



Testimony of Adam Lougee, Executive Director
Addison County Regional Planning Commission
House Energy and Technology Committee
February 17, 2021

Good Morning:

My name is Adam Lougee. I am the Executive Director of the Addison County Regional Planning Commission ("ACRPC"). One of the main functions of regional planning commissions throughout the State is to help the region or individual communities plan for and create "community infrastructure" that supports the fabric of their community. Traditionally, it has been good planning, transportation infrastructure, housing, emergency services, and natural resource conservation. Prior to last year, we had done some work in broadband infrastructure planning, but not a lot. As you all know, the COVID -19 pandemic really stressed the need for broadband in communities. The Addison Region, like a lot of Vermont, had pockets of good service in and around its community centers, but large portions of the rural areas in the region were and remain underserved. Last spring ACRPC started working with DPS to kickstart a regional broadband plan for the Region. Since that time ACRPC has worked on a wide range of planning services to bring broadband to the Addison Region.

In the spring/summer ACRPC worked with DPS and the Vermont Community Foundation to secure grant funding to facilitate the formation of the Addison County CUD (Now Maple Broadband). We contracted with DPS to create a broadband feasibility study and broadband business plan for the Region, which we have given over to Maple Broadband for its use. We worked with local community leaders to help establish Maple Broadband.

Fast forward 8 months, the Addison Region has a functioning CUD, Maple Broadband, run by a very dedicated, hard-working, and talented group of volunteer community leaders. Maple Broadband has 18 member communities all with at least one delegate and most with alternates. They oversee their own finances, marketing, and administration. They are working quickly to complete their business plan, choose an operating partner and proceed to designing and building their network. ACRPC still provides the following support:

- Administrative support by serving as Clerk and providing bookkeeping functions.
- Assist with CUD governance matters by 1) providing staffing for Governing Boards and Committees, 2) providing guidance on Open Meeting Law and public records, and 3) helping develop fundamental CUD policies (financial, conflict of interest, purchasing policies) and committee/task force charters.
- Serve as a point of contact/liaison between the CUDs and state-level partners such as DPS, electric utilities, ISPs, and other potential partners.
- Working with funding agencies and local communities to help find financing for the organization's buildout.

Helping Maple Broadband serves ACRPC's larger community goals of providing critical infrastructure to the community we serve. We, the RPCs, are a good fit to help establish and maintain CUDs. We have long-standing relationships with both the member communities and with statewide organizations like DPS with an interest in providing better broadband infrastructure. In most of the new CUDs, RPCs have helped to establish them. RPC's also exist in areas without CUDs to provide start-up support.

Moving forward, I believe RPCs can still play a useful role supporting the CUDs. We can still provide relatively inexpensive contract labor on an as-needed basis. We understand planning, administration, public meetings. We supply valuable contacts to local and state government and share the same mission of providing reliable and affordable infrastructure to our communities.

My request to the legislature on behalf of the CUDs would be to provide a stable long-term environment for them to flourish and fulfill their mission. DPS has done a tremendous job organizing a system of organizations across the State that have the mission and drive to create this infrastructure for all Vermonters. CUDs need additional operational funding to maintain their existence. More importantly, they need a clear long-term and realistic funding path to the millions of dollars it will take to build out Vermont's broadband system. I would suggest the legislature identify long-term capital (3-4 years) in the form of grants or loans structured so that newly formed organizations have the ability to realistically access the funding, build a portion of their infrastructure and create positive cashflow. I would set a clear expectation that in 3-4 years CUDs should be able to support their own needs and transition to the revenue bond market for the remainder of their infrastructure growth needs.

Thank you for your interest, support and the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Adam Lougee