

Charlemont Fiber Network Status

Nov 12, 2020

Charlemont's Municipal Fiber Network will become a reality in 2021 as residents get connected and receive service. A lot of the construction work is already complete, although this progress is not always visible. The Select Board and Broadband Committee are trying to accelerate the schedule as much as possible to help residents cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. The project remains on budget and there are no major problems.

The Broadband Committee is working on multiple work-streams simultaneously to ensure the project continues without blockers. This work can be grouped under **network build out** and **administration**.

Regular project updates are posted at www.charlemontconnect.org and on the [CharlemontFiber Facebook page](#).

Network Build Out

Network build out is all of the activities that are taken to build and deliver the physical plant that makes up the broadband network.

Network Build Out - Utility Pole Make Ready

Utility pole make ready work is the preparation work that needs to occur prior to the fiber network being built throughout town. National Grid completed their make ready work on schedule in June 2020, despite the pandemic. Verizon has just completed their work on November 6, 2020.

An inspection and remediation process will be done by the utilities along with Westfield Gas and Electric (WG&E). This inspection is the final step of make ready.

Several sections of the network required additional make-ready work to be done by the town or required cooperative agreements with Rowe and Heath. The town has completed additional make-ready work at the Long Bridge, the west end of Tower Road, Heath Stage Terrace and Warner Hill Road. National Grid will be upgrading the utilities along part of Hawk Hill Road in Spring 2021.

Network Build Out - Distribution Build Out

Following the completion of make ready, the distribution network will be built out in 5 sections called Fiber Service Areas (FSAs).

In April 2020, TriWire was selected as our distribution network construction firm. We expect that they will begin work once the utility pole inspections are completed in early 2021. We don't yet know the order in which the FSAs will be built. However, we do expect to be able to start serving residents in the earliest FSAs while the other FSAs are under construction.

Network Build Out - Fiber to the Home

As each FSA comes on line, residents will be able to sign up for service and get their homes connected. This will be done through our ISP Westfield Gas & Electric (also branded as Whip City Fiber). We will be starting a subscription sign-up campaign soon as the construction of the distribution network gets underway.

Administration

To support the municipal broadband project a number of administrative activities are in progress. This includes finances, contracts, and policy activities.

Administration - Financing

The project is being funded by a combination of town borrowing and state and federal grants. To date, the town has received and spent more than \$1,400,000 in grant funding for the network, with more grant funds committed as we reach future milestones.

On the warrant for our Special Town Meeting on November 14, there are articles to create an enterprise fund for network operations and to adopt an operating budget. The Broadband Committee and Finance Committee have recommended this accounting structure for several reasons: It is efficient, it uses standard municipal accounting rules, and it provides transparent oversight of the network operating budget. Adopting an enterprise fund has no impact on the town tax rate.

Administration - Policy

The town has published a drop policy which describes the process for connecting your home or business to the network and provides a subsidy of up to \$1400 for each network connection. This document is considered complete, although minor updates may occur from time to time as additional questions arise.

This drop policy can be found here: <http://charlemontconnect.org/resources/>