There is a lot going on at SWCBC now, after more than a year of planning, mapping, surveying, early fund raising, feasibility study RFP creation, feasibility study contracting, website creation, town advocacy, resident advocacy, County Commissioner advocacy and more. SWCBC now convenes two monthly meetings, committee and subcommittee meetings, meetings with ISPs and town information sessions.

Through it all, SWCBC’s mission has remained the same: to bring affordable and reliable broadband to all of the residents of Freedom, Liberty, Montville, Palermo and Searsmont.

**TOWN MEETINGS**

Town Meetings in all five SWCBC towns will be held in the next several months, giving SWCBC a chance to provide information in writing, orally and through presentation, in Town Reports and at the town meetings. A template for Town Report insertion and a Town Meeting handout has been distributed and is being tailored for use by each SWCBC town. Towns were asked to consider warrant items allowing a town to accept and disburse ARPA funds.

**FEASIBILITY STUDY UPDATE**

A feasibility study, responding to SWCBC’s November 2021 Request for Proposals, is now being prepared by Axiom through a $45,000 contract. Funds for the study came from Waldo County ARPA funds, with no municipal property tax monies used, at a cost of $9,000 per town. The study should be provided to SWCBC by Axiom by the end of March, 2022.

**MUNICIPAL, COUNTY, STATE AND FEDERAL FUNDING UPDATES**

The five SWCBC towns combined have more than $600,000 in unallocated ARPA funds. None of those funds have, to date, been allocated for broadband expansion.

Waldo County still has more than $3,000,000 in unallocated ARPA funds, having distributed $100,000 total of $7,700,000 in those funds to the five SWCBC towns, with no requirement that the $20,000 awarded to each town be used for broadband expansion.

ConnectMaine Authority, which has awarded SWCBC a Phase I planning grant of $5,000 and a Phase II “financial modeling” planning grant of $30,000, has been given $10,000,000 from the new Maine Connectivity Authority. That means ConnectME has $15,000,000 in the spring 2022 implementation/build out grant cycle. SWCBC is not eligible to apply in this round, but the amount now bodes well for future grant cycles when SWCBC can apply. ConnectME had a Zoom meeting on Jan. 26 regarding “Broadband Utility Districts” (BUDs) and has set up a BUD web page. Maine Connectivity Authority will soon publish guidelines on how to spend nearly $150,000,000 in ARPA funds. There is no word yet on how much federal IIJA (infrastructure act) money will be coming to Maine, or how it will or can be spent.

**ISP UPDATE**

SWCBC has recently met with or had presentations by RedZone, Spectrum and Unitel.

**LEGAL AND FINANCIAL RESOURCE UPDATE**

SWCBC Board members have contacted two legal firms, for possible hiring if and when SWCBC pursues an inter-local agreement, corporation creation, or feasibility study recommendation implementation.

KVCOG is the SWCBC’s fiscal agent for ConnectME grants and the feasibility study.

**OTHER NEWS**

At a recent Zoom meeting of the grassroots Community Connectors, ConnectME’s Nick Battista cited data from the Maine Development Foundation. The data may indicate some of the issues that SWCBC may have to address in its advocacy. According to this link, Waldo County is 40% served with 100/100mbps broadband service, and less than 15% of Maine is served with the kind of service the five SWCBC towns’ residents currently deal with. The link is [https://www.mdf.org/measures-of-growth/broadband-connectivity](https://www.mdf.org/measures-of-growth/broadband-connectivity).

**WHAT SWCBC DID IN JANUARY**

The SWCBC met on January 12 and January 26.
On January 12, agenda items and discussions included a presentation by Mark Ouellette from Axiom, SWCBC’s feasibility study vendor, and reports from the Community Outreach, ISP Outreach, Coalition Outreach, Grants and Professional Services committees and subcommittees. The ISP Outreach Committee reported on status of discussions with Spectrum and Unitel.

On January 26, agenda items and discussions included forward movement on the feasibility study from Axiom (Mark Ouellette in attendance) as well as discussion of the study’s technology analysis, strategies for discussions with ISPs and the start of revenue and expense modeling. A discussion of creating an inter-local agreement was tabled until after receipt of the feasibility study. Review of potential financial modeling example reports and potential vendors will begin with discussions with Island Institute and ConnectME.

WHAT SWCBC WILL BE DOING NEXT

Outreach

Municipal outreach will include work to build the support of SWCBC towns’ selectboards residents to both apply for and allocate one-time funds to broadband expansion. If a non-profit regional utility model is part of the solution, SWCBC will work to build community support for and guidance regarding an Inter-Local Agreement.

County outreach will include continuing advocacy with County Commissioners, to support broadband expansion, including letters and presentations, and the recruitment of influential advocates to do the same.

State outreach will include carrying out conditions of the ConnectME Phase II $30,000 fiscal modelling planning grant, advocacy with Maine Connectivity Authority board members and staff, and preparation for ConnectME and MCA implementation funding.

ISP outreach will include continuing discussions with ISPs, consistent with accepted feasibility study recommendations.