REGIONAL PRIORITY PROJECT PRIORITIZATION PROCESS

PROJECT INFORMATION FORM

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PROJECT NAME:

Universal Broadband

TYPE OF PROJECT:

- [x] Infrastructure:
  - [ ] Water
  - [ ] Wastewater
  - [x] Broadband
  - [ ] Transportation
  - [ ] Public Facility
  - [ ] Other
- [ ] General Development:
  - [ ] Industrial
  - [ ] Commercial
  - [ ] Residential
  - [ ] Mixed
- [ ] Site/Facility Development for Specific Business
- [ ] Workforce Development
- [ ] Business Development
- [ ] Other:

PROJECT SPONSOR:

Organization Name	Addison County Communications Union District dba Maple Broadband
Organization Mailing Address	PO Box 530 Middlebury VT 05753
Organization Email	info@maplebroadband.net
Organization Phone	(802) 377-3713

Contact info for the person submitting project information:

Name	Ellie de Villiers
Title	Executive Director
Mailing Address	PO Box 530 Middlebury VT 05753
Email	ellie@maplebroadband.net
Phone	(802) 377-3721

PROJECT PRINCIPAL(S) (if different than above):

Person 1:

Name	
Title	
Organization	
Mailing Address	
Email	
Phone	

Person 2:

Name	
Title	
Organization	
Mailing Address	
Email	
Phone	

PROJECT DESCRIPTION - Provide a brief (2-3 sentence) description of the project. (500 character limit):

Maple Broadband is working to ensure that every on-grid address across the communications union

DETAILED PROJECT DESCRIPTION (5000 Characters):

Maple Broadband is a communications union district comprised of 20 member towns in Addison County. One of the district's obligations is universal service to every on-grid address in each member town. In order to reach this goal, Maple Broadband is designing, building, and operating a fiber-optic broadband network in Addison County.

The network build will prioritize areas that are underserved (meaning they lack access to at least one option providing speeds of 100Mbps down/20Mbps up, which in practice means either cable or fiber-optic service). Maple Broadband's eventual goal is to ensure that every on-grid address has access to fiber-optic service from at least one provider.

Moreover, Maple Broadband wants to make access affordable to all residents. As the business case permits, Maple Broadband will be engaging in activities and subsidies to support access to residents who cannot afford the full cost of services.

PROJECT LOCATION (3000 characters):

Provide the physical location of the project and/or the area to be served by the project

The physical location of the project is along the roads of the 20 member towns of the district - primarily fiber-optic cable installed aerially on existing utility poles, or the placement of new utility poles or buried fiber.
The area to be served are the on-grid locations (households and businesses) within the 20 member towns - Addison, Bridport, Bristol, Cornwall, Ferrisburgh, Leicester, Lincoln, Middlebury, Monkton, New Haven, Orwell, Panton, Ripton, Salisbury, Shoreham, Starksboro, Vergennes, Waltham, Weybridge, and Whiting.
Maple Broadband has a partnership with Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecom (WCVT) whereby the locations that they serve will be upgraded to fiber by WCVT, so Maple Broadband will not be deploying fiber along those roads.

PROJECT PURPOSE AND BENEFITS (3000 Characters):

Describe the purpose and benefits to the region of the project. Describe if/how the project builds capacity within the region for improved economic development or community development, builds capacity in the region for improved economic and community development, and/or advances the goals and objectives of the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and/or regional plans, and addresses the most pressing needs of the region.

The availability of high-speed broadband ticks many of the boxes of the Strategic Direction, Action Plan, and Evaluation Framework of the CEDS. Broadband access has become a fundamental building block to participation in the modern economy, whether for businesses trying to reach and serve customers, residents wanting to pursue remote work or flexible work, educational institutions exposing teachers and students to the vast research capabilities of the internet, medical facilities complying with regulation or conducting tele-health; the list goes on and on.
In particular, broadband helps attract new workers and expand the labor force by ensuring that those new workers have the capacity to use the internet to do their jobs or to gain new skills (Goal #1). It similarly helps with business development and job creation (Goal #3), and Workforce Development and Employee Retention (Goal #4). Universal broadband is infrastructure, and it helps feed into advanced grid monitoring which is a key element of the resiliency plans of electrical utilities. CUDs are specifically mentioned under #7 broadband on p. 57 of the CEDS.

PROJECT TIMELINE, MILESTONES, AND STATUS (3000 Characters):

Describe the project timeline, the current status, and impediments to proceeding. Include factors such as site control, engineering and design, financing/funding identification and commitment, and permitting. Clearly identify where the project is within the project timeline and what work remains.

Maple Broadband currently aims to complete its network build by the end of 2025. This would mean that every address in the district has access to fiber-optic broadband from at least one provider, with the exceptions of any areas that Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecom have committed to build.

On the back of total awards of $4,283,367 in Pre-construction funding and $10,843,386 in construction funding, Maple Broadband launched service in February 2023. By the end of 2023 will have active service across approximately 140 miles comprising portions of Cornwall, Salisbury, Leicester, Shoreham, Orwell, Whiting, and Middlebury ("Phase 1"). Phase 1 is scheduled to be completed on schedule and under budget.

Our remaining funding under our ARPA-funded Act 71 construction grant, as well as ARPA donations from towns and matching funds from the Vermont Community Broadband Board will enable us to continue our build next year into more of Orwell and Whiting, as well as portions of Vergennes, Ferrisburgh, Monkton, New Haven, and Waltham.

When this work is complete, approximately 150 miles will remain to be built, primarily in the towns of Leicester, Salisbury, Middlebury, Ferrisburgh, New Haven, and Ripton.

Engineering has been completed for approximately 80-85% of the remaining work. Permitting primarily consists of licensing on utility poles owned by Green Mountain Power, which proceed according to PUC Rule 3.700 (which is to say, without significant issues). To date, both VTRANS and our member towns have been very helpful in supportive in providing any additional ROW permitting.

Expected total cost to complete is ~$6M, of which some portion will be grant-funded if we are successful in our grant application under the next round of Federal broadband funding, BEAD (Broadband Equity Access and Deployment).

PROJECT PRINCIPAL EXPERIENCE/PARTNERSHIPS (3000 Characters):

Describe project principals' experience managing federal or state grants, and/or successfully developed similar business models, their ability to complete the project, and describe any partnerships that will help ensure success.

Maple Broadband's Executive Director Ellie de Villiers has over a decade of experience in telecommunications strategy and management. She is chair of the Vermont CUD Association, and has worked for years at a senior strategic level for one of the largest fiber optic operators on the African continent, Liquid Intelligent Technologies, with over 100,000km of fiber assets.

Chair Steve Huffaker has over a decade of experience designing and deploying inside plant for JPMorgan Chase, and an extensive engineering background prior to that.

Maple Broadband has successfully completed a Single Audit, and is in good standing with the Vermont Community Broadband Board.

Key partners include:

1. Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecom, responsible for installations of end customer locations and back-office ISP operations including network management, billing, customer service, etc.
2. Vantage Point Solutions, responsible for fiber-optic engineering; high-level and detailed design.
3. Syracuse Utilities, construction contractor with an exemplary work quality and safety standards.
4. Mission Broadband, performing construction oversight and on-site day-to-day quality assurance.
5. Addison County Regional Planning Commission, whose Executive Director Adam Lougee serves as Maple Broadband's Clerk, an ex officio member of the Executive Committee, and the organization has provided extensive support to Maple Broadband since prior to its formation.

PROJECT SUPPORT AND REGIONAL NEED (4000 Characters):

Describe how the project is consistent with identified local and regional goals, advances regional needs identified in the region's CEDS and/or regional plans or is supported by reports or public forums. Describe the community support for the project and any community engagement that has occurred. Include reference and link to region's CEDS, the municipal and/or regional plan, and reports, or forums identified. Also describe how the project leverages regional human, social, financial, cultural, and/or physical capital, and supports, compliments, or enhances existing efforts.

Community support and engagement is the sine qua non of CUDs, including Maple Broadband.
In addition to the alignment with the CEDS described above, all of Maple Broadband's 20 member towns, all in Addison County, voted to join the district. Almost all towns have appointed at least one delegate to the governing board, which meets monthly. 7 volunteer members of the Executive Committee spend a minimum of 3 hours a month (and often much more!) volunteering for Maple Broadband.
To date, 1559 residents have searched for their address to find out about service availability, 774 people have gone as far as to place a pre-order/expression of interest in service, and nearly 100 customers are live.

PROJECT COST, IDENTIFIED AND COMMITED FUNDS/FINANCING, AND FUNDING GAP:

Provide the total project cost and complete the simple sources and uses chart.

Total Project Cost: $ 23,850,000

Sources:

Source	Amount
Act 71 Pre-construction	$ 4,283,367
Act 71 Construction	$ 10,843,386
Town ARPA & match	$ 830,000
BEAD grant	$ 2,000,000
Revenues	$ 476,412
Total Sources:	$ 18,433,165

Uses:

Use	Amount
Design & overheads	$ 6,250,000
Make-ready/permitting	$ 2,500,000
Construction oversight	$ 600,000
Construction	$ 14,500,000
Total Uses:	$ 23,850,000

Funding Gap: **$ 5,416,835**

Note: Uses must exceed sources or there is no funding gap

Budget Narrative (3000 Characters):

Describe the amount of funds/financing that have been identified and include a clear status of the funds (Received, committed, applied for, identified, etc.) including the dates of receipt, commitment, application, expected distribution, etc. Clearly identify any funding gap. Also, identify the type of resource (cash, grant, loan, sponsor in-kind, third party in-kind, etc.) and describe which resources can serve as a match, noting that, for example, some grant sources do not allow matching federal funding with other federal funds. Clearly identify any funding gap and identify the state or federal resources that you expect might help fill the gap.

With the exception of the revenues (based on projections through 2025), and BEAD grant (based on projections/assumptions) the other sources of funds are existing grants and/or commitments.
Pre-construction grant - most recent amendment - 7/12/2023
Construction grant - most recent amendment - 8/23/2023
Town ARPA - with the exception of Lincoln's 9/26/2023 pledge which is not yet collected, 100% of town ARPA donations are in the bank. VCBB match has not yet been received but the money has been identified and is expected to be approved by the board formally on 11/13/2023 and disbursed shortly thereafter.
The BEAD application process is expected to open in early Q2 2024, awards made in Q3, and money disbursed starting in Q1 2025.
Importantly, BEAD requires a 25% match which can be either existing assets that meet the qualifications, in-kind donation of time, or cash.
Maple Broadband is expecting to obtain up to $6 million in debt in 2024. The source of this debt is not yet certain; we are exploring various options including short term debt, municipal bonds, or working with the VCBB and state of Vermont on an expansion of an existing state broadband loan program to close this gap. Financiers are confident that with existing assets and grant funds plus the evidence of market traction Maple Broadband is seeing, obtaining debt will not be a problem. More of a concern are the current interest rates, which are not favorable. As noted, we are presently exploring options and strategies to address this funding gap in an optimal manner that minimizes total debt service.

JOB CREATION (4000 Characters):

Provide an estimate of the number of permanent and temporary jobs to be retained and/or created by the project, including the period of time over which new jobs will be created.

This project will be the direct cause of very few full-time permanent jobs. Maple Broadband currently has a .80 FTE Executive Director but once the network is completed this will transition to part-time caretaker role.

Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecom will add a small number of jobs over the next 3-5 years (likely under 5) to support new customers.

The work being done on the project, whether utility pole make ready or construction, is almost exclusively being done by staff of existing companies or their contractors.

The project, however, will indirectly create jobs as described above through enabling local businesses to innovate and grow using the internet, and supporting incomes in the area by allowing people to participate in full-time and part-time remote work, with the benefit of a reliable and fast internet connection.

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