

Broadband Update

The big news on the broadband front is the completion of the broadband engineering study by Axiom (<http://www.connectwithaxiom.com>). [We expect to have the study in final form by March 10]. The study documents engineering and budget details to provide reliable high-speed broadband to all subscribing residents in **Georgetown, Arrowsic, and Southport**. The effort has been a collaboration of the 3 Bridged Islands Task Force (3BI), Axiom, and the Island Institute (<http://www.islandinstitute.org>).

While Axiom was working on the technical design, the task force has focused on financing options and on the legal structure of the 3-island organization that will be needed to contract for the construction and operation of the internet system. We met with teams in Maine and Vermont that have taken a regional approach to rural broadband upgrade. We are looking closely at recent Maine legislation for setting up a **multi-town broadband utility**, which is a model being used by Calais and Baileyville with support from the Downeast Economic Development Corporation.

We learned about financing options from CEI (Coastal Enterprise Institute), the Island Institute, and the Eaton Peabody law firm. All have experience in Maine rural broadband and coastal development. Funding models include a mix of grants, private investment, commercial or government-backed loans, and town bonding. For example, the US Department of Agriculture has a rural broadband loan program that looks promising.

Despite the challenges for rural communities, there are success stories for us to follow. The Island Institute has been a huge advocate and facilitator helping us navigate the waters. In April we will participate in their Broadband Summit in Belfast, gaining valuable insight into what works and the benefits emerging from in Maine's rural broadband projects. We are participating in that process to promote broadband synergies for economic development, education, marine resources, and aging in place.

We are fortunate to have a dedicated and highly motivated task force team. A core group (David Tudor, Peter Degnan, Carlos Barrionuevo, Nancy Prisk, Ken Hnottavange-Telleen, Mark Aukeman) meets weekly on the phone or in person. As the pace quickens, we need to expand the group to give sufficient focus to issues like grants/funding, legal organization, and community outreach. If you are interested in participating, please send an email to: 3bi-broadband@inthemaine.com.