

Important Information from the Minot Broadband Committee

January, 2021

For about a year now, the **Minot Broadband Committee** has been meeting, gathering information, working with our consultant and reaching out to internet service providers. *Our goal is to ensure that every home in Minot that wants access to broadband, has access to broadband. We also prioritize making sure that service is both affordable and reliable.*

Currently, about one-third of the households in the Town of Minot do not have access to high-speed internet. These 345 households have trouble connecting from home for school and for work, for telehealth and to run their own businesses. The COVID-19 pandemic has made clear that access to broadband is a critical service for every home to have access to. Lack of broadband access throughout the town also impacts property values and home sales.

The good news is that **resources are available**: recent bond approval, CARES Act funding and state and federal programs. We are working with a consultant and numerous potential service providers to **map the town** and determine the best solution(s) to bring broadband to those unserved portions of the community. Several different service providers are potentially interested (GWI, Spectrum/Charter, and FirstLight chief among them). Consolidated may also be an option.

We have a provider (FirstLight) that is prepared to extend service to about half of the homes in town currently without broadband. We are preparing to apply for funding from the State in March to move this project forward. We are also watching for updates to federal grant programs to see if towns like ours would meet new eligibility guidelines. And, we have researched options for how the **Town share of the cost** of expanded service could be covered.

- **What needs to happen to bring broadband to every home?**
 - We need to secure funding, which usually comes from several sources. Towns that take on projects like this typically get some funding from state or federal grants, some of the cost is covered by the service provider, and some by the Town itself.
 - We also need to confirm which service providers are willing to work with the Town, how much of the cost they are willing to cover, and what is the cost per home of the service. Note that sometimes the individuals who will get the benefit of the new service also pay a fee towards hook-up.
 - Finally, it is important to understand that both the State and the service provider expect to know what portion of the cost of the project the Town will cover.
- **How much do we think this will cost?**
 - Current estimates – and they are only estimates – are that the Town’s share of the cost to bring broadband to about 150 of the 345 homes that are unserved (per FirstLight’s proposal) is approximately \$100,000. (We anticipate the total cost for this project will be \$300,000 with the Town, the ConnectME Authority and FirstLight each covering one-third of the cost).
 - A commitment from the Town of Minot needs to be secured before the application for remaining funding is due to the ConnectME Authority at the end of March, 2021. Because Town Meeting will be held later this spring, due to pandemic concerns and related restrictions on numbers of people who can gather, the Selectmen in Minot unanimously moved to put the warrant article related to the Town share of funding for broadband expansion forward as a

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referendum item. It will be voted on March 12th, at the same time as elections for Selectmen and School Committee will be held.

- The Selectmen propose that the Town's \$100,000 share for this broadband expansion come from Undesignated Fund Balance. This means there would be no increase in local taxes to cover the cost of the expansion.
- **What do you need from me?**
 - We need your support! Please help us get the word out to Townspeople about the referendum vote on March 12, 2021. Absentee ballots will be available starting February 10th. There is a public hearing on February 8th at 6:30pm at Town Office (call Town Office to RSVP or to obtain Zoom link)
 - And, we hope you will consider voting Yes in support of the referendum so that high-speed internet can be extended to half of the houses in town currently without that critical service.
 - We expect to have another vote in the future to fund expansion of broadband to the remainder of the Town once we have identified a provider and the costs related to securing that final coverage.
 - We hope you feel as we do that everyone in town who wants access to broadband should have access to broadband. That's good not just for the individual households that get it, but for all of us since it makes Minot a more desirable community to live and work in.

For more information, contact the Town Office or visit www.minotme.org