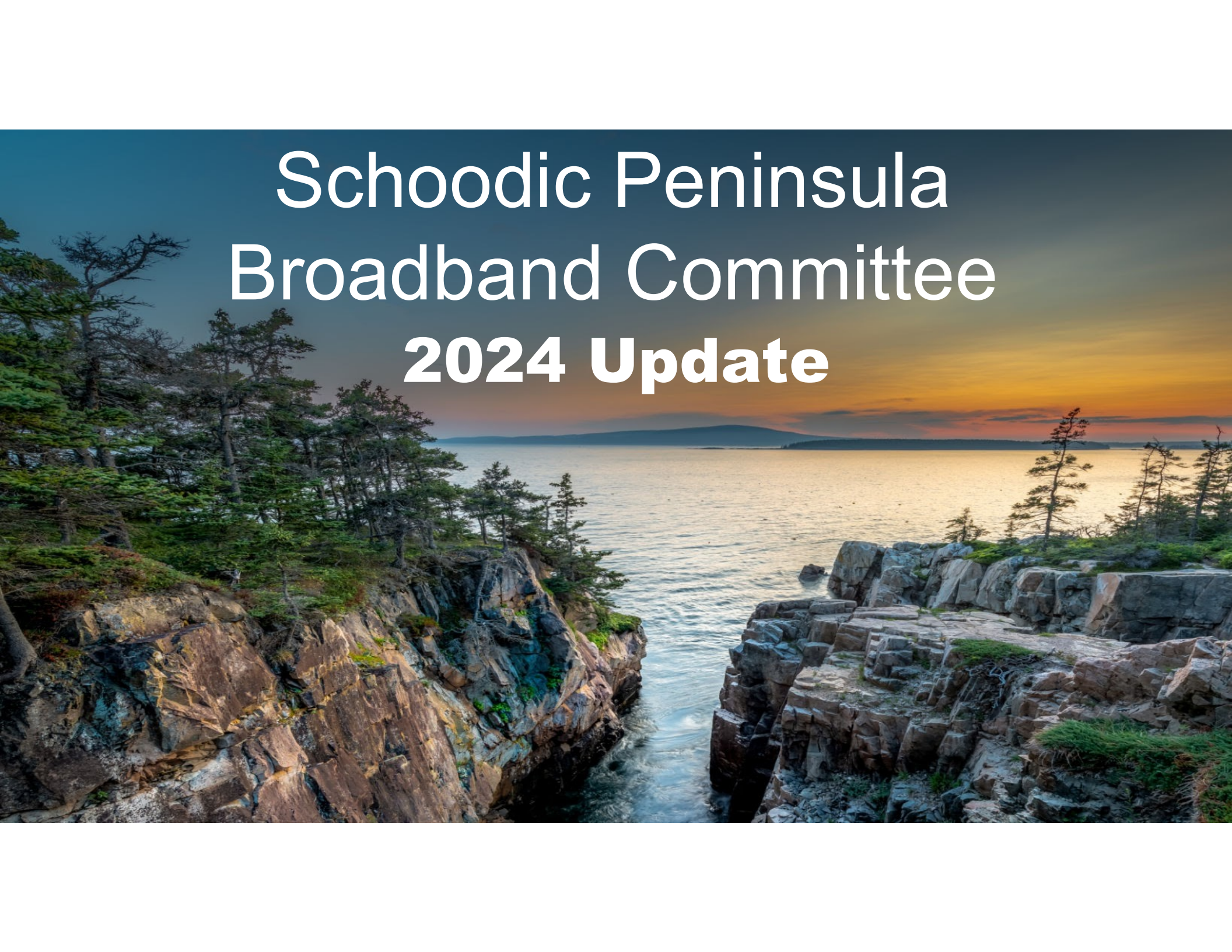


The background of the slide is a scenic photograph of a rocky coastline. In the foreground, there are rugged, dark rocks with patches of green moss and small evergreen trees. The middle ground shows a calm body of water reflecting the warm colors of a sunset. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and blue, with distant land visible on the horizon.

Schoodic Peninsula Broadband Committee **2024 Update**

The Work So Far...

- In 2022, we sent out a survey to all postal addresses in Gouldsboro and Winter Harbor, asking how the residents used their internet service, about its cost, and its sufficiency
- We sent out a Request for Information (RFI) to local internet providers to see which companies were interested in developing broadband internet access networks in the two towns at a minimum of 100 Mbps symmetrical
- We investigated different models of providing broadband internet access including method of delivery (we determined fiber optic is best) and mode of operation and ownership of the network – ISP vs community

The Work So Far...

- In 2023, we held three separate community outreach meetings where we went over the basics of broadband internet access and engaged with participants on the work to that point
- There was a strong demonstrated need for improved internet access from both the surveys and attendance at the outreach meetings
- There was a strong preference to have the control and eventual revenue stream that accompanies the locally-owned model
- A Request for Proposals (RFP) was issued to area providers to get more detailed responses for an actual project covering both towns

The Work So Far...

- In 2024, we evaluated the responses to our RFP
- Two “responses” were received, only one reasonably meets the requirements set out
- Neither includes a plan for a community-owned, open-access network as requested, but the Consolidated Communications response has a community-owned option with a 20 year of exclusivity requirement
- The second response (Spectrum) did not include fiber as a network medium and consequently does not offer symmetrical speeds; it did not contain any specific information requested in the RFP

Consolidated Communications (CCI) Options

- The CCI proposal effectively meets all of the requirements for the network build as specified in the RFP: fiber to the premise, a minimum of 1 Gbps symmetrical with the ability to increase over time
- Overall project build cost estimated to be \$5,279,294.00
- CCI would be responsible for all drop costs (excluding special construction) including customer premise equipment and ongoing network repair/operation
- CCI already has obligations to add service to 366 locations through Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) awards, construction value of \$1,266,396.00
- Balance of network build requires funding of **\$4,012,898.00**

CCI Offering

- Fidium fiber service already exists in Eastbrook and Ellsworth locally
- Residential: 100 Mbps (\$45/mo) , 300 Mbps (\$65/mo), 1 (\$85/mo) Gbps services
- Current continuing prices after 1-yr promotional rate
- Business prices roughly double
- Subject to user fee in bond funding model to be discussed, typically \$3 to \$15 per month
- If we were to accept a proposal at the beginning of 2024, project would tentatively be complete (including RDOF areas) by end of 2025

CCI Funding Models

- CCI is willing to pursue either a grant-funded model or a community-financed model to cover the \$4,012,898.00 required for construction
- Can be funded through a combination of grants, Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) funding, and/or town funding (either taxes or bonds)
- If pursuing grants, CCI will write the grants and increase its contribution to the project to meet whatever match is required for the program, reducing the local requirement
- If the project requires bonding by the towns, CCI will charge a user fee and guarantee payment to the towns equal to the bond payments

Grant Funding

- Last year, MCA administered the “Connect the Ready” program to fund projects driven by small, local efforts like SPBC – we weren’t able to go to RFP in time
- Federal funding (BEAD Program), to be administered by Maine Connectivity Authority (MCA), still a work in progress for this year
- MCA will divide the Maine map into chunks to be “bid” on by providers
- Towns can give letter of support to a preferred provider
- Entire map chunks will be bid on, awarded, and built together by one provider
- Focus on the least-served (less than 100 Mbps/20 Mbps service or no service)
- No work/funding required by the towns other than a letter of support

Bond Funding Model (Right Now)

- Straightforward, driven by towns
- Towns take out bonds, CCI repays towns in accordance with payment schedule
- Uncertainty about areas to be built out through BEAD may make bond funding challenging prior to BEAD funding becoming available
- In the end, if our towns do not get built out through BEAD, could pursue bond funding model and include other close, similarly unbuilt towns to improve likelihood of a project

Committee Recommendation

- At present, best outcome is to see how BEAD funding will progress
- Our town select boards could submit letters of support for a specific provider which can help steer the bid selection
- At least CCI intends to include all areas of all towns in their bid areas, not just the “unserved” and “no connection” areas
- This would require least effort from the towns
- If not all areas in both towns are satisfactorily built out as a result, then pursue further expansion

Spectrum Response

- Was interested in having discussion about expanding their existing network
- Fiber is on their horizon, but intend to stick with hybrid fiber cable (HFC), copper, for time being
- Will not offer symmetrical speeds until on fiber
- Most of Winter Harbor already served, a little over half of Gouldsboro

What to do until BEAD funding settled?

- Island Institute is working with non-profit Give IT Get IT to rehome Starlink equipment from areas that have recently been built out with fiber
- May help reduce barrier to Starlink service until broadband expansion done
- Though Starlink prices did just increase in this area, for some, from \$90 to \$120 per month

Your Thoughts?

- Committee plans to meet with select boards to make a recommendation on how to proceed concerning proposals received, funding models, and letters of support

Next steps

- Committee will send out information as it becomes available
- Keep eyes on town newsletters for updates as the broadband effort progresses

www.schoodicbroadband.org