

1 Town of Stockton Springs

2 Select Board – Evening Meeting/Community Input Session

3 February 17, 2022

4 Minutes

5
6 Present: Betsy Bradley, Marsha Shute, Darren Shute.

7 Also Present: Mac Smith – Town Manager.

8 Ms. Bradley called the session to order at 6:00 p.m. There were roughly 10-15 people in
9 attendance. This included George Kerper of the Searsport Broadband Committee, and Kevin
10 Kelley, Winterport Town Councilor.

11 Mr. Smith explained the reason for the meeting, which stemmed from a letter signed by many
12 residents of Old County Road regarding problems with internet service, and the consequences
13 related to those problems. He shared a handout and information from two emails he had
14 received on the subject. Complaints regarding spotty internet service were received from:

15 Old County Road

16 Heights Road

17 Harris Road

18 Tugboat Lane

19 Hatch Road (off Old County Road).

20 George Kerper, who handles technology for the Town of Searsport, and a member of that town's
21 Broadband Committee, spoke to those assembled. He presented handouts. He said the Town of
22 Searsport had been working on the issue of spotty internet service for one-and-a-half years. He
23 said that time was spent on grant-planning for infrastructure costs, as well as working on a grant
24 to cover the costs of planning the project, which was received from the Island Institute. He said
25 Searsport had sent a Request for Financing Proposal to four different places regarding the
26 project.

27 Mr. Kerper said the Town of Searsport has installed eight hotspots throughout town to help with
28 their spotty internet service in the short-run. He said any member of the public could use these
29 spots for an hour, and then they were automatically signed out. They could sign on again if no
30 one else was using the hot spot. He said one hope of the Town was that tourists might stop at
31 these spots on their trip through Route 1.

34 Mr. Kerper said the Town of Searsport wants fiber internet service available to every home in
35 their town. When asked about utility lines that were underground, Mr. Kerper said that the
36 resident has to pay if a conduit is needed.

37 Mr. Kerper said that Axiom bid 3.9 million dollars to wire the entire town with fiber. He said
38 Consolidated Communications bid \$3,029,000 million, minus \$700,000, for a total cost of 2.3
39 million. He said Consolidated agreed to provide the drop from houses.

40 Mr. Kerper said the voters of Searsport had agreed to a 2.8 million bond before sending for bids.
41 He said Axiom agreed to try and get someone local to do the work, but that the workers might
42 need to come from Machias. He said Rockland is already using Consolidated for their
43 broadband. He said Consolidated already has much of the infrastructure for broadband service,
44 as opposed to Axiom. He said Spectrum would not put fiber in.

45 Mr. Kerper made clear, as did Mr. Kelley, that the money in the federal infrastructure bill is for
46 areas that have no internet service at all, or who are underserved. They said most likely the
47 Town of Stockton would not qualify for the underserved category.

48 Mr. Kerper said there was an option of municipal ownership of a broadband system, but he did
49 not advise going that route.

50 Mr. Kelley said he had done a fiber network in the Bath/Brunswick area. He spoke of
51 Winterport's experience in pursuing broadband service. He said their town had not gone for an
52 RFP yet. He said he did not think Winterport would support a bond for fiber.

53 There was discussion of the fact that bond rates would probably be going up in the near future.
54 There was discussion of the lead time in a project such as broadband, presumably 12-24 months.
55 There was discussion of the fact that Connect Maine has a planning grant checklist.

56 There was discussion of large amounts of money that had been dedicated to the issue of
57 broadband long before last year's federal infrastructure bill.

58 It was noted that the Town of Stockton Springs has 38 miles of road. Questions were asked
59 about how the wiring would be handled on private roads.

60 Mr. Smith reminded the Select Board that the Town of Prospect had expressed an interest in
61 working with the Town of Stockton on the issue of broadband. He said that town should be
62 included in discussions as much as possible.

63 Mr. Smith said he would bring 3-5 names for possible committee members to the Select Board
64 meeting on March 3. Mr. Shute advised that some of those members should be people with
65 technical experience.

66 The session ended at approximately 7:30 p.m.

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