

Shutesbury Broadband Committee		
02_23_2024	3:00 PM EST	On Line Zoom Meeting
Facilitator	Gayle Huntress	
Minutes keeper	Jim Hemingway	
Committee Attendees	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Gayle Huntress <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Jim Hemingway <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Steve Schmidt <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Craig Martin <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Graeme Sephton	
Other		
Approved minutes January 17, 2024		

Hut Report: Graeme reports that there was no sign of any mice stealthily creeping into the hut since his last visit, unlike Wendell which recently suffered a network outage due to a single mouse that snuck into their hut and chewed on their fiber.

Support calls last month remained virtually the same in the 35-45 range. Netegrity, our 24/7 support team, did encounter a late night customer who was having trouble connecting their printer wirelessly to their Linksys router. This customer didn't know to push the WPS button on their router which would have quickly solved the problem. This incident brought up the issue of whether SHELD, our ISP, is responsible for solving such problems. It is outside their scope to provide this sort of support other than for everything up to the router connection but not beyond. This brought up the issue as to whether the MLP should embrace managed routers in the future which, if implemented, may have quickly solved this issue for this frustrated subscriber. Until we have a different solution, the best thing Netegrity can do is manage the customer's expectations about the type of tech support help that they can provide.

Moving our fiber network from the old poles along Locks Pond Road and Lake Shore Drive by Lake Wyola to the new three phase ones is currently a work in progress. It should be finished once some extension brackets come in. Brackets are on backorder.

Insurance: Our deductible went up from \$10K to \$25K, a significant jump. Gayle is looking into whether the insurance company could offer us a lower deductible in exchange for a slightly higher premium. This may not be an option at all or the premium may be unreasonably high. And so we may have to make an adjustment to the insurance line in our budget as a result.

The MLP is preparing the draft budget to present to the Finance Committee at their next meeting. Budget discussion: We have increased the routine network maintenance line from \$60K to \$70K. The insurance will likely go up as well if we can get a plan with a lower deductible. The CAF funding that we applied to Westfield Gas & Electric for some years ago has not shown up yet but we hope to see it in by the end of this fiscal year. This will amount to almost \$44K which Steve suggests should be put into our FY 2025 budget so that access to

these funds will not become a part of the retained earnings for FY2024. Steve also suggested some minor adjustments to some of the lines in the budget. Gayle has also combined some of the lines into one budget item which makes our budget a little easier to follow. For example, accounting, treasurer and audit support has been combined into one line in the budget, reflecting the suggestion from the Finance Committee that department budgets could be simplified in such a manner. The MLP's projected operating budget for 2025 is slightly less than it is for 2024 due to income from the expected CAF II funding dividend as well as income from the New Salem IRU. As a result some new lines have been added to the budget to account for the CAF income as well as the income from the New Salem MLP, both of which will be ongoing.

The New Salem MLP will be paying us \$13,920 for a dark fiber connection from Pratt Corner Road to Cooleyville Road where the towns of New Salem and Shutesbury meet. This will give them a Crown Castle connection as a supplemental middle mile source to the World Wide Web. There are 6 poles that are involved with the interconnect with New Salem close to where the Swift River flows under Cooleyville Road. In addition to the dark fiber fee, there will also be a \$600 annual fee to cover maintenance costs having to do with the fiber on these six poles for which we will now be responsible. Graeme reports that we do have additional unconnected fiber connections at this junction point that could be made in the future should the need arise. Some time ago the two MLPs – New Salem and Shutesbury - split the cost of installing the fiber on these 6 poles. This fiber connection is a new source of income for the Shutesbury MLP that we were not expecting.

Gayle proposed the new additional income could be used to help replace the loss of ACP (Affordable Connectivity Program) funding support for broadband service this April which amounts to \$30 per month for 25 of our low income subscribers who qualified for it when it became available. This would help to continue to make our service more affordable to them. The problem we face in administering this support ourselves is that we have never become involved with the application process to determine which of our Shutesbury subscribers qualifies for this support, which makes it difficult for us to replace this ACP support mechanism with one of our own.

The MLP then voted unanimously to approve the IRU arrangement with New Salem – Schmidt, aye; Sephton, aye; Hemingway, aye. New Salem indicated that they would rather pay the \$13,920 fee that covers the dark fiber for the next 10 years up front all at once, but Steve felt that splitting it up over the next 10 years instead of one lump sum payment would be preferable if New Salem was agreeable to that arrangement, given the fact that the \$600 maintenance fee would also be paid on a yearly basis. Gayle will finalize the agreement and try for the annual fees instead of up-front but either way we will get the full amount in total.

Concerning the election of MLP board members, Graeme has decided he will go ahead and run once again for the seat he currently holds on the MLP but for a shorter 2 not 3 year term. This will give the MLP time to recruit others who might be interested in becoming one of the three MLP members. Although we would welcome any Shutesbury resident to run and contribute, we

want to encourage candidates who can offer a helpful range of skill sets and perspectives to balance out the existing board members due to the specialized nature of MLP operations. Concern for how the MLP might be able to replace the loss of ACP funding in April for those 25 Shutesbury households that qualified for it came up again. These subscribers also receive Lifeline support of \$9.25 a month as well which we hope will continue, hopefully, for some time to come. The MLP wondered if it could replace that ACP \$30 per month support with a \$5,000 line in the budget that would come from the new income we are receiving from CAF II and New Salem. The \$5K would be evenly split among those subscribers who qualify for it based on whether they currently have Lifeline support. Would this be legal for us to do? Gayle will consult with Donna McNichol, the Town of Shutesbury's lawyer, for advice on this matter. A motion to approve adding this new line to the budget was proposed and had unanimous support from the 3 MLP members – Schmidt, aye; Sephton, aye; Hemingway, aye.

Gayle will be working with FRCOG on the Digital Equity survey and planning process which will be paid for by a grant from the MBI. Once this survey is created by FRCOG and Gayle, it will be distributed to everyone in Shutesbury by late spring.

Meeting concluded at 4:40pm.