

1 Introduced by Committee on Commerce and Economic Development

2 Date:

3 Subject: Telecommunications; siting; Vermont Universal Service Fund;

4 Connectivity Initiative; telecommunications news service; public

5 school grants

6 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to make various

7 amendments to Vermont law concerning telecommunications.

8 An act relating to telecommunications

9 It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

10 * * * PSB Telecommunications Siting; Municipal Role * * *

11 Sec. 1. 30 V.S.A. § 248a is amended to read:

12 § 248a. CERTIFICATE OF PUBLIC GOOD FOR COMMUNICATIONS

13 FACILITIES

14 (a) Certificate. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, if the applicant

15 seeks approval for the construction or installation of telecommunications

16 facilities that are to be interconnected with other telecommunications facilities

17 proposed or already in existence, the applicant may obtain a certificate of

18 public good issued by the Public Service Board under this section, which the

19 Board may grant if it finds that the facilities will promote the general good of

20 the State consistent with subsection 202c(b) of this title. A single application

1 may seek approval of one or more telecommunications facilities. An
2 application under this section shall include a copy of each other State and local
3 permit, certificate, or approval that has been issued for the facility under a
4 statute, ordinance, or bylaw pertaining to the environment or land use.

5 (b) Definitions. As used in this section:

6 (1) “Ancillary improvements” means telecommunications equipment
7 and site improvements that are primarily intended to serve a
8 telecommunications facility, including wires or cables and associated poles to
9 connect the facility to an electric or communications grid; fencing; equipment
10 cabinets or shelters; emergency backup generators; and access roads.

11 (2) “De minimis modification” means the addition, modification, or
12 replacement of telecommunications equipment, antennas, or ancillary
13 improvements on a telecommunications facility or existing support structure,
14 whether or not the structure was constructed as a telecommunications facility,
15 or the reconstruction of such a facility or support structure, provided:

16 (A) the height and width of the facility or support structure,
17 excluding equipment, antennas, or ancillary improvements, are not increased;

18 (B) the total amount of impervious surface, including access roads,
19 surrounding the facility or support structure is not increased by more than 300
20 square feet;

1 (C) the addition, modification, or replacement of an antenna or any
2 other equipment on a facility or support structure does not extend vertically
3 more than 10 feet above the facility or support structure and does not extend
4 horizontally more than 10 feet from the facility or support structure; and

5 (D) the additional equipment, antennas, or ancillary improvements on
6 the support structure, excluding cabling, does not increase the aggregate
7 surface area of the faces of the equipment, antennas, or ancillary improvements
8 on the support structure by more than 75 square feet.

9 (3) “Good cause” means a showing of evidence that the substantial
10 deference required under subdivision (c)(2) of this section would create a
11 substantial shortcoming detrimental to the public good or State’s interests in
12 section 202c of this title.

13 (4)(A) “Limited size and scope” means:

14 (i) A new telecommunications facility, including any ancillary
15 improvements, that does not exceed 140 feet in height; or

16 (ii) An addition, modification, replacement, or removal of
17 telecommunications equipment at a lawfully constructed telecommunications
18 facility or on an existing support structure, and ancillary improvements, that
19 would result in a facility of a total height of less than 200 feet and does not
20 increase the width of the existing support structure by more than 20 feet.

1 (B) For construction described in subdivision (3)(A) of this
2 subsection to be of limited size and scope, it shall not disturb more than 10,000
3 square feet of earth. ~~For purposes of~~ As used in this subdivision, “disturbed
4 earth” means the exposure of soil to the erosive effects of wind, rain, or runoff.

5 (5) “Substantial deference” means that the plans and recommendations
6 referenced under subdivision (c)(2) of this section are presumed correct, valid,
7 and reasonable.

8 ~~(4)(6)~~ “Telecommunications facility” means a communications facility
9 that transmits and receives signals to and from a local, State, national, or
10 international network used primarily for two-way communications for
11 commercial, industrial, municipal, county, or State purposes and any
12 associated support structure that is proposed for construction or installation
13 which is primarily for communications purposes, and any ancillary
14 improvements that are proposed for construction or installation and are
15 primarily intended to serve the communications facilities or support structure.

16 An applicant may seek approval of construction or installation of a
17 telecommunications facility whether or not the telecommunications facility is
18 attached to an existing structure.

19 ~~(5)(7)~~ “Wireless service” means any commercial mobile radio service,
20 wireless service, common carrier wireless exchange service, cellular service,
21 personal communications service (PCS), specialized mobile radio service,

1 paging service, wireless data service, or public or private radio dispatch
2 service.

3 (c) Findings. Before the Public Service Board issues a certificate of public
4 good under this section, it shall find that:

5 (1) The proposed facility will not have an undue adverse effect on
6 aesthetics, historic sites, air and water purity, the natural environment, and the
7 public health and safety, and the public's use and enjoyment of the I-89 and
8 I-91 scenic corridors or of any highway that has been designated as a scenic
9 road pursuant to 19 V.S.A. § 2501 or a scenic byway pursuant to 23 U.S.C.
10 § 162, with due consideration having been given to the relevant criteria
11 specified in 10 V.S.A. §§ 1424a(d) and 6086(a)(1) through (8) and (9)(K).
12 However, with respect to telecommunications facilities of limited size and
13 scope, the Board shall waive all criteria of this subdivision other than
14 10 V.S.A. § 6086(a)(1)(D)(floodways) and (a)(8)(aesthetics, scenic beauty,
15 historic sites, rare and irreplaceable natural areas; endangered species;
16 necessary wildlife habitat). Such waiver shall be on condition that:

17 (A) the Board may determine, pursuant to the procedures described
18 in subdivision (j)(2)(A) of this section, that a petition raises a significant issue
19 with respect to any criterion of this subdivision; and

20 (B) a telecommunications facility of limited size and scope shall
21 comply, at a minimum, with the requirements of the Low Risk Site Handbook

1 for Erosion Prevention and Sediment Control issued by the Department of
2 Environmental Conservation, regardless of any provisions in that handbook
3 that limit its applicability.

4 (2) Unless there is good cause to find otherwise, substantial deference
5 has been given to ~~the land conservation measures in~~ the plans of the affected
6 municipalities ~~and;~~ to the recommendations of the municipal legislative bodies
7 ~~and the municipal and regional planning commissions regarding the municipal~~
8 ~~and regional plans, respectively;~~ and to the recommendations of the regional
9 planning commission concerning the regional plan. Nothing in this section or
10 other provision of law shall prevent a municipal body from basing its
11 recommendations to which substantial deference is required under this
12 subdivision (2) on an ordinance adopted under 24 V.S.A. § 2291(19) or bylaw
13 adopted under 24 V.S.A. chapter 117 by the municipality in which the facility
14 is located. A rebuttable presumption respecting compliance with the
15 applicable plan shall be created by a letter from an affected municipal
16 legislative body or municipal planning commission concerning compliance
17 with the municipal plan and by a letter from a regional planning commission
18 concerning compliance with the regional plan.

19 (3) If the proposed facility relates to the provision of wireless service,
20 the proposed facility reasonably cannot be collocated on or at an existing

1 telecommunications facility, or such collocation would cause an undue adverse
2 effect on aesthetics.

3 (A) If a proposed new support structure for a telecommunications
4 facility that provides wireless service will exceed 50 feet in height in a cleared
5 area or will exceed 20 feet in height above the average treeline measured
6 within a 100-foot radius from the structure in a wooded area, the application
7 shall identify all existing telecommunications facilities within a three-mile
8 radius of the site of the proposed structure and, for each such existing facility,
9 shall include a projection of the coverage and an estimate of additional
10 capacity that would be provided if the applicant's proposed
11 telecommunications equipment were located on or at the existing facility. The
12 applicant also shall compare each such projection and estimate to the coverage
13 and capacity that would be provided at the site of the proposed structure.

14 (B) To obtain a finding that a proposed facility cannot reasonably be
15 collocated on or at an existing telecommunications facility, the applicant must
16 demonstrate that:

17 (i) collocating on or at an existing facility will result in a
18 significant reduction of the area to be served or the capacity to be provided by
19 the proposed facility or substantially impede coverage or capacity objectives
20 for the proposed facility that promote the general good of the State under
21 subsection 202c(b) of this title;

1 (ii) the proposed antennas and equipment will exceed the
2 structural or spatial capacity of the existing or approved tower or facility, and
3 the existing or approved tower or facility cannot be reinforced, modified, or
4 replaced to accommodate planned or equivalent equipment, at a reasonable
5 cost, to provide coverage and capacity comparable to that of the proposed
6 facility;

7 (iii) the owner of the existing facility will not provide space for
8 the applicant’s proposed telecommunications equipment on or at that facility
9 on commercially reasonable terms; or

10 (iv) the proposed antennas and equipment will cause radio
11 frequency interference that will materially impact the usefulness of other
12 existing or permitted equipment at the existing or approved tower or facility
13 and such interference cannot be mitigated at a reasonable cost.

14 * * *

15 (h) Exemptions from other law.

16 (1) An applicant using the procedures provided in this section shall not
17 be required to obtain a permit or permit amendment or other approval under
18 the provisions of 24 V.S.A. chapter 117 or 10 V.S.A. chapter 151 for the
19 facilities subject to the application or to a certificate of public good issued
20 pursuant to this section. This exemption from obtaining a permit or permit
21 amendment under 24 V.S.A. chapter 117 shall not affect the substantial

1 deference to be given to a plan or recommendation based on a local land use
2 bylaw under subdivision (c)(2) of this section.

3 (2) Ordinances An applicant using the procedures provided in this
4 section shall not be required to obtain an approval from the municipality under
5 an ordinance adopted pursuant to 24 V.S.A. § 2291(19) or a municipal charter
6 that would otherwise apply to the construction or installation of facilities
7 subject to this section ~~are preempted~~. This exemption from obtaining an
8 approval under such an ordinance shall not affect the substantial deference to
9 be given to a plan or recommendation based on such an ordinance under
10 subdivision (c)(2) of this section.

11 (3) Disputes over jurisdiction under this section shall be resolved by the
12 Public Service Board, subject to appeal as provided by section 12 of this title.
13 An applicant that has obtained or been denied a permit or permit amendment
14 under the provisions of Title 24 or 10 V.S.A. chapter 151 for the construction
15 of a telecommunications facility may not apply for approval from the Board
16 for the same or substantially the same facility, except that an applicant may
17 seek approval for a modification to such a facility.

18 * * *

19 Sec. 2. 24 V.S.A. § 4412(8)(C) is amended to read:

20 (C) The regulation of a telecommunications facility, as defined in
21 30 V.S.A. § 248a, shall be exempt from municipal approval under this chapter

1 when and to the extent jurisdiction is assumed by the Public Service Board
2 according to the provisions of that section. This exemption from obtaining
3 approval under this chapter shall not affect the substantial deference to be
4 given to a plan or recommendation based on a local land use bylaw under 30
5 V.S.A. § 248a(c)(2).

6 * * * Connectivity Initiative; Public Schools; Cellular Service * * *

7 Sec. 3. 30 V.S.A. § 7515b is amended to read:

8 § 7515b. CONNECTIVITY INITIATIVE

9 (a) The ~~purpose~~ goals of the Connectivity Initiative ~~is~~ are to:

10 (1) ~~provide~~ Provide each service location in Vermont access to Internet
11 service that is capable of speeds of at least 10 Mbps download and 1 Mbps
12 upload, or the FCC speed requirements established under Connect America
13 Fund Phase II, whichever is higher, beginning with locations not served as of
14 December 31, 2013 according to the minimum technical service characteristic
15 objectives applicable at that time. Within this category of service locations,
16 priority shall be given first to unserved and then to underserved locations. As
17 used in this section, “unserved” means a location having access to only satellite
18 or dial-up Internet service and “underserved” means a location having access
19 to Internet service with speeds that exceed satellite and dial-up speeds but are
20 less than 4 Mbps download and 1 Mbps upload.

1 (2) Provide universal availability of mobile telecommunications service
2 throughout the State.

3 (b) Any new services funded in whole or in part by monies from this
4 Initiative shall be capable of being continuously upgraded to reflect the best
5 available, most economically feasible service capabilities.

6 ~~(b)~~(c) The Department of Public Service shall publish annually a list of
7 census blocks eligible for funding based on the Department's most recent
8 broadband mapping data. The Department annually shall solicit proposals
9 from telecommunications service providers, alone or in partnership with one or
10 more municipalities, to deploy broadband to eligible census blocks.

11 (d) The Department shall give priority to proposals that reflect the lowest
12 cost of providing services to unserved and underserved locations; ~~however, or~~
13 that include upgrading Internet service at one or more public schools that do
14 not have access to Internet service capable of the minimum speeds required
15 under subdivision (a)(1) of this section. In addition, the Department shall give
16 priority to proposals that include matching public or private funds and establish
17 an alignment between the proposed broadband or cellular project and
18 community goals.

19 (e) In addition to the priorities established in subsection (d) of this section,
20 the Department also shall consider:

- 1 (1) the proposed data transfer rates and other data transmission
- 2 characteristics of services that would be available to consumers;
- 3 (2) the price to consumers of services;
- 4 (3) the proposed cost to consumers of any new construction, equipment
- 5 installation service, or facility required to obtain service;
- 6 (4) whether the proposal would use the best available technology that is
- 7 economically feasible;
- 8 (5) the availability of service of comparable quality and speed; ~~and~~
- 9 (6) the objectives of the State’s Telecommunications Plan;
- 10 (7) whether a public school has a percentage of students receiving free
- 11 or reduced lunches that is above the State average;
- 12 (8) whether the community in which a public school is situated does not
- 13 have high speed Internet connectivity; and
- 14 (9) whether the community in which a public school is situated is rural
- 15 and has a percentage of households categorized as low-income that is higher
- 16 than the State average.

17 Sec. 4. FY 2017 CAPITAL APPROPRIATION; CONNECTIVITY

18 INITIATIVE

19 The sum of \$1,000,000.00 is appropriated to the Connectivity Initiative,
20 established in 30 V.S.A. § 7515b, from the bond premium in the FY 17 Capital
21 Budget Adjustment Act.

1 Sec. 5. 30 V.S.A. § 7523 is amended to read:

2 § 7523. RATE OF CHARGE

3 (a) Beginning on July 1, 2014, the rate of charge shall be two percent of
4 retail telecommunications service.

5 (b) Beginning on July 1, 2016 and ending on June 30, 2020, the rate of
6 charge established under subsection (a) of this section shall be increased by
7 one-half of one percent of retail telecommunications service, and the monies
8 collected from this increase shall be transferred to the Connectivity Fund
9 established under section 7516 of this title to provide specifically additional
10 support for the Connectivity Initiative established under section 7515b of this
11 title.

12 (c) Universal Service Charges imposed and collected by the fiscal agent
13 under this subchapter shall not be transferred to any other fund or used to
14 support the cost of any activity other than in the manner authorized by this
15 section and section 7511 of this title.

16 Sec. 6. 30 V.S.A. § 7516 is amended to read:

17 § 7516. CONNECTIVITY FUND

18 (a) There is created a Connectivity Fund for the purpose of providing
19 support to the High-Cost Program established under section 7515 of this
20 chapter and the Connectivity Initiative established under section 7515b of this
21 chapter. The fiscal agent shall determine annually, on or before September 1,

1 the amount of monies available to the Connectivity Fund. Such funds shall be
2 apportioned as follows: 45 percent to the High-Cost Program and 55 percent to
3 the Connectivity Initiative.

4 (b) In addition to the monies transferred to the Fund pursuant to subsection
5 (a) of this section, monies collected from one-half of one percent of the
6 Universal Service Charge shall be allocated to the Fund specifically to provide
7 additional support to the Connectivity Initiative, as prescribed in subsection
8 7523(b) of this title.

9 * * * VUSF; News Service; Blind and Visually Impaired * * *

10 Sec. 7. 30 V.S.A. § 7511 is amended to read:

11 § 7511. DISTRIBUTION GENERALLY

12 (a)(1) As directed by the Commissioner of Public Service, funds collected
13 by the fiscal agent, and interest accruing thereon, shall be distributed as
14 follows:

15 (A) to pay costs payable to the fiscal agent under its contract with the
16 Commissioner;

17 (B) to support the Vermont telecommunications relay service in the
18 manner provided by section 7512 of this title;

19 (C) to support the Vermont Lifeline program in the manner provided
20 by section 7513 of this title;

1 (D) to support Enhanced-911 services in the manner provided by
2 section 7514 of this title; ~~and~~

3 (E) to support a telecommunications information and news service in
4 the manner provided by section 7512a of this title; and

5 (F) to support the Connectivity Fund established in section 7516 of
6 this title; and

7 (2) for fiscal year 2016 only, any personnel or administrative costs
8 associated with the Connectivity Initiative shall come from the Connectivity
9 Fund, as determined by the Commissioner in consultation with the
10 Connectivity Board.

11 (b) If insufficient funds exist to support all of the purposes contained in
12 subsection (a) of this section, the Commissioner shall allocate the available
13 funds, giving priority in the order listed in subsection (a).

14 Sec. 8. 30 V.S.A. § 7512a is added to read:

15 § 7512a. TELECOMMUNICATIONS NEWS SERVICE

16 The fiscal agent shall make distributions to the State Treasurer for a
17 telecommunications information and news service that provides access to
18 existing newspapers and other printed materials for individuals who are blind,
19 visually impaired, or otherwise unable to read such printed materials. The
20 amount of the transfer shall be determined by the Commissioner of Public

1 Service as the amount reasonably necessary to pay the costs of a contract
2 administered by the Department of Public Service.

3 * * * High-Cost Program; Eligibility; Deployment Information * * *

4 Sec. 9. 30 V.S.A. § 7515 is amended to read:

5 § 7515. HIGH-COST PROGRAM

6 (a) The Universal Service Charge shall be used as a means of keeping basic
7 telecommunications service affordable in all parts of this State, thereby
8 maintaining universal service, and as a means of supporting access to
9 broadband service in all parts of the State.

10 * * *

11 (i) The amount of the monthly support under this section shall be the pro
12 rata share of available funds based on the total number of incumbent local
13 exchange carriers in the State and reflecting each carrier's lines in service or
14 service locations in its high-cost area or areas, as determined under subsection
15 (e) of this section. If an incumbent local exchange carrier does not petition the
16 Board for VETC designation, or is found ineligible by the Board or by the
17 Commissioner of Public Service pursuant to his or her authority under
18 subsection (k) of this section, the share of funds it otherwise would have
19 received under this section shall be used to support the Connectivity Initiative
20 established in section 7515b of this chapter.

21 * * *

1 (l) Based on the recommendation of the Commissioner of Public Service,
2 the Board may deem a company ineligible to receive monthly support under
3 this section or revoke a company’s VETC designation if he or she finds that
4 the company or one of its affiliates has not provided adequate deployment
5 information requested by the Director for Telecommunications and
6 Connectivity under subsection 202e(c) of this title.

7 * * * Proposal; School Connectivity Grant Program * * *

8 Sec. 10. PROPOSAL; SCHOOL CONNECTIVITY GRANT PROGRAM

9 On or before December 1, 2016, the Secretary of Education and the Director
10 of Telecommunications and Connectivity shall propose to the General
11 Assembly in the form of a draft bill a school connectivity grant program
12 designed to provide competitive grants to public schools for capital costs
13 associated with the purchase of state-of-the-art educational applications and
14 equipment. The goal of the program is to ensure that the maximum Internet
15 service available to the school is accessible by all personnel and students on
16 school grounds, consistent with and supportive of educational policies and
17 objectives. Proposed criteria shall prioritize rural communities having a
18 percentage of low-income households higher than the State average.

19 * * * Effective Date * * *

20 Sec. 11. EFFECTIVE DATE

21 This act shall take effect on passage.