



August 26, 2020

RE: Governor's Recommended FY 2021 State Budget and CUD support

Dear Chairs of the Vermont House and Senate Appropriations Committees:

I am writing on behalf of the Windham Regional Commission's (WRC) Community Development Committee in support of the Governor's Recommended FY 2021 State Budget. The Community Development Committee specifically supports the Governor's proposal to allocate funds to the Public Service Department in support of Communications Union Districts (CUD).

WRC received a Broadband Innovation Grant (BIG) in December 2019. Since that time our project team conducted a survey and developed a feasibility study that confirmed the need for improved internet service throughout our region. Simultaneously, the Deerfield Valley Communications Union District (DVCUD) formed to serve the region. The Windham Regional team is now about to wrap up the final phase of the BIG grant project, which involves the development a business plan that will become the DVCUD's business plan. DVCUD is now in the early stages of fundraising to support the construction of broadband fiber throughout our region.

The Governor's proposed budget, including the allocation of funds to support CUDs, is critical to seeing DVCUD's efforts succeed in our region. Bridging the funding gap and providing funds for CUD administration and fiber construction would leverage other resources and will be a big step toward deploying broadband fiber to residents and businesses in the Windham Region.

The overall goal of the Windham Region Broadband Project is to provide internet services to the unserved and underserved areas of our region. It may go without saying that high speed broadband is a critical foundation to a thriving, diverse economy. Not only do our downtowns and commercial areas need to be connected to conduct business, residential internet service is crucial for home businesses and those who work from home. The COVID pandemic brought this issue to the forefront. Working remotely is now widely accepted. The importance of good internet connections for education, health care and many other services is now understood.

WRC's Community Development Committee supports the Governor's proposed budget and funds that would support the development of broadband fiber in the Windham Region and throughout Vermont. Please let us know if you have any questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Susan Westa".

Susan Westa, AICP
Senior Planner

cc: Senate Finance Committee
House Energy and Technology Committee
Representative Laura Sibilila
Representative Tim Briglin
Senator Ann Cummings
Senator Randy Brock
Commissioner of Public Service, June Tierney