

Shutesbury Broadband Committee		
12_18_2024	5:00pm 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 November 20, 2024		

Hut report – There is little to report. Graeme did change the setup for the HVAC units to their winter settings. There were only 24 service tickets in November, nine of which were technical and therefore actionable issues, the rest were billing and administration calls.

Gayle applied for and won a National Trailblazer Award in late October for our MLP’s work towards digital equity to serve all residents. Receiving this award may enable the MLP to receive some additional grant money at the federal or state level.

Gayle is still working on the seemingly never-ending paperwork for the Digital Equity Grant which she will be submitting to the MBI by the end of January. There are limits as to how we can use the grant money once it is awarded to the MLP. Unfortunately, it turns out that it can’t be used for new installations or drops for those who are still not connected to the web, a decision that seems to be contrary to the one of the original purposes for the grant money which was to get everyone connected to the World Wide Web and further digital equity in our state. There are 85 households in Shutesbury that are still not connected to our fiber network.. Regardless, the grant money might be able to be used to help pay for router upgrades and ONT replacements. There are various other possibilities we could use the grant money for which might include some form of tech support for our subscribers, especially our seniors.

Our retained earnings for FY2025 (roughly \$71,000) have been approved by the State. The current balance in our MLP account is approximately \$35,000.

Gayle posted a draft of our FY2026 budget. There is some uncertainty about the insurance premium for FY26. As insurance premiums have been increasing significantly recently, Steve suggested raising it to \$15,000. The backhaul cost estimate dropped significantly from the FY2025 estimate by close to 20% which is where it will stay for the remainder of our 10-year contract. No change for most of the other operating expenses. The audit expense line rose significantly to \$2,000, having been understated for the previous year. CAF II funding remains the same since the MLP has no way of knowing how many subscribers will apply for this support. 19 people are currently receiving CAF II support. The CAF II line for the grant income

has also been moved to the income side of the budget per the request of the Town's accountant. The MLP would like to see the surety bond of \$6,750 that we currently have to pay to the utility companies be replaced, perhaps, by one that the State could offer and cover, and Graeme has asked Aaron Saunders, our State representative, to look into this possibility. In the past the MLP has tried without success to get the requirement for surety bonds for municipally owned cable networks removed by the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities (DPU).

Our Broadband Capital Stabilization account, otherwise known as our depreciation account, continues to appreciate. Gayle has asked Calix for an estimate for the purchase of 780 Gigaspire U6 routers, the cost of which could be covered in part by the funds in this account. The question is how much "all in" will it cost to do a townwide upgrade. We know there are monthly license fee charges but there may also be a cost to run our own support cloud instance as well. This would enable us to maintain our independence without being tied to a specific ISP. Regardless, such an undertaking will be an expensive one. How the MLP will proceed in this matter is an on-going work in progress. We will also explore using a portion of the digital equity grant to provide in-person tech support to those who might need it.

Gayle has had an informal chat with SHELD concerning the upcoming ISP contract negotiations. Undoubtedly, the costs for some of the services that SHELD provides will increase. By January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2025, SHELD will be sending Gayle a preliminary proposal which will outline some of the increases they expect for the next 3 or 5 years. Needless to say, there is a lot of uncertainty regarding the future economy. As a result, there are likely to be some increases in our monthly subscriber rate regardless of who will be our ISP once the current contract with SHELD expires.

The status of the Calix Gigaspire routers, and their accompanying management service, provided to committee members for testing and evaluation by SHELD was discussed. The testing has provided useful data as we continue to explore the possibility of replacing the original Linksys routers installed system-wide in 2019. No action was taken; we expect to revisit this topic later in 2025.

Meeting adjourned at 6:10pm