

#6...Feb 13, 2020

Results of tonight's meeting with GWI:

First, there were some important guests. In addition to representatives from some of our neighboring towns, we had our state Rep Sarah Peabworth, and a representative from each of Maine's two Senators. Also the state director of the USDA Rural Development, Tim Hobbs, based in Bangor. Our Island Institute mentor, Stephanie MacLaghan, also came from Old Town. They were all very approachable and knowledgeable and really want to help.

The loan application was rejected not on its merits, but on procedural grounds. I am still trying to ferret out exactly what that means. It has something to do with different branches of USDA that don't work in synchronicity.

The only immediate avenue for us for funding - and it is IMMEDIATE, i.e. application due March 15 - is for the Re-Connect grant program. Note this is a grant and not a loan. The problem with this program is that the areas that are eligible are those where the available speeds are less than 10 download and 1 upload. (The loan program cutoffs were 25 and 3, and almost all of Brooksville qualified.) Using this definition, and looking at the speed tests we collected in November of 2018, we lose about 18% of the respondents. In addition, under the Re-Connect program, what the existing service providers CLAIM they are providing is given significant weight. So some of you folks who are paying CCI for 10/1 but getting much slower speeds might not be included. (Ostensibly the reason for this is because the federal government cannot compete with existing businesses, even if those businesses are doing a lousy job. It's a broken system in the case of an essential service like broadband.)

There may be some improvement in this arbitrary regulation in the future, but not the immediate future, and it certainly won't come into being before March 15. In fact it may be 6 to 9 months before new, better criteria are developed.

One interesting thing though: cell phones being used as hotspots, and the Verizon hookups, and satellite services, don't count because they are not viewed as permanent land based service. So those of you who in desperation have turned to those remedies, you would be included. (Unless you live in an area where supposedly CCI's DSL service is "available", even if you have been told that you can't get it because there are no more slots in the remote terminal. Talk about a Catch 22!)

The March 15 application will need 15 letters from businesses that meet the "under 10/1" definition in the 4 affected towns (Brooksville, Penobscot, Sedgwick, Brooklin combined), and they preferably will come from the farming, fishing and logging sector. We are trying to get the USDA census of those businesses and will ask the affected ones to write letters. We are working with GWI to find out what information those letters should contain.

It is important that everyone do more speed tests, whether or not you live in an area that would be included in the March 15 application. We need to keep track of our situation town wide so that we can respond quickly when the next program comes "down the pike", which is bound to

happen as the politicians and the USDA get a better understanding of the importance of the issue for our towns and the difficulties we are facing. So what we are asking you to do is:

1. Go to the speed test website and do the test: here is the official link used statewide by ConnectME: <https://speed.measurementlab.net/#/>

2. Write down the results and the date and time, and send them to me with your name and the address in Brooksville where you did the test.

3. Please do this at least once before the end of February. (I know this is frustrating to many of you who are seasonal residents and not in Brooksville at this time. I share your frustration, dismay, and yes, anger.)

Please talk about this with your friends and neighbors and encourage them to do the speed test.

(I just did mine tonight at 11 pm: 0.79 download, 0.84 upload.)

I will be happy to try to find answers to any questions you have, so don't hesitate to ask.