

WEST WINDSOR SELECTBOARD

Draft Minutes

May 21, 2013

Present: Glenn Seward, Tom Kenyon, Chris Nesbitt, Win Johnson, Ted Siegler, Ken Parrot (EC Fiber representative), Tim & Leslie Nulty (EC Fiber), Merle Bushkin, Tom Olivero, Meg Clough, Mary Dalton, Phil Arvidson, John Cocke, Barbara Gerstner, Paul Biebel, Nancy Nesbitt, Barbara Truex, Dow & Susan Davis, Genevieve Lemire, David Keen, Christine Pade, Paul Charow, Martha Hunt, Tim Mello, Martha Harrison

- 1) Call to Order – Selectboard Chair Glenn Seward called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM. Glenn explained that residents have been expressing concern about property values due to the limited internet service available in West Windsor. Glenn added that the Planning Commission is urging the expansion of high-speed internet to enable economic development. As a result, the Selectboard consulted with the town's EC Fiber representatives, Dave Halpert and Ken Parrot, and the EC Fiber Board and came up with a plan to provide high-speed internet service to our municipal buildings, while also providing the foundation for service to some underserved areas of town. In order to implement the plan, the voters will have to approve the borrowing of \$135,000 to finance the construction of a fiber optic line from Reading to the Town Hall. The vote will take place on May 30th by Australian ballot from 10:00 AM until 7:00 PM. Glenn said the loan will be repaid by leasing the line to EC Fiber. The town will save money in phone and internet service charges. Glenn thanked Dave Halpert, Ken Parrot, Ted Siegler, Chris Nesbitt, Win Johnson and EC Fiber for their efforts. Glenn introduced Ken Parrot who described EC Fiber and the proposed municipal network, which will connect the Town Hall, Library, Fire Station, and Town Garage. The network will be financed by the town with no net cost to the taxpayers, due to a long-term lease arrangement with EC Fiber, which will build and operate the network. By leasing the town's fiber optic line, EC Fiber can provide service to residential customers along the line and can expand service out to an additional 150 residences with a privately-funded network. For the project to proceed, the voters have to approve the municipal network and sufficient capital (approximately \$150,000) has to be raised to fund the private network. Ken had a map showing the initial proposed route for the two projects, which includes portions of Route 44, Shattuck Hill Road, Rush Meadow Road, Banister Road, Sheddsville Road, Cemetery Road, and Bible Hill Road. Tim Nulty explained that the project costs \$25,000 per mile, is locally funded and can only expand as sufficient capital is invested; there is no big pot of money available. Tim explained the risk and return on the private investment and added that there is almost no risk in the municipal network because the town will own it. Ken talked about the benefits of a fiber optic network, which include economic development, education, and increased property values. Win Johnson spoke about the benefits of high-speed internet with regard to health services. Chris Nesbitt said individual investors have made verbal commitments totaling between \$115,000 and \$120,000 for the private network. Although \$150,000 will only be enough for an initial route along portions of the above-mentioned roads, Chris said the intention is to continue to expand to eventually cover the entire town. Ted Siegler mentioned other possible sources of funding for future expansion, including grants and the capital markets. Tim talked about the time involved in getting pole licenses as one of the primary non-financial constraints on rapid expansion of the network. Phil

Arvidson asked what the voters are being asked to approve. Glenn said he understands that everyone is interested in getting high-speed internet service to their homes but the vote is to authorize the Selectboard to borrow \$135,000 to construct a network from Reading to the Town Hall, which provides the foundation for residential service. Glenn said the Selectboard, after hearing the frustration of people who don't have service or who have poor service, was prompted to find a creative way to get high-speed service into town. Glenn noted that the \$135,000 loan will have no effect on the taxpayers because EC Fiber will lease the line from the town at payments equal to the town's debt service. Tim said the municipal network will have enough spare capacity to provide service to a residential network. There was discussion about the Fairpoint connection in Reading and alternate means of connecting to the EC Fiber hub in Royalton. Win pointed out the necessity of: 1) passing the Australian ballot vote for the municipal network, and 2) getting another \$35,000 in investor commitments for the residential network. Merle asked how many miles of road there are in West Windsor. Glenn said there are 49 miles of road. Tom asked why someone should support the proposal if they're not going to benefit personally right now. Chris said it will benefit the town. Ken said EC Fiber has already been approached by people on Silver Hill and Cowshed Trail who are interested in being served by the network. Ken said the limiting factors are interest and financing; if people can gather a group of interested investors and prospective subscribers, the network can be expanded. Leslie said you have to start somewhere and West Windsor's municipal line will provide EC Fiber with a starting point for expanding the network. Factors that are considered in planning routes include population density, utility pole locations, and the lack of other service providers. Un-served or under-served residents are more likely to subscribe and the more subscribers there are, the more quickly the network can be expanded. Glenn noted that, without the investor-financed residential network, the municipal network cannot be built, even if the bond vote passes. Tim added that, in order to be able to make lease payments to the town, EC Fiber needs subscribers on the residential network so the two go hand in glove. Merle said he is 150% in favor of this proposal but he is having a hard time convincing a friend whose house is not on the planned route to invest. Chris said if someone is willing and able to write a large check, the network can be expanded further than currently planned but this is about working together for the betterment of the community and if we quibble about how it gets done, it won't get done. Glenn clarified that a "yes" vote simply authorizes the Selectboard to borrow the funds to build the network if they feel it's in the best interest of the town.

2) Adjourn – The meeting adjourned by consensus at 7:45 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Martha Harrison