

Broadband Diffusion in Rural Maine: A Qualitative Assessment of Residents' Attitudes

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APPENDIX A — WHAT LEADERS WISH COLLEAGUES KNEW ABOUT BROADBAND & RURAL COMMUNITIES. (INTERVIEW RESPONSES)

Q: Is there anything you wish other broadband leaders understood about the internet or broadband and rural communities?

Leader Responses (14 Participants):

*In no particular order. Only 14 participants are quoted here because for 2 of the participants interviewed, the recordings malfunctioned and this portion of the interview was lost.

1. Broadband utility leader (Hancock County): “I think the biggest thing [and] it’s not just always the leaders... people got to stick it out, you know? We kind of hung together for four years plus we did have two towns drop out of our group. Now we have two other towns...actually three have kind of joined our group [on] digital equity related stuff. But I think...I put this at the bottom of my email: ‘failure is not fatal. Success is not final.’... The fact is, we hung around and people noticed it and paid attention to us. That’s a good thing. If somebody at the town or community is totally silent [and] nobody’s talking to anybody about it [and] nobody’s participating, you’re low on the totem pole because you’re missing a lot of the stuff that’s going on out there. But at the same time, when you do get something... there’s still going to be people who don’t understand it...how many people still get HughesNet envelopes?...And, people just need to pay attention and find somebody who is willing to get into a little bit of the technical stuff. Now, there’s not a lot they really need to know, but knowing what megabit per second really means [is important]...when somebody says, ‘I have broadband,’ and then you ask them what their service is and they say, ‘DSL.’ You go, ‘you don’t have broadband. You have internet, but you don’t have broadband.’ So this term ‘broadband’ and ‘internet’ have unfortunately been more recently inter-changed....So, there’s a lot of those little nuances.”
2. Broadband committee member and island seasonal resident (Knox County): “Just a few things that I would say to other communities that have broadband committees and are looking at doing broadband [are that] we have found that continuity of membership on the committee is a key factor. For example, all the while I’ve been doing this, I’ve been off and on in contact with [redacted] Island, and I’ve seen the broadband committee over there disband and reform and disband and reform about three times, and every time you do that, you reset back away and you have to, you know...people start reinventing the wheel. So, it’s important, I think, for momentum, to keep (if at all possible) continuity on the committee. That doesn’t necessarily have to be everybody. But if the whole committee disbanded, and then a whole new one forms, that’s a problem. If you have a committee and one person has to drop off, but you bring someone in who learns the ropes and then you rotate people through, that’s probably not so bad.”

“We have been in contact with, obviously, the various state agencies over time and then it was the old ConnectMaine Authority that decided to put us into this NTIA grant pool. Which was a plus. What the people have to understand is, the state doesn’t have enough money to do everything, you know, so things have to be prioritized. And what the state has to understand is that most of these communities aren’t going to have really—I shouldn’t say smart, but you know...because I’m just in [this] position because I worked with this stuff years ago, but—people who are dedicated enough to learn it...you know, learn enough to be dangerous. I don’t know. That’s a poor choice of words, but, yeah.”

The governments need to educate themselves and you talk about [some selectboards] not being particularly broadband literate. Early on when the American Rescue Plan funds first came out,... the whole relationship with the [redacted] County commissioners has been challenging for the islands in the first place and they were openly hostile to spending anything on broadband which [is] not a way to win friends and influence people now. Somewhat in their defense, the group that was trying to get them to pony up some money was approaching it with a ‘bull in a china shop’ kind of attitude and I thought that the whole thing with the county commissioners was not handled well by anyone—either the commissioners or the people who were trying to get broadband funding out of the county. That said, the county commissioners in [redacted] County have shown antipathy towards the island communities and it’s sort of like, well, we’re communities too. Yes, we’re small, you know, but we pay into the county coffers all the time. One of the commissioners who’s got the various island communities, [redacted island name] included...the island communities have been referenced as “her little islands,” you know, in a very condescending way. Hearing things like that really irritates me. On the other hand, maybe I should pat myself on the back. The people at the state level, from the ConnectMaine Authority and now from the Maine Connectivity Authority...there are enough people who know who I am that I think they probably...I think they probably scream and run in horror when they see me on the Zoom call, *laughs,* but I’m not an antagonist...they just know who I am. And that gets back to the whole consistency of people on a committee thing.”

3. Regional broadband coalition leader (Piscataquis County): “I’m hoping just to stress the point that my work with the local people here indicates that they increasingly understand that having broadband is a necessary condition to retaining the current rural culture that they have. They’re going to lose people, for sure, much less be able to attract any people without it. It’s an absolute essential.”
4. Broadband consultant (Sagadahoc County): “[This] was one of my interests going into it, and I had a fear that it was going to really be left on the table but I’m starting to see signs of promise: everybody thinks of broadband infrastructure as just surfing the internet [or] Facebook [and] whatever...you can run your business and all that type of stuff. But what are the other things that it can bring to a rural area? Because, again, not everybody is trying to run an Etsy shop just because they live in Aroostook County. But, what can be transformative are the other technologies that can then be leveraged. If we have proper fiber-optic capacity throughout the state, and then you can start looking at, ‘alright, well, what does agricultural tech look like when you have access to the internet?’ And you can do smart growing and crop manipulation and monitoring for fishing communities—you know, a fisherman being able to look at the fishery boundaries or being able to renew his permit or access what he needs to from a GPS standpoint because the broadband coverage is enough that you can extend it a mile offshore. Or same thing inland, you know, if you can monitor your blueberry field’s conditions without having to pay six people to go out and do things physically, you can make up for a lot of the workforce lack that we have...things like that. But I’m starting to have conversation with the smarter people in the room sometimes...younger people [and] more aggressive companies that are looking at things from that standpoint. So, I’m becoming a little more encouraged that we’re not just being concerned about everybody having access to the internet...it’s, what does that really mean and what can you do with it outside of just the standard template? So, I’m encouraged by that.”

“If you have a conversation about, you know, ‘hey we want everybody to have broadband in your beautiful, idyllic coastal Maine community,’ they’re like, ‘yeah I don’t really [care] if I get my email. I’m trying to have my morning coffee.’ But if the conversation is, ‘well now you can plot your lobster traps on the same mapping software you use on your boat but you can access it from home and be able to do that when you’re not on the boat [and] increase your productivity,’ then they start making that connection. And it’s just not presented that way. And that’s where I see the problem being. It’s just the communication. We’re just not communicating in the right way to all of the different populations. But, that being said, as I’ve learned more about this space, I found out about things like the Island Institute that is working primarily with fishing communities and island communities and they are having those conversations so [that’s] fantastic...now I have less to worry about. There’s people doing the right things with this.”

5. Former island selectboard chair (Cumberland County): “I wish that...in the state of Maine, they paid Consolidated to put a cable under the ocean so that the school and library could have high-speed internet because it’s part of a program. And then, to turn around, you know, to have that be a private business, and not have it be accessible without all this rigmarole, you know...it just seems disingenuous of the people who are the beneficiaries. I think that maybe the state didn’t think about, when they were doing that, how they could have made it more public and less... you know...given that grant directly to Consolidated versus the community or something. I don’t know. Or maybe owned it themselves or... I just think people didn’t think about it.”

“One of the issues that I didn’t talk about is the alternatives. For example, when there was the big controversy of whether we needed to do it or shouldn’t do it, [there] was the whole idea of Starlink. And so people got some Starlinks. And they’re going, ‘Why would we be doing this when people can just buy Starlink?’ And, even [for] some of the people who had Starlink ... it wasn’t as reliable as they thought it would be. But for some of them, ... it was always reliable. But the ones who were opposed to this [broadband] project—it always worked for them. Which I thought was very interesting because I don’t know any technology, *laughs* that always works for everybody.” The other thing too...if you’ve got tons of money, you can go spend a thousand dollars on something that might not work for you, you know what I mean?”

“Let people buy their own [service], you know, that kind of thing. I think people don’t see it as a public utility. And that was one of the things that the broadband committee tried to talk about is, telephone, electricity...[broadband] is the same idea, just an updated version of it.”

6. County economic council leader (Washington County): “The only thing that I think I would like to touch on [is that] I am a strong advocate for statewide pricing, and not because we’re a community anywhere as rural that they pay higher prices due to low density and whatever. I’m a big proponent for statewide pricing. Also, the Affordable Connectivity Program is absolutely vital. I really hope that it continues to be funded, but in my experience in this rural area—but I don’t think it’s just this area—is that, with the Affordable Connectivity Program, some of the barriers to adoption are lack of trust. [People] think it’s a scam...‘if it sounds too good to be true, then it must be.’ So, it takes a lot of work in rural communities to do outreach and convince people that ‘no, no, no, this isn’t a scam.’ So, affordability is definitely a huge issue.”
7. Library director (Piscataquis County): “I get frustrated with nonprofit work in general or governments and big nonprofits really, in that there’s not a free flow of ideas and communication top to bottom. And I wish that they would get more input from people who have direct service experience...but not just experience. A lot of what is frustrating is that people either ... go for a Master’s and then they don’t actually do the actual work anymore. Or they do the work so well that they get a higher up job and then they just keep being promoted until they’re obsolete. So I feel like there’s not a lot of people who are doing—especially in libraries because of the funding—the work and have time to have conversations like this, because they’re so swamped with everything else. Like I said, at the MCA conference they were like, ‘well we need people to talk to these people’...librarians do. We talk to these people. We talk to people all the time.”
8. Former selectboard chair and local farm owner (Washington County): “Well, I mean, I do think, truthfully, when you’re talking federal/state...usually, I don’t think they understand what rural internet is like at all. I mean, they don’t have it. It’s the same thing that I discovered [about] people who have high-speed internet [who] couldn’t even imagine that the rest of us didn’t. And that was just like a mile. And one mile [difference], [it was] almost like they didn’t care. Supposedly, in our government—our federal and state—they’re supposed to care. But, if you have high-speed internet, how much are you really thinking about those that don’t, really? If you think about it? So, it really kind of means we [have to] put in front of them constantly as a reminder, and maybe even have a lot of them experience it in some way, even if it’s through a field trip or something, like, ‘this is how we deal with it. This is like dial-up people. Remember dial-up?’”

9. “And, I’ve been asked to speak sometimes with groups down here. I always tell them, ‘don’t forget the Nos.’ Even though you know that they’re probably not going to change their mind, you’ve got to include them. Because, first of all, if you talk to the Nos, you might even be able to come up with a reasoning to their concern that you can address and maybe change that. But it’s one of those things. And also, I strongly, strongly recommend you don’t put high-speed internet in the easy locations of your town, because then you’re still in the same problem that you are [in] now.”

“A lot of people say, ‘well, if you don’t like it, move.’ Where am I going to move to? And I heard that alot too...‘if you don’t like it, well, move.’ Well, I can’t do that. That’s not the way it works for me. And I’m sure it’s the same for a lot of others. So I just want people to remember—everybody deserves high-speed internet. It isn’t just, based on where you live, whether or not you deserve it. And, I hope [that] even once I have high speed-internet, I don’t forget about people that don’t.”

“It’s great to hear that other places are starting to think about [broadband] and do it. I really also have a lot of concern with towns that seem to take five to seven years to even talk about it. It’s just a way to put it off, but people forget about it. Because if you’re doing a feasibility study now, in five years, everything’s changed in price. To me, everytime I hear feasibility study, I’m going, ‘oh so you don’t want it.’”

10. Regional broadband project leader (Waldo County): “I think other communities could benefit more from working together. And it’s not that we’re working at odds. That’s not happening. ... But the conversations need to continue. At the ground level, the local communities need to have more of a singular voice and communicate back up to the state. So the state is...they’re doing the best that they can. But, there’s not a whole lot of—that I’m seeing—rural engagement going to Augusta and sitting down and saying, ‘we understand that there are regulations for how you’re trying to apply this. Do you understand how this is affecting us? You wouldn’t give us grant money because of this thing but you didn’t tell us you needed that.’ Right? And, everybody’s doing the best they can. But, I think that the towns—all the people at my level—there should be a little more collaboration and working together. ISPs are... especially with certain ones...ours is very clear that they’re out to make money, but their goal is to work in rural communities, and so they do it that way. Some of the other ISPs are very forceful in their hand. And a lot of times they do things to the detriment of their own customers, and the reason that they’re able to do that is because there’s not enough enforcement at the top. And, also, there’s not—I hate to use the word ‘union’ but there’s not enough of a unified voice from these towns that represent the customer bases to be able to do anything to influence these large ISPs to work harder, faster, leaner, charge less, right?

This is what I got from another community leader: one of the large ISPs came through [and] trampled [someone’s] garden and ran fiber. And when the person who owned the property said ‘what the heck are you doing? You just ruined my daisies’ and they said ‘well we’re giving you fiber so you’re fine.’ They’re like, ‘what are the rates?’ And the lady was handed a paper for 100 gigs. It’d be 400 dollars a month. And it’s like, what are you even doing at that point? You’re basically running the line and making it so prohibitive that you’re not going to get any customers, so what’s the value? And the value is [that] the state awarded them money to run the line. So, they’re spending the money so they don’t have to give it back. And again [this is] an anecdote that I got...I personally believe the source 100 percent, but, because I don’t have the paperwork, I don’t want to tell you who it was or anything like that. They’re not who we’re working with, that’s for doggone sure. But, it’s stuff like that from the big companies that’s just not helpful.

And, in order for these rural towns—because it’s small town USA out here—to be able to compete with those large corporations, we have to be speaking together and communicating up to the state together, and having the state advocate now on our behalf because they know exactly what it is that we are concerned about and dealing with. ... I’ll say it this way—I have yet to hear of a small town ... who partnered with one of the big guys. And the reason is that they hate them, because, *laughs,* I mean, right or wrong, that’s the reality. When we had our meetings and we did our RFP and we had 16 RFPs come back, there were people on my committee who were like, ‘I don’t even

know why we're reading them from this company. If we went back to the town and said that we're going to recommend this, they'd fire us all.' I mean, it would just be over. They'd just say 'forget it.' And, it was 100 percent true. Like, we did the legal thing...we reviewed it, and we asked them questions, and we said, 'hey, would you like to change some of these answers, because they're ridiculous?' and they decided no and we said, 'okay, that makes our decision easy...No! Bye!' But, I mean, we went into it with people going, 'this will never fly if we do this.' And those are the companies that have the biggest stake in the share of the network that's up here. And it's impossible to compete—not impossible—but it's difficult to compete without state intervention. Because we can't attract the smaller ISPs without the grant money. It wouldn't be profitable for them."

11. Island broadband committee chair (Cumberland County): "First thing is, commit. Get your towns [or] group of towns...whatever it is...get commitment from the people before you go out. That's the first thing. If people don't want to talk [or] get behind it, you're never going to get anywhere. You can possibly get a grant. I think that's the main thing. And then, prepare people for the fact that it's going to take longer than you think. You know, if you bond a firetruck or something like that, in a couple of months—maybe even six months—you've got it. There comes the brand new fire truck, wonderful. Broadband's not that way. The pole business is the principal reason why. They have six months to do the make-ready work and they've been taking 8 lately, and we're at the stage where they're now sort of doing that and my role currently is to bug people—'How are we doing? What's up? How many last week?' *laughs.* But, get as many—because it's a long commitment—get as many people involved in it as you can. [Hold] open meetings, tell people what's going on...people came around to me in a bar somewhere and said—people who trusted me—and said, 'I gotta know, is anybody getting rich off this?' you know, 'who's making money off this?' and I said...the answer is, 'nobody. If things go well, the operating company, Axiom, will make a profit, but not an enormous one.' You have to be able to say that, and you have to have people who are well-enough respected that that's accepted. There are people who have, in some way, achieved respect for whatever they've done, and people don't always agree but they listen to them...but some people, they don't really listen to them very much."
12. Selectboard chair and retired lobsterman (Hancock County): "Well I think we probably covered most of it but I go back to...if I was up in your area right, I'm assuming probably you're a bedroom community for Fairfield or Waterville or someplace. I mean most of your people go to other places to work or just stay there. Some use the land. ... But if he was staying at home, he still could have a nice job but he wouldn't be harming the environment as much as some of us do now, just like the lobstermen. When I was fishing I had that diesel engine right in the corner all the time and I had to be real careful about throwing things overboard that I shouldn't be throwing overboard and not everybody is too [careful]. I think some of the broadband is just better for the future as far as climate change [goes]."
13. Passamaquoddy broadband leader (Washington County): "I think the importance of adequate support for the community once you introduce a tool like this. Because, you know, somebody could drop off a whole toolbox of carpentry tools [but] I'm not going to build anything with it unless I have somebody there to help me and entice me to do it and all of those things. So, we've developed a tech support specialist program where we're going to train and hire very part time and contract and hire people to support elders and other people that are uncomfortable in the community with accessing things. One of the biggest things we get is—people don't understand how the smart TVs and internet now makes their home different because they don't have to have a 200 hundred dollar satellite built... [people ask], 'how [am I] going to be able to watch the Sox?' Like, that is number one. 'How do I get my local news?' So, unless they have the tools, we're just adding a bill for them and adding internet access so that they can see the grandkids maybe on FaceTime, but most of the time just on Facebook. But, they're not....it's not as economic of a tool as it could be. We [need to] teach them or support them in doing with it what they want to do."

"We did have some...I wouldn't call it resistance, but we had some selling to do to tribal leadership because there was a time, workforce, and financial investment in the project, and we're a community that...our tribal government is our administrative agency and they function on a finite budget every year. I had to be very creative in helping them see the long-term benefits of prioritizing internet. Because we're still facing disproportionate rates of chronic disease. We're still facing a life expectancy that's 30 years younger than the general population. We are

experiencing overdose death at a rate that's exponentially higher than other places in the state and in the world. We face language annihilation. We still see a ridiculous level of poverty, unemployment, lack of access to medical and behavioral health care. ... Not only is overdose death and overdose frequency an issue but active addiction is also an issue. And trying to get them to have any pot of money dragged away from any of those issues almost seems like you're asking them to do something that is impossible to do—to prioritize something so frivolous. So, we really had to work hard to ensure that this access was going to give us more tools to address those things. So that we weren't just getting internet, but we were building another tool that may in some way impact all of those things that have much more priority over, you know, something as basic as internet seems on its face, in general.”

14. Island broadband committee member (Cumberland County): “Something, philosophically, I’ve thought all along being on this committee is, and I’ve gotten to understand a little bit more why, but, my question all along was, ‘okay, they want broadband to every corner of the state of Maine. Rural Maine is the toughest and the more rural you get the more expensive it is because you have fewer customers per square mile. So, you can’t make your money back on the fiber. It resembled the electrification push back in the 30s...a lot of people refer to that, and so this was ‘the modern-day electrification of America, with broadband.’ But, it’s always puzzled me—the inefficiency of having to have these committees in every rural pocket in Maine to bring this forth and [redacted island name] had this great resource of smart, aware people. I mean, just smart people, you know, lawyers...well-crafted and trained people who could push this grant through. But, I know there’s rural areas that don’t have these resources. How are they going to get broadband? They’re going to have to prove this, that, and the other. Why doesn’t ConnectMaine just give the money out and have it done? I kind of know why—it’s because we’re having to push back against the entrenched system which is in place, which is good....that’s how we got to where we are (because of the competitive economics) and [how we] pushed broadband to where it is, and those people don’t want to lose their investments, you know, the big companies don’t want to lose investments. So, that’s the pushback against having it be this ‘free for all’ government-subsidized broadband. But, I don’t know how we’re going to get over this getting it to every rural pocket [problem] if all these places need to write a grant. ... And volunteers [are needed]—people with extra time—to sit on these boards. We were meeting once a week for a while there, just to get [the local broadband project] off the ground.”
15. Island community broadband provider leader (Sagadahoc County): “There’s something I feel very, very strongly about—“I have 3 partners who are fabulous. One is a billionaire, who knows finance and all of that and, fortunately, he’s now dedicated his life to giving back, which is pretty cool. I have [partner name redacted], who’s involved in the state level, MCA, understands marketing [and] the public side of it. ... I don’t know that stuff. He knows it. I know construction [and] running a project. I [have] a Master’s of architecture, Master’s of civil engineering, [and a] Master’s of construction management. And I had a big design firm. ... And, so I understand that space, and it wasn’t a big jump to come over to broadband—new nomenclature, but just a pretty short learning curve. So between the 3 of us, we have it covered pretty well. These projects are almost hellish to get through. I don’t mind jumping in the middle of anything...I’m writing all the checks. You got a problem with it, you have a problem. So, I have no problem, Plus, also [having worked] on large construction—half a billion, billion dollar—projects, I have competence in jumping in and getting involved and explaining it until I understand it. We have hit so many hurdles. I mean, it’s just hurdle after hurdle after hurdle. And most of these broadband committees are, you know, three, four, or five laypeople who are just trying to be good citizens and may not have the tools to tackle all this. ... So, I see that as one of the biggest problems of broadband. This is why ... the state, through MCA, would really do well with a group of project managers, maybe five or six, to just rotate through these small towns and communities—once a week, look over what’s happening [and] give guidance, rather than everybody going from zero to one hundred on the learning curve on every island...now somebody can come in and give their experience, help them out, figure out what they need to do, et cetera.”

APPENDIX B — HOW OPTIMISTIC DO LEADERS THINK RESIDENTS ARE ABOUT BROADBAND EXPANSION? (INTERVIEW RESPONSES)

Q: How optimistic or not do you think residents are about soon getting better and more affordable internet?

Leader Responses (15 participants):

*In no particular order. Excerpt from one leader transcript missing because this question was largely not applicable for their community.

1. Broadband utility leader (Hancock County): “People do price-shop [for broadband] and some people always go for the lowest thing. And I usually tell people if I can, two things—one, even if you’re not sure about it, get it to your house, try it for a month (it’s free for the first month where we are), and if you decide you either don’t like the capacity you have—it’s too too expensive—you can always lower it down. You can also cancel it if you want, but you’ve got it to your house and then you can do it again later on, down the road, when you are more confident in what you want to do. But at least you’ve got it to the house ... Then the other one is talking to people about what you can use [broadband] for. Sometimes [people] don’t realize [it can be used] for streaming services. They say ‘Oh I don’t stream.’ I say, ‘Do you use Netflix? Do you use AppleTV?’ And in a lot of cases they say ‘yes’ and I say, ‘that’s streaming.’ ... I think a lot of people are still sensitive about price, and needing to compare. And I think the ability to actually say what the comparison is—fifteen dollars, twenty dollars, compared to 50 to 60...It’s a big difference. So, the savings in doing it through using the internet can be tremendous. ... [Also], the Affordable Connectivity Program...those sorts of things help some people get their internet for free if they qualify, and more people qualify than people realize for doing those sorts of things.”
2. Broadband committee member and island seasonal resident (Knox County): “For the year round community, the fishing season is starting and nothing else is on their radar screen. You know, they see the trucks [and] the workers on the roads and no one’s complaining about it. But I don’t think it’s sinking in just yet. And it’s gonna be some time before we actually get the service up and going fully, because we have this whole backhaul question to answer—whether we can put a cable in, and we’re stuck in Army Corps of Engineers permitting right now [and] whether we have to put up a tower, which would be another delay. So, that’s where we’re at. It will probably be next spring before people will really be getting the gist of the service.

I think we have the benefit in that we have trucks and crews on the island already. So, people are seeing stuff happening. And we’re trying to communicate [that] these are the delays ... and people know that out here it takes a long time to get stuff done...like, there’s a channel that needs to be dredged for boats to get in and out periodically and that is another Army Corps of Engineers permit thing...that’s been trying to be permitted for about two years now. So, people out here understand it takes a while to get things done. That’s a plus.”

3. Regional broadband coalition leader (Piscataquis County): “They’ve heard about this for so long that they’re kind of, ‘well, let’s wait and see.’ I think they’re going to be pleasantly surprised and by that I mean, we’re going to see fiber everywhere in the next, probably, four years. But, if you asked people on the street, they wouldn’t believe it, because they’ve been promised and told ‘this is coming’ for so long. So, the expectations are pretty low at this point. But, I’m a lot more optimistic.

So, we’re dealing with that. But, people are glad to see that activity is taking place. Increasingly, people know about the Maine Connectivity Authority and the zillions of dollars available. They’re doing their grants rather more slowly than I would have hoped, but okay. The grant applications...they give lots of positive weight to the people who are totally unserved, that is, all they have is at best DSL. And, I don’t think they’re anywhere near granting to the towns and communities that are served by cable, as expensive and crappy as it is. So, the cable towns are going to have to wait, I think. That’s a bit of an issue.”

4. Broadband consultant (Sagadahoc County): “The funny thing is [there are] sort of very differing perspectives, [depending on] your lens of what this all looks like to you. We have a lot of very unhappy people that thought all of this funding and federal money meant they could all have a fiber optic connection, so they’re looking to have their current provider over-built with a different company that’s going to bring them fiber and have it paid for. And that’s not what’s going to happen. So they’re very unhappy, even though they have access to broadband. And then for the places that had no options prior, they’re getting ecstatic, because there’s potentially light at the end of the tunnel to have something, and they don’t care what form it takes, they just want a connection. If I were to say [what] the general pulse is...very optimistic in the moderate levels of rurality in Maine, you know...sort of, the fringes of the established towns. But then as you get farther out, I think you still have a very deep sort of ambivalence or weariness or just not concerned one way or the other.

That expectation piece is huge because...everybody, depending on where their community is with the planning process...even if they’ve been approved recently for an upcoming grant....I’m in the industry...I know how long the backlog is for materials, for crews, trucks...some of these projects could be five years out, at the end of the day. And it’s just going to be an expanding window of time from start to time of completion. It’s just going to keep getting wider, and it’s going to be frustrating, and most of these projects are. But, at the end of the day, it’ll be fine.”

5. Broadband committee chair (Lincoln County): “I think at this point, if they could have it by 2024—the end of 2024—I think they’d be thrilled. I think that if we don’t get into this next grant round that should be coming up in November or sometime [and we] have to wait [for] the next bunch of money from the federal government, I think it’s going to be really hard.”
6. Selectman and broadband committee member (Lincoln County): “[It has been helpful to] circumvent all the bureaucratic ‘Mother May Is’ and come up with a solution that is willing to basically take on some of that initial cost, because it’s all just numbers anyway. That has allowed us to not have to go and get approval beyond the Select Board.”
7. Former island selectboard chair (Cumberland County): “Well, it’s interesting...my husband asked that question this morning. And I’d just been to the selectmen’s meeting and heard [name redacted] give a report on where they are, and they hope to start construction in January...actually hanging the wires. And [name redacted] felt that next summer, in August, we might be up and running. I’m sure there are a lot of people that don’t believe they’ll ever see it in their lifetime. But, people are asking questions about, you know, ‘where are we in the process?’ Nobody’s seen any wires being [installed]. I think until they actually see wires, they’re not really going to believe it. Because it’s still theoretical. Even though they’re making progress...even though they’ve got the loans...even though they’ve done all of these things, until you see people up in poles, the reality is different from the verbiage.”
8. County economic council leader (Washington County): That varies by community. I think that, for the unserved communities, they’re very hopeful. For the communities who are considered underserved, there’s not a lot of hope. Within those communities, there seems to be a lot of negative feelings about it because they’re being carved out. With some of the communities I’m working with ... they’ve gone without for so long. And then I worked with another community that’s considered underserved, and they’re like ‘wait a minute, these people are going to get fiber? And we’re stuck with this?’ And, so, you know, it’s like, ‘I can’t help it, guys. That’s the way the funding is happening. Those aren’t my rules.’
9. Library director (Piscataquis County): “I think people are fairly optimistic. I know MCA just announced that there was just a big federal grant that came through. I forget the exact numbers but it’s millions upon millions of dollars. Well, I get worried about it being spent in equitable or effective ways because that’s not always the case. So, I am curious to see how that is actually going to be spent. I have real problems sometimes with how some of these things work, because it seems like a lot of it works by basically throwing money at the companies that are already doing a bad job, like Consolidated or Spectrum, and saying, ‘please, pretty please, build better internet access here. We

would really like it if you did.’ And then they will hire a consultant, which is actually part of their company, to come in and say that it’s not feasible and meanwhile that costs like 500 thousand dollars. So, *laughs,* a lot of times these things end up just being eaten up by companies that don’t actually produce results. There’s not a lot of gauging how effective it actually is. So I get worried about that a lot. Because if these companies are already doing a bad job, why are we funneling more money to them, hoping that they’ll do a better job?”

10. Former selectboard chair and local farm owner (Washington County): “I think there was a lot of hope built up ... but the problem is, I think right now, people are really feeling hopeless that it’s not going to happen. I think about my dad [and] a few other people...for my dad, he got his hopes up that this was going to be better—that he could watch news without the ‘circle of death’ on it or whatever. Now, he’s to the point where [he’s thinking], ‘this isn’t going to happen. We’re never going to have good internet service. We’re never going to be able to do this.’ And I think for us it was, the whole idea that we were going to have it, and now people thinking because it’s been so long, that it’s just not going to happen—that it was a pipe dream...it’s never going to happen. I mean, I’m seeing progress. They are getting the poles up. But, I myself have concerns because now that they’ve waited so long, the cost is up. We only got a certain amount of money...is the government holding off this long really with the grant? Are we going to lose that? So, there’s all these things that I have concerns about myself, but I think I do see progress. I know what’s going on. I mean, I realize other people don’t, but I can see that it’s slowly moving now. So, I think a lot of people have given up at this moment of ever having high-speed internet.”
11. Regional broadband project leader (Waldo County): “You asked how optimistic they are. I don’t think that’s the right word. I think it’s ‘desperate.’ I think ‘desperate’ is the word. How desperate are they for this to work? And the answer is, 100 percent. The reality is, everybody is realizing we cannot continue without it now. It is now integrated—internet is part of the world and there’s nothing you can do. You are a part of it. So, unless you want to go live in the woods and not talk to anybody...that’s fine—we support you [and] we love you for it—but, you cannot do business without internet...you cannot...I mean your car has computers in it nowadays... so, it’s becoming more and more...well it already is, right? It has to happen. So, I think that’s the feeling for the people that I’ve talked to who are currently supportive and hopeful and everything else—they’re just desperate for it. So, if our current effort fails, we keep working harder to go after more funding and more options, because this has become a no-fail thing for our community. We may differ on how to do it. But, from everything I’ve gotten from these four towns, with the exception of the guy who wants to live in the woods without power,...the overall thing I think is desperation, not hope. That may frame things a little bit differently for your work.”
12. Island broadband committee chair (Cumberland County): “I think they know what’s coming. They say, you know, ‘when is it?’ They’re impatient of course— ‘what’s happening?’ So, we just put out a little poster—it’s going on Facebook as soon as we get around to it and it’s already on the website—telling people where we are in the process and what’s going on, and [that] it’s been held up because of this and that. So, I think people think it’s coming. When I talk to people about it, I sometimes get frustrated because things take so long, [and] the tendency is to be consoling and say [to me], ‘well you’re doing good. It’ll come.’”
13. Selectboard chair and retired lobsterman (Hancock County): “I think we’re hopeful. I don’t think we expect it overnight. I think it will probably be here as quick if not quicker than we expected. And there will be problems. Just like everything, there will be problems. They can get ironed out fairly well I think. And life will move on.”
14. Island broadband committee member (Cumberland County): “People are frustrated that it hasn’t happened yet. We’re getting pushback from the utility companies. Particularly, Consolidated doesn’t want us to hang our fiber on their poles.... It’s already been delayed a year because of this. It’s ridiculous. We’re going ahead, we’re doing it, and even now it’s going to take six months because it’s going to take them six months to approve us putting fiber on their poles. So, we’re looking at next summer now, at this point. We were supposed to be spring of this year. [Affordability] will be a work in progress.”

15. Island community broadband provider leader (Sagadahoc County): “We are relatively expensive, for the service level. We’re 25/25, 50/50, and 100/100. We’re \$65, \$85, and \$115 I think...in that range. Our prices were set in our speed reset three years ago, with our application to what is now MCA. The other organizations around us—at other islands—will come online with somewhat the same prices, or a little lower, and much higher speeds. Now, first of all, I’ve never heard one complaint about the 25/25 service. There are no errors and right now, the lag is four to five milliseconds. So everybody thinks it’s fast. A standard high def TV only needs about five megs. Most of what you hear about ‘gig-gig’ service is marketing. You don’t need it. You really don’t need it. Think about it. A 4K TV—and we don’t have 4K programming yet—needs about 25 megs. The only people who care about it (high bandwidth), outside of a few esoteric examples are gamers. That’s pretty much it. So, we are planning on moving our bandwidth up this fall after we get a bit of the grant money... But we have a lot of people that’ll never be more than the lowest float we offer. So, we are expensive right now, but, it’s a lot cheaper than the alternatives—half to a third of the cost of the alternatives.”