

# **Request for Proposals**

## **EASTERN SLOPES REGIONAL BROADBAND**

### *MUNICIPAL BROADBAND PLANNING STUDY*

#### **1.0 Project Purpose**

The Eastern Slopes Regional Broadband Committee, comprised of the Towns of Brownfield, Denmark, Fryeburg, Lovell, Stoneham, Stow, and Sweden, Maine, and Chatham (TBD), New Hampshire, is soliciting proposals from qualified firms to determine need, feasibility and justification for a broadband solution serving the residents of the Towns. Eastern Slopes Regional Broadband's vision for broadband services is:

To establish a broadband network that serves all permanent residents, seasonal residents, businesses, and visitors with competitive, reliable, and scalable (future proof) service that meets the minimum requirements of 100/100 Mbps.

The desired outcome of this planning effort is to create a Broadband Adoption Plan which provides the region and each of the Towns with:

- 1) accurate information to document the current status of high-speed broadband service in the eight towns including mapping and gap analysis;
- 2) evaluation of various technologies and their ability to meet the Committee's vision;
- 3) evaluation of the financial and operational strengths and weaknesses of general approaches including working with existing providers, attracting new competitive providers, establishing a municipal network, or some combination of the above
- 4) evaluation of various organizational and operational models which have proven success in similar rural situations and which are permissible under current Maine and New Hampshire law
- 5) estimation and analysis of cost of infrastructure and expected operating costs of viable alternatives
- 6) preliminary network design at a general concept level
- 7) an analysis of financing alternatives, including: grant funding for which the towns are eligible and competitive; user funded; public-private partnerships; municipally funded
- 8) estimation of revenues, including "take-rate" requirements to achieve financial sustainability

#### **2.0 Background**

The eight towns have a total of ~6,350 residences (full and part-time) and ~8,760 year-round residents, with an estimated 4,376 residences (69%) unserved or underserved. Attachment A provides basic service area statistics. The towns are currently partially served by Spectrum (fiber-coax), Consolidated Communications (DSL), satellite, cellular or are unserved.

The Eastern Slopes Regional Broadband Committee initially met in August 2021 and subsequently has met at least once a month. The Committee is proceeding to utilize the VETRO mapping tool so that all eight towns, which are the members of Maine School Administrative District #72, are working from a common set of information. The Committee has had initial meetings with Consolidated Communications, GWI, Redzone, and Outer Reach Broadband.

In January 2022, the Town Selectboards approved a Memorandum of Agreement to fund and complete a Joint Broadband Planning Process. As an initial step in that process, a regional Phase II Planning Grant

Application was submitted to the Connect Maine Authority for the eight towns on January 20, 2022. The Connect Maine Authority approved the grant at its meeting on January 26, 2022.

Attachment B provides current preliminary broadband information for the eight towns and the status of their individual broadband planning activities to date, including formation of a local committee, involvement by the Selectboard, community surveys, and speed tests completed.

The COVID 19 pandemic has laid bare the importance of high-speed broadband and prompted the Congress to allocate significant financial resources to expand broadband across the country. Federal funding is providing states, counties and local governments with resources and a path to universal broadband access. The resources allocated in the American Rescue Plan Act, among others, have created an unprecedented opportunity to build connectivity to the last mile, and the possible upcoming federal infrastructure bill may add to that capacity.

Wishing to take advantage of these resources and recognizing that access to affordable, reliable, high-speed internet service is critical to the Towns' future as an attractive and economically viable region to live and work and for residents and businesses to thrive, the Towns are exploring the best path forward to meet their broadband vision.

### **3.0 Scope of Services**

A Broadband Implementation Plan is the product that will be produced through this project and will advance the vision of the Eastern Slopes Regional Broadband Committee.

#### **3.1 Vision**

*To establish a broadband network that serves all permanent residents, seasonal residents, businesses and visitors with competitive, reliable, and scalable (future proof) service that meets the minimum requirements of 100/100 Mbps.*

*The Towns' residents, businesses and visitors need this service to:*

- *Accommodate the growing needs of its traditional students and teachers, and of the growing needs of other non-traditional education resources.*
- *Accommodate community telehealth needs, especially considering the distance to healthcare facilities.*
- *Accommodate the needs of a growing "work from home" segment of the population. Many higher paying professional jobs now allow for or require remote employment. The Towns cannot grow and prosper without affordable and robust broadband.*
- *Give consumers a choice in broadband services. The Towns have many areas that are unserved/underserved or served by only one provider that has no competition.*

#### **3.2 Consultant Services Generally**

To help achieve this vision and pursue improved internet service, the Committee seeks a technical consultant to:

- Produce a detailed and accurate map and analysis of existing cable and fiber internet service, building on the mapping the Committee has already done
- Identify gaps in service

- Generate recommended strategies and related cost estimates for expanded service accomplishing the vision
- Identify potential public and private partners and realistic funding sources for expanded service

### **3.3 Specific Consultant Services – Initial Phases**

Specific services expected from the consultant are:

- Generate project timeline from start to completion
- Meet with the Eastern Slopes Regional Broadband Committee and other Town representatives to review the timeline and study elements, respond to questions and solicit input from Committee members and Town representatives
- As elements of the Study are developed, develop content for the ESRBB Committee and Towns' education and consideration throughout the process. These should include, but may not be limited to, the existing state of broadband service across the region, the pros and cons of possible solutions including technical and economic aspects, and more refined content as the study progresses.
- As the study is developed, collaborate with the Committee in producing options that may include more cost-effective solutions relevant in providing broadband service in more sparsely populated areas and some consideration of not providing services in extremely hard-to-serve locations.
- A broadband study for each Town and the region will be produced that includes the following elements:
  - Field audit(s) of internet assets, characterizing speeds and ownership,
    - CATV
    - Fiber and remote terminals
  - Identification of potential subscriber locations using 911 data and aerial imagery
  - Mapping field audit in VETRO or equivalent platform
  - Mapping gaps in VETRO or equivalent platform
  - Validating road segments subject to Franchise Agreement obligations and clear identification of premises not served under standard coax hook-up obligations
  - Extracting data and metrics from VETRO or equivalent platform
  - Estimating costs
    - CATV extensions
    - FTTP
    - Other potential technologies which meet the Committee's goals
    - Hybrid approaches
- A Study Report including:
  - Provide each Town with recommendations on the kind and type of telecom and broadband infrastructure needed to achieve the Towns' goal of a network providing symmetrical high-speed service of nominally at least 100/100 mbps (download/upload speed) to all housing, business, and town facilities as well as public safety needs and requirements. A similar recommendation should be provided for a regional solution. Document the range of technologies and their relative ability to meet current and future demand. Identify key technical requirements needed to support network operations. A fiber-based network must be one

potential technology. If there is new or emerging technology that can provide the same end result that should be a part of the recommendations.

- An evaluation of various organizational/partnership options for accomplishing the Towns' vision, specific to those available to each town given their location, current internet service, and constraints of law and organizational capacity; proven successful examples from reasonably similar Maine municipalities should be provided. Assist the Towns with the identification of a governance and ownership strategy that both protects and leverages the Towns' investment and determines what private sector participation could be beneficial and which create risk to the Towns. Ensure that the Towns' interests and needs are well-represented during the development and operation of the network and provides significant Town input and decision-making ability over the long term. One option must include full municipal ownership, individually and collectively, of the utility but not operation.
- Recommended strategies and related costs for filling service gaps using CATV expansion versus building out a FTTP solution town-wide (with some very limited exceptions), including a preliminary network design at a general level and any potential phasing.
- An analysis that provides the Towns with a highly detailed projection of revenue, expenses, debt costs, subscription rate projections, capital expenses, and build out plans for viable alternatives.
- Provide an analysis of a variety of funding options including, but not limited to, public/private partnerships, federal/state/private grants, general obligation bonds, revenue bonds and others where appropriate. The analysis will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each financing option and the potential effects of different financing strategies and other variables on the business case.
- Identify all realistic state and federal implementation funding assistance programs which can financially assist the Towns in implementing the selected alternative.
- All data and information collected in support of the analysis and recommendations shall be included as appendices.
- When the report is in final draft form, meet with the Eastern Slopes Regional Broadband Committee and Towns' representatives to review the draft study report and respond to questions and comments.
- Revise draft report based on the Committee's comments and provide final report
- Preparation for and participation in 3-5 regional community meetings at various stages of the project.

These will be for the purposes of:

- Providing education on the state of broadband infrastructure and service in the Eastern Slopes Region, collectively and for each town, and on possible technologies to fill gaps and provide full service
- Provide education on organizational, potential partnership, potential financial options, based on viable options to provide full service
- Present a final recommendation based on the analysis done and Committee decisions made during development of the final report.

### **3.4 Subsequent Phase Consultant Services**

- Subsequent to acceptance of the final report and Town-level decisions regarding next steps, with a minimum of five towns agreeing to move forward, an additional stage will be to assist the Eastern Slopes Regional Broadband Committee with the following:
  - Develop an RFP for broadband final design, construction and operation
  - Assistance with identifying potential vendors to provide those services and in soliciting proposals from them
  - Assistance with technical review of RFP respondents' proposals
  - Technical assistance with negotiations with vendor negotiations

## **4.0 PROPOSAL CONTENTS**

### **4.1 Statement of Qualifications**

All respondents must submit a written Statement of Qualifications to include information about the respondent directly related to each of the Selection Criteria. Proposals must detail the team that will be working on the project, should you be the successful respondent. All information should be submitted succinctly. Provide names, addresses, telephone numbers, and e-mail addresses of clients for whom the Consultant has performed projects of a similar type and size within the last 5 years. Please provide a brief description of projects performed of similar type and size. A completed Conflict of Interest Affidavit and Disclosure form (Attachment C) and a proposed contract must be submitted with the proposal. Please submit five (5) paper copies and one (1) electronic copy of the proposal in PDF format.

### **4.2 Proposal**

All proposals should address how the Respondent proposes to provide each element of the Scope of Services. Respondents must provide an explanation of how they propose to accomplish the project outcome within the stated timeframe.

The proposal must include estimated costs broken down for each item listed within the Scope of Services above. The cost proposal should explicitly recognize that the work subsequent to acceptance of the Final Report is contingent upon at least five towns agreeing on the next step of seeking vendors to final design, construction and operation.

### **4.3 TIMEFRAME**

In order to allow for an appropriate response time for questions and comments prior to the Proposal due date, all questions and comments must be submitted by 2:00 p.m. on March 3, 2022. Answers to the questions and comments, as well as any changes made to this RFP, will be posted online at [www.ESRBroadband.org](http://www.ESRBroadband.org) by March 8, 2022.

All proposals must be received at the Office of the Town Manager, 62 East Main Street, Denmark, Maine 04022 no later than 4:00 p.m. local time on March 22, 2022.

It is anticipated that a choice of consultant will not be determined until mid-April 2022, and any proposed contract subsequently requires approval by each participating town's Selectboard and signature by the lead Town of Denmark. Such full approval is anticipated by May 1, 2022. The selected firm would begin work

immediately upon signature of the contract by the Town of Denmark. The final Planning Report phase of the project is to be completed by October 31, 2022.

The final Implementation vendor RFP, vendor evaluation and negotiation phase of the project (see Subsection 3.4) has a deadline of April 31, 2023.

## **5.0 SELECTION PROCESS**

The Committee may ask top ranked firms to attend a presentation interview as part of the evaluation process. Firms invited to interview should be prepared to have general discussions on non-binding estimates of cost to provide requested services.

The Committee reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposals the Committee deems to be in its best interest.

The contract with the selected consultant must be approved by each Town. If five or more towns approve the contract and participate, the lead Town of Denmark will sign the contract on the participating towns' behalf.

## **5.1 SELECTION CRITERIA**

The respondents will be evaluated on the following criteria.

- Submission of a complete and concise proposal with the Consultant's approach to the project, which contains all information, services and requirements of this RFP.
- Demonstration of strong understanding of the Project and the Committee's objectives.
- Thoroughness of services the Consultant proposes to provide.
- The Consultant's stated ability to perform and complete all work as indicated in the Scope of Services and in a timely manner.
- Recent public sector experience and performance with municipal/regional/multi government fiber initiatives; specific information on all broadband planning projects in Maine should be provided; provide information on results achieved from all broadband planning projects in Maine. Please reference specific projects.
- Staff expertise and relevant experience of the proposed team; project lead is to be clearly identified and must be present for any interviews for the consultant selection and for any Committee and Community meetings
- Demonstrated experience developing technical, financial and business models for broadband initiatives.
- Demonstrated ability to work collaboratively with municipal broadband committees.
- Experience with the management and oversight of construction and operation of fiber initiatives.
- Consultant's willingness and ability to expand the scope of services to include proximate towns.
- Comparative costs of the proposal will be considered but will not be the only basis for selection.
- Acceptability of terms of the proposed contract.

The Committee will notify the respondents with a final decision or request for additional information within four weeks of the submission deadline.

## **6.0 SUBMITTAL**

All proposals are due at the Office of the Town Manager, Town of Denmark, 62 East Main Street, Denmark, Maine 04022, no later than 4:00 p.m. local time on March 17, 2022. Five (5) hard copies and one (1) complete electronic version are required. Vendors assume the risk of the methods of dispatch or delivery chosen. Office hours for receipt of mailed or expressed proposals are: Tuesday through Thursday, 9:30am - 4:30 pm (EDT).

## **7.0 DISCLAIMERS**

- The Town of Denmark, on behalf of the Eastern Slopes Regional Broadband Committee, reserves the right to accept or reject any or all submittals received, cancel or modify the RFP in part or in its entirety, or change the RFP guidelines when it believes it is in the Eastern Slopes Regional Broadband Committee's best interest to do so.
- The Town of Denmark, on behalf of the Eastern Slopes Regional Broadband Committee, will not be responsible for any costs incurred by the respondent in the preparation of a response to the Request for Proposal.
- The Town of Denmark, on behalf of the Eastern Slopes Regional Broadband Committee, reserves the right to delay or discontinue this selection process at any time during the process.
- The Town of Denmark, on behalf of the Eastern Slopes Regional Broadband Committee, reserves the right to request clarification and/or additional information from the Respondent during the evaluation process.
- The Town of Denmark, on behalf of the Eastern Slopes Regional Broadband Committee, reserves the right to waive any informalities in submitted proposals.
- All proposals submitted in response to this RFP become the property of the Town of Denmark, on behalf of the Eastern Slopes Regional Broadband Committee. The Town has the right to disclose information contained in the proposals after the award has been made. All submitted reports, documents, and materials, including the mapping software files, shall be considered public information and shall be the property of the Town of Denmark, on behalf of the Eastern Slopes Regional Broadband Committee.

## **CONTACT INFO**

Questions and comments regarding this Request for Proposal shall be directed to [RFP@ESRBroadband.com](mailto:RFP@ESRBroadband.com).

### Attachments:

- A: Project Area Statistics
- B: Current Broadband Activities – Towns in Eastern Slopes Broadband Area
- C: Conflict of Interest Affidavit and Disclosure

Attachment A: Project Service Area Statistics

Estimated 60% of the residences are unserved using a 50/10 definition

	# of residences	Year-round residents	Square miles	Road miles	Estimated % of residences with access to cable internet	Estimated # of residences needing service	Data source
Brownfield	973	1579	45	89	0	973	Speed test data
Denmark	1043	1210	50	72	62%	381	Spectrum
Fryeburg	1931	3449	66	163	48%	1004	Fryeburg Survey
Lovell	1227	1140	40	116	30%	858	Speed test data
Stow	232	401	24	18	0	232	Speed test data
Stoneham	344	236	35	22	0	344	Speed test data
Sweden	331	408	30	33	0	331	Speed test data
Chatham, NH	253	337	57	unknown	0	253	Local knowledge
Totals	6334	8760	347	513		4376	

**Attachment B: Current Broadband Activities – Towns in Eastern Slopes Broadband Area**

	Committee established	Selectboard involvement	Startup Grant Received	Community Surveys in process	# of surveys complete	# of Speed test locations	# of speed tests complete	Meeting with Selectboard	Community informational meetings	MOA Commitment
Brownfield	11/2020	09/2021	12/2021	Yes	132	169	174	10/28/2021		01/2022
Denmark	08/2020	08/2020	N/A	Yes	92	388	657	10/12/2021		01/2022
Fryeburg		10/2021	N/A	Yes	100	228	294	10/25/2021		01/2022
Lovell	10/2021	10/2021	12/2021	Yes	12	111	160	10/19/2021		01/2022
Stoneham	09/2021	09/2021	12/2021	Yes	115	86	117	10/21/2021		01/2022
Stow	09/2021	09/2021	12/2021	Yes	6	24	27	01/11/2022		01/2022
Sweden	09/2021	09/2021	N/A	Yes	36	74	100	10/26/2021		01/2022
Chatham, NH		09/2021	N/A					01/06/2022		

Attachment C: Conflict of Interest Affidavit and Disclosure

- A. "Conflict of interest" means that because of other activities or relationships with other persons, a person is unable or potentially unable to render impartial assistance or advice to the Municipality, or the person's objectivity in performing the contract work is or might be otherwise impaired, or a person has an unfair competitive advantage.
- B. "Person" means and includes the Consultant, an Offeror, Vendor, Provider Contractor, consultant, or subcontractor or sub-consultant at any tier, and also includes an employee or agent of any of them if the employee or agent has or will have the authority to control or supervise all or a portion of the work for which a Proposal is made.
- C. The Consultant warrants that, except as disclosed in §D, below, there are no relevant facts or circumstances now giving rise or which could, in the future, give rise to a conflict of interest.
- D. The following facts or circumstances give rise or could in the future give rise to a conflict of interest (explain in detail — attach additional sheets if necessary):
- E. The Consultant agrees that if an actual or potential conflict of interest arises after the date of this affidavit, the Consultant shall immediately make a full disclosure in writing to the procurement officer of all relevant facts and circumstances. This disclosure shall include a description of actions which the Consultant has taken and proposes to take to avoid, mitigate, or neutralize the actual or potential conflict of interest. If the contract has been awarded and performance of the contract has begun, the Consultant shall continue performance until notified by the procurement officer of any contrary action to be taken.

**I DO SOLEMNLY DECLARE AND AFFIRM UNDER THE PENALTIES OF PERJURY THAT THE CONTENTS OF THIS AFFIDAVIT ARE TRUE AND CORRECT TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE, INFORMATION, AND BELIEF.**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ By: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Authorized Representative and Affiant)

SUBMIT THIS AFFIDAVIT WITH BID/PROPOSAL