

TOWN OF GROTON
SELECT BOARD MEETING
September 19, 2023

In Attendance: John Rescigno, Tony Albert, Ron Madan and Sara Smith (Administrative Assistant)

Audience Members Present

John called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

MINUTE APPROVAL

John motioned to approve the Work Session Meeting minutes of September 5, 2023 as written, Tony 2nd, so voted.

John motioned to approve the Select Board Meeting minutes of September 5, 2023 as written, Tony 2nd, so voted.

NEW BUSINESS:

Open House- NHEC/Broadband introduction

Jonathan Nelson the VP of broadband for NHEC and Tina Sullivan with Regional Sales and our local contact attended the Select Board meeting to provide an update regarding broadband options in Town. Carol Miller was also in attendance.

Jonathan stated that the good news is that it will be in this area. Within weeks the service will be available to be brought in to the homes. He said you have probably noticed them in the area working to make it readily available to those interested in taking advantage of this service.

NHEC as a whole covers a third of NH which includes 118 different towns. They are the second largest coop in the state. For electric they consist of 6,000 miles in NH and service approximately 86,000 meters. They have 250 employees.

In 2019 membership began asking for broadband especially the rural areas that didn't have good access. Then after COVID it made sense to really take on the project since more people needed to be able to work from their house. In June of 2020, membership accepted articles of incorporation to start this process. In October of 2022, members voted to change the bylaws to allow them to start New Hampshire Broad Band (NHBB) which is a subsidiary of NHEC. The initial build in 2020 was built to 1000 homes for a trial area to make sure they could successfully do it. These areas were Lempster, Colebrook, Clarksville and Stewartstown. Similar to the Groton area, they showed interest and didn't have reliable service. To date, in Lempster, Colebrook and Acworth, which they later built, they have membership to roughly 45%. This was proven to be successful and as they hoped members do want it. That helped the determination to find a way to extend it to all membership. The first big part of that was in October of 2022 they received a \$50 million dollar grant from the state which will account for about ¾ of the membership. The remaining areas they are calling phase four, which they are looking at other funding for the rest.

With this build, they are offering 3 different packages which are 100mg for \$49.95, 1 gig for \$79.95 and 2 gig for \$99.95. They also offer traditional phone service for an additional \$29.95. The phone numbers can be kept and transferred over. There are additional services they can discuss on a one-on-one basis to see what works best for you and your home such as managed wi-fi and extended wi-fi so you can use it on the move, all over your house with your phones, tablets and laptops. They also offer three tiers of business services. These are at a

higher rate but they offer higher levels of service in regards to response time on outages, and other business support.

There offer discounts for those that qualify through the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). This would offer a \$30 discount if you qualify. For example, if you have the plan for \$49.95 and qualify for this discount you would only pay \$19.95 a month. There is also the Lifeline program which offers a \$10 discount off the phone cost.

Regarding the build out, they are in the process of splicing which allows it to go off to individual homes. They are looking to complete that in the next few weeks. Groton is a part of the Rumney build out and they have spliced about half and are finishing it up the remaining now. Once this is complete, they can offer service to 481 meters. They use the term meters based on the electric meters so they know it covers more people than that. The build out for this covered 25 miles following the electric lines. That is the footprint so if you are wondering about availability, if you are an NHEC member it will be available.

Questions:

- Sara said the resident on Ocean View Boulevard, off of Giovanna Road, could not attend but they wanted to know why that road did not have the broadband wires put up there or any cutting done. They do have electric to the house and it was our understanding that anyone who has electric will have broadband. Jonathan explained that it will be run to the house once it goes live and is ordered. They run the main lines to the meter and they do not run it to the house until it is ordered. If they have already showed interest and submitted the request, someone should be calling to schedule the install as it gets closer. They are trying to get a turn around of 2 weeks from the time of the placement of the order to the placement of the house.
- Celine signed up and she asked if it comes with the modem or if they have to get one. Jonathan explained it comes with it. They will come and set it up and make sure it works. She asked if they will come into the house to make sure it works and he said they will. While they are there, they should pull out all devices they want to connect so that they can help them while they are there setting up. She said that she didn't sign up for the extender and asked if she will need it for a 1700 square foot home. He said that the max residence that wouldn't need an extender would be for about 1800 square feet so he doesn't think she will need the extender. He said you can use your own modem if you want to but they provide it and the bonus to using the one provided is that they can remote service it and troubleshoot it if you are having any issues.
- Celine asked if the phone would be Wi-Fi or a landline. Jonathan said you can have Wi-Fi calling but the landline would plug into the router that you will be receiving with the install.
- Tammy asked how does this affect the cable system we have now. Jonathan said it wouldn't affect it because they do not intermingle and are separate companies so it is a separate network.
- Jim said he has Spectrum cable and asked if they can keep spectrum for TV and have internet with NHEC. Jonathan said they operate separately.
- Jim asked what TV option they provide. Sara clarified that when you sign up online it gives the option for Direct TV. Jonathan confirmed this and said it is an app. Jim said his concern is that it is new and is great when they set it up but then it won't work when they leave. He likes his local news.
- Tony Tavares asked if there will be email offered with it. Jonathan said this service doesn't come with email address so if you have yahoo, gmail or something like that you would be fine but if you have one with your provider like Spectrum, you would have to check with them because NHEC cannot roll the email address over like they can the phone number.
- Catherine said they have dish network and it will be able to go on to broadband no problem. She called and asked questions. Jonathan said that most providers offer services in apps now that can be used over the internet
- Tammy asked if smart tv offer apps you need. Carol said that smart TVs come with some apps installed and then you can always add the apps for the channels you want.

- Tony Tavares asked if they start out with lowest plan, what is the changeover process like if you want to change plans. Jonathan said it is very simple. They do not even need to come out. It is a phone call and is changed within minutes.
- Jim asked if when installer comes out, does he have everything in case you realize you need something else. Jonathan said they will have everything you need.
- Dan asked if they should buy the firestick before the install if they were planning on it. Jonathan said that would be best so that if you have any questions setting it up you can ask while they are there. John said if you have a smart TV, you may not even need the firestick. Sara said there are so many options for the apps and for local channels these days such as YouTube TV, Amazon and others. You can always look online to see the options and the pricing.

Tina provided hands outs and her business cards and explained that she said she is the local rep and handles business and local accounts.

The Select Board thanked them for coming and let the audience know that they would be in the back room in case anyone has any other questions on an individual basis.

Building concern- Map 7 Lot 51

It was brought to the Towns attention that the owner of Map 7 Lot 51 has added on to their house and also put a 2nd story up. The Select Board may want to also look to determine if they have a septic system and if they added living space over their barn. Sara looked into this and we do not have any current building permits, the last one was done in 2009. She also looked at the septic system and there is one on file with DES for a 2 bedroom, 300 GPD Max system. Sara drafted a letter to the resident asking if they are building and stating that a building permit is required for any changes over 100 square feet. She also asked about the living space over the barn and stated that the current septic approval that was done by the State was for 2 bedrooms so if these additions have changed the number of bedrooms, then a new septic needs to be installed. **John motioned to sign the letter to Map 7 Lot 51, Tony 2nd, so voted.**

SELECT BOARD ITEMS:

Building Permit- Map 1 Lot 13-1

The owner submitted a building permit for their property on Bailey Hill Road for a 12x20 addition. They included the DES Septic Approval. This is on the private portion of the road so this has to go before the Planning Board. **John motioned to table the building permit for Map 1 Lot 13-1, Tony 2nd, so voted.**

HB349

John mentioned that HB349 passed. This allows the three towns, Bridgewater, Hebron and Groton, to form their own school district, which will include a K-8 school. This would also allow the town to have control over the school and then they will contract in for Highschool. They have created a steering committee to come up with all of the details such as the budget, school board, and all of the other components. John mentioned that Terry who is a Selectman in Bridgewater and is also on the Steering Committee was here.

John said in March the three towns will vote to see if we will exit the Newfound Area School District. This is going to do two things for us. One this will allow us to enhance the education of the students with the K-8 school instead of the K-6 over at the Bridgewater Hebron Village School (BHVS). This is an exceptional school. This will also substantially shorten the time the students are on the bus for the 6-8 grades. This will give them back about 2-2.5 hours per day which they could use for studying, relaxing or whatever else. This will enhance their life and their education. This will also give the option of school choice, for which High School they would be going to. John said he knows there is a little bit of a concern out there that their child will not be able to attend high school. However, there is an RSA out there that states if the school is not at maximum capacity, they cannot turn

students away. Even though the school will be changing to a K-8, they are working on that if a child is already at the middle school and wants to stay there that they can choose to do that.

The other thing this will do for us is that it will also stabilize our tax rate. It probably will not make it go down but will avoid larger tax increases and allow us the ability to have better control over this. John asked if everyone was familiar with Article 5 that they tried to pass. He was on the committee for that last year and the last proposal would have made it so that Groton would have gone from \$20,000 per student to \$35,000 per student. Meanwhile, Alexandria who tried to put this article through would have gone down from \$19,000 per student to \$10,000 per student. They were not looking to enhance education; they were looking to save on their taxes.

That is where we stand right now. We are in negotiations and are looking to build all the components so they can come to the Town with a concrete plan on what we are doing so that people know what they are voting on so hopefully it will be a favorable vote so we can better educate the students and have better control over our taxes.

Celine asked if they will send out a memo to the town to let them know. John mentioned that we have been trying to put together an email list because it is very costly to mail them out, not to say that we won't mail something out. There is a list at Ruths office if you are interested in receiving these emails.

There will be a kick off meeting for Groton residents on HB349 which is meant to be informative and educational so they know where this all stands at that time. This will take place on October 17th at 7pm here are the Town House to discuss what we know so far. We are working on flyers right now to advertise this and once the flyers are complete, we will hand them out at the Town offices and at the Transfer Station as that is what seems to work best and we will work on emailing this to anyone who is on the email list. Also, word of mouth is the best way to get it out there so please let your neighbors know about this meeting. John said he doesn't care how people vote but he wants them to be educated for when they come out to vote.

Tony Tavares asked if this district would have to contract with a separate bus company. The routes are already in progress with the current bus company. They are hoping it would be the same but they are working on this.

Terry from Bridgewater explained that the School Board had a meeting last night in regards to this which was a listening session. Those of us that went sat there and listened because it was a listening session and now, we are criticized that we didn't say anything. This was not done in secret like they are saying. The Superintendent at the time was informed in December and chose to ignore it. He said to be careful where you get your information and don't believe everything you read because there is a lot of false information out there. This bill gives us an opportunity to talk and try to figure things out. They will put more information together in the next 2-3 months to outline the schools, high school questions, etc. They will have options of where they want to go to school. This is to protect us so that they do not pass article 5 or anything like it again and if we stay in the district there is a chance this could happen again. When the change happens, it could increase the taxes a little at first but then will level out. When they built the school there was a \$1.00 increase on the taxes per thousand until the building was paid off and then it went back to normal. There will be boards for the towns to help have better control over the education. He will guarantee that no child will receive a poor education because we are trying to change this. The teachers will have a mirror of the existing contract and there will be a four-member board for the Newfound Area School District and a three-member board for the new district with Bridgewater, Hebron and Groton. You will have better control, more say and the money will go towards the education of the students not to lower the tax rate for another town. Since he has been a selectman, this is the fourth try to change the taxes. It has been like dodging a bullet but sooner or later it will happen.

John said Newfound is also trying to build a new school. Terry said this is the problem because this is a big tax increase. Our Towns get outvoted because we are smaller. Bridgewater, Hebron and Groton have 161 students

out of 1150. The other towns have more which makes it so our towns do not have as much say or voting power but they will if they have their own school district. They are trying to scare people right now because they don't want us to leave and since it is an unknown that makes people upset. Terry said when they built the building everyone thought they were out of their minds and it has turned out to be the best thing for all of our kids. John said the reason we could do HB349 is because of the Bridgewater Hebron school district being a special school. Normally, all the Towns would have to vote to allow a Town to leave the school district but this school being a village school helped pass HB349 to allow these three towns to leave without the other towns voting on it.

Tony Tavares asked if we would still have a representative on the Newfound Board. John said no. Tony said that when they set the tuition fees for high school or middle school, we would have no voice. Terry said that is taken care of because there is an RSA that covers which says what they can charge each child and they cannot go over that. Tony said there are things he learned when he was on the school board that we don't have local control over that are federal laws or state laws that are mandated that you have no control over such as special education and other things that we would still need to follow but it will be a smaller SAU. Tony said you cannot give the impression that we will have control over everything or that it will be cheaper because that is not the case. John and Terry agree there are still things we will not have control over. John mentioned when they say control, they will have control on the things at the local level that they didn't before that Newfound would put out there such as new buildings, changing the way the taxes are collected, and other things. This would enable us to stabilize the way the taxes. John said there is always things we cannot get around. Terry said we have a consultant to look at the education along with the mandated costs.

Terry said that he will guarantee if we don't do this our tax rate will go up a lot and none of that money goes to the education it goes towards lowering the taxes and education costs for another town. We are fortunate to have the school and to have the staff. School is no longer the way it used to be with the new Charter schools and other options for education.

Terry said that the Steering Committee is working on the tuition agreements, RFPs for services, etc. so they are working on it all right now. RSA 195 is a penal code that once you get in you have to be voted out by the other towns and they knew that was not going to happen so HB349 was the only option. The idea obviously has merit which shows with it passing the house first 18-2 and then it passed senate 5-0. It has merit but of course right now they do not have all the answers which is why they are working on putting a comprehensive plan together to share with the voters and then go from there. He is telling his voters that this will be the most serious decision you will have for your future coming up so make sure you are there to vote on this. Terry said John has been so helpful and they have good people working on this but everyone is second guessing this right now. They will not hurt the children or the teachers.

John said he doesn't want to dwell on the taxes because this is also about better education which is very important but since they have the numbers from article 5, they have the taste in their mouth and will try to pass it again. The one town will lower their taxes by \$9,185 per student, another town \$3,013, another town \$9,862, and the last town \$4,149. They can taste that so if this doesn't pass, they will come back for this which means their taxes will go down and our taxes will go up from \$22,141 to \$35,448 per student.

Terry thought it was important to mention that currently have 71 kids from Alexandria and Bristol in BHVS and 61 of ours from the other three towns. They are the top 25% of the state. John said he wanted to include that the other towns would not get kicked out of BHVS and if they have to build more because of this they will do this.

John wanted to point out that the Steering Committee meets every Wednesday and they will be meeting tomorrow at 6pm at the Church in Hebron. We will be having the meeting for Groton residents on October 17, 2023 at the beginning of the Select Board Meeting.

COMMITTEE UPDATES:

Conservation Commission

Slim wanted to provide a reminder that the Conservation Commission will be having their road clean up on Saturday September 30, 2023. Anyone interested can meet at the Town House at 10:00am.

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS:

There were no questions or comments from the audience.

Having no other business to conduct, John motioned to adjourn at 8:06pm, Tony 2nd, so voted.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sara Smith
Administrative Assistant