

Jamaica Planning Commission (JPC)
Draft Meeting Minutes - Regular Meeting
April 18, 2022
Jamaica Town Offices, 28 Town Office Road
Jamaica VT 05343

Commissioners present: Bryan Zieroff, Chris Robbins, Charlie Peck, Patrick McQuillan

Public present: none

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m.

1. A this is the first meeting following the annual Selectboard appointment of town officers; the agenda was expanded to include election of JPC officers. The Selectboard has reappointed JPC members Bryan Zieroff, Chris Robbins, Patrick McQuillan and Charlie Peck. One JPC position remains vacant. Bryan Zieroff was nominated and elected to serve as Chairperson. Charlie Peck was nominated and elected to serve as Clerk.
2. The draft meeting minutes of the April 4, 2022 JPC meeting were approved as written by unanimous vote of members present.
3. No pertinent mail received.
4. Chris reported that DVfiber's Operations Committee has completed negotiating Statements of Work (SOWs) numbers 3,4, and 5 with our private partner, Great Works Internet (GWI). This completes detailed contract negotiation. The SOWs will be signed upon completion by the Communications Union District (CUD) lawyer. GWI has completed the top level design and will commence detailed design, i.e. local neighborhood distribution designs.

Chris further reported that Winhall, which is a DVFiber member town, is considering forming a new CUD, Tri-Mountain CUD, with neighboring towns in Bennington county in order to bring broadband to Winhall sooner. They are considering six different technologies including all fiber, satellite, and four different hybrid technologies. Chris has urged their representative to seek expert advice before committing to any technology other than all fiber; while alternate technologies offer the possibility of providing speeds at the low end of all fiber systems sooner than an all fiber network, they lack potential for growth and will become obsolete within a decade., causing the once –in- a- lifetime opportunity to realize a “future proof” fiber to the premises internet to be lost.

Finally, it is anticipated that ComCast will upgrade the old SVcable network with one of the hybrid technologies, i.e. a fiber optic base with coaxial cable last mile connections to individual homes. They will be able to offer speeds competitive with the low end of an all fiber system for homes within certain distances from the optic to coaxial conversion electronics but will be limited for homes at greater distances. Coaxial cable bandwidths will limit maximum download/upload speeds and growth to meet future internet speed requirements will be limited.

5. Bryan reported that the planning advance contract has been signed by the Selectboard and the VT Department of Environmental Conservation. The local steering committee has held its first meeting, and the project is underway at last.

6. There was general discussion of JPC recommendations for use of existing federal ARPA funds and potentially available federal IJA funds. It was noted that the ARPA funds are unrestricted and may be used to fulfill local match requirements for several existing state grant and loan programs. Chris described a preliminary prioritization list for use of ARPA funds he has compiled:

1. Grant preparation expenses and any additional engineering expenses beyond those funded by the engineering design grant required for a construction grant or loan.
2. Pre Grant or loan engineering expenses required to apply for a town road improvement program to take advantage of IJA based funding increases to the State Highway fund and applicable federal grants, e.g. the national culvert program.
3. Contribution to DVfiber's effort to bring broadband to everyone in Jamaica, in one of the following forms:
 - a. An unrestricted donation to DVfiber
 - b. A restricted donation to DVfiber to be restricted to offsetting the possible non-standard connection costs for those unable to afford them
 - c. A restricted donation to a local charity (Neighborhood Connections) for the purpose of funding non standard connection costs for those families that can not afford them. It's not known if Neighborhood connections will accept any restriction on donations, Although they may help in establishing eligibility for both town help and FCC monthly rate subsidies
4. Items from the Town Clerk's recommendations.
5. Matching funding requirements for any grants or loans obtained for items 1 or 3.
6. Items developed from public input. Other towns are holding town meetings or hearings to solicit input for ARPA town fund expenditures. Should we hold Planning Commission hearings or recommend Selectboard hearings or both for that purpose?

There was consensus agreement that items 1-5 on this list are appropriate for JPC recommendation. There was consensus that, while public input and participation is important, that issue should be handled by the Selectboard, as it is their responsibility to make the final decisions, and their request to the JPC was for our specific recommendations, not organization of public input opportunities.

Additional recommendations for ARPA fund use suggested and agreed to be applicable and appropriate by consensus were:

1. Expenses related to energy audits, grant application preparation, and local match requirements for existing Efficiency Vermont grant and loan programs targeted for improving energy efficiency of selected town owned buildings (an Action Step in the Town Plan Energy Element).

2. Applicable expenses related to securing grant and loan funding to implement selected and appropriate Action Steps in the Town Plan.

Charlie will combine and try to refine these preliminary lists, and distribute to members before our next meeting, for continued discussion and refinement of the JPC recommendation.

7. Charlie reported on a site visit he made, and discussion with Greg Meulemans (SB liaison for road issues) about the road foreman's recommendation to discontinue and designate as a Legal Trail a segment of TH 42 (Henderson road), presently a class 3 town highway. Both Charlie and Greg agree that designation of this segment as a Legal Trail is not appropriate, and both recommend reclassifying this segment to class 4 (no winter maintenance). JPC members agreed by consensus to support a recommendation to the Selectboard to reclassify this segment from present class 3 to class 4. Charlie will prepare and send to the Selectboard an addition to the existing JPC report and recommendation, recommending reclassification to class 4 and explaining the JPC's reasons for making that recommendation

8. No members of the public present, thus no public concerns expressed.

9. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.