

“Last Mile” Broadband Update – February 12, 2018

The Colrain Selectboard and Last Mile Advisory Committee are pleased to report that the stars have finally aligned and that Colrain along with other area towns now have a realistic technical path forward to Broadband for our residents, along with potentially more funding assistance from the state if final cost projections come in higher than expected.

In March of 2017, the Massachusetts Broadband Institute’s board of directors voted to make the full broadband grants available to each town, instead of holding back the engineering and design funds as previously. Towns were able to start applying for their full broadband allocation grants on Monday April 3rd. Colrain immediately filed an application for our \$1.3M allocation and received our first half of that allocation (along with several other towns) in early June. This funding will be used for the technical design assistance in a number of steps necessary prior to construction.

In April 2017, Westfield Gas & Electric (WG&E), a municipally-owned electric, gas and fiber company from Westfield, came to speak with the Select Board and the Last Mile Advisory Committee to describe what they can offer Colrain in terms of technical advice and services. Several neighboring towns have also decided to work with WG&E.

In July 2017 the town signed a contract with WG&E to determine final, full and accurate construction costs for our last-mile buildout. This fall you may have seen WG&E personnel on the roads around town - they spent a few weeks determining routing and run lengths so that we have accurate costs for that portion of the needed work.

In January 2018 WG&E and the Town commenced our Pole Application process in which we apply to Verizon and Eversource (who own our utility poles in town) to tell us what it will cost for them to make the poles “ready” for us to install our broadband cabling. This process will take a number of months, as several other towns are also requesting this work from the utilities. Somewhat in parallel, WG&E is having the final engineering design done for the cabling installation and “hub” construction.

Once the final construction costs from both of these elements are prepared and vetted, the town will make a decision as to how to move forward. Until then, we will

not be spending any town monies, only some time from our Town Administrator, Select Board, and Last Mile Advisory Committee.

It is anticipated that the decision to move forward with construction will be made by the end of this year, which would mean a (very rough) project completion sometime in 2019. However, that depends on an assumed turnaround time from Verizon and Eversource for both their “make ready” estimates as well as their actual “make ready” work, and delays are likely.

This is great progress after the fits and starts of the past several years, but we still have a long way to go and will do so carefully and mindfully.

What can residents do? Talk to our family, friends and neighbors - broadband is key to our future as a sustainable town and the more households that sign up (when that’s available) the lower our costs will be. If you have Satellite service, consider avoiding any long term contracts! WG&E will be sending out mailers to town residents to sign up for Colrain Broadband early in 2019.