can develop a communications plan with all their member towns. CCI appears to have a clear plan for next steps.

#### 10. All other business

Eric Hatch proposed doing a Round Robin to give each of the board members the opportunity to comment or ask questions.

Jed Rubin asked if Eric had a sense that CCI was waiting on the contract until they knew the outcome of NTIA and if that might impact the partnership. Eric said he did not have that impression. Alternatives to NTIA were discussed. Sheila said CCI is paying attention to alternative funding sources through VCBB, USDA and other avenues.

Jed Rubin also asked if the CUD has a new treasurer. Eric Hatch reported that Al Bashevkin of Bennington will be the new treasurer. They are coordinating with Melanie on the transition. Jed asked if the CUD has insurance on the treasurer. Jonathan replied that he doesn't know the details but he believes they do.

Eric Hatch asked if the CUD has performed an annual audit and engaged an accounting firm. Jonathan Cooper responded that we don't have an engagement letter with any firm at this time. Tim Scoggins added that it is something the CUD is supposed to do but hasn't had the wherewithal to do yet.

Andrew McKeever asked if there was a process for tapping into the new infrastructure funding and drawing it down to Southern Vermont. Eric Hatch said he believes any funding would come to VCBB and then distributed to the CUDs. Jonathan Cooper reported that this is something VCUDA is looking into. The \$100 million pot of funding will not just be open to CUDs. Jonathan added that VCUDA is also looking to procure fiber that would be available to the CUDs. Sheila added that NTIA is the entity responsible for distributing the infrastructure money and will be working directly with states to set up the process and programs for distribution.

Karlan Eberhardt asked if anyone has been in touch with the absent member towns. Bill Meyer reported that he hasn't done anything yet.

Eric Hatch said that Landgrove has been working with Comcast under the line extension program. He suggested that if the CUD continues to have issues with quorum, they should talk to Landgrove about whether the town wants to remain in the CUD, considering they might be covered with Comcast.

Jed Rubin said that Londonderry is in two CUDs and might be fully participating in the other one. Jonathan Cooper said that hopefully a positive NTIA decision would give towns incentive to remain in the CUD. He added that the CUD may be in a position to provide a letter of support to Landgrove as they pursue the line extension program.

Michael Corey reported that he is no longer able to represent the CUD at the VCUDA meetings. Jonathan Cooper said that he attends the meetings but not as a member, so he cannot vote. Terrence Dorsey agreed to take over attending those meetings.

Eric Hatch said the next regularly scheduled meeting is set for the day before Thanksgiving and proposed moving it to Monday, November 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Andrew McKeever said that he has put the word out for a new Sunderland alternate.

The next meeting was set for November 22<sup>nd</sup>, with the understanding that the meeting could be cancelled if there was no news about the CCI contract or NTIA. The next meeting would then be on December 8<sup>th</sup>.

Jonathan Cooper reported that he and Callie Fishburn are scheduled to meet with Rob Fish of the Public Service Department, to bring the CUD back up to date with its reports.

## 11. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn by Bill Meyer, seconded by Terrence Dorsey. *Motion passed unanimously.*