

# LAKES REGION BROADBAND PARTNERSHIP

## Vision

The Lakes Region Broadband Partnership envisions symmetrical gigabit services to every premise in the region and as a priority the establishment of services in our business corridors and downtowns within two years. Digitally aware citizens will have increased opportunities to access information and services via an enhanced broadband network as well as the opportunity to participate in digital education through a larger partnership of providers and programs. Public computer access will be broadened throughout the region, and programs will be available for citizens of limited means to access the equipment, training and broadband services necessary in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

## Executive Summary

Since May of 2015, four communities in the Sebago Lakes Region, Gray, Raymond, Standish, and Windham, the Lakes Region Broadband Partnership, have been meeting with stakeholders representing businesses, public schools, municipal economic development agencies and committees, Cumberland County, Saint Joseph's College, and residents to better understand the needs and current capacity of the region for broadband services. These four communities with their partners are taking steps to achieve their vision of symmetrical gigabit broadband service (gigabit speeds in both download and upload mode) to every premise in the region along with a digitally aware populace which can take full advantage of a true high speed broadband network.

Some of the challenges that the four town region is facing are:

- Attracting new technology-based/dependent businesses along our Main Streets and in our villages
- Reducing vacancy rates in existing retail/office space in the villages and along the connecting travel corridors
- Supporting existing small and larger businesses that require increasing broadband capacity
- Keeping up with increasing broadband demand from home occupations and telecommuters
- Competing with urban hubs in close proximity to our region for existing and new business
- Maintaining a highly skilled digitally literate workforce to attract and sustain technology reliant businesses
- Providing high quality educational opportunities in our public and private schools and for their students needing access while at home
- Providing high quality educational opportunities in residential colleges as well as those students who utilize online/distance learning
- Sustaining tourism and improving seasonal residents' experience by increasing the quality of broadband for telecommuting
- Having access to a robust and redundant broadband network for critical services
- Future-proofing any investments made in the expansion and extension of broadband service

The Lakes Region Partnership has embraced goals for an enhanced and more robust broadband infrastructure that include:

- Meeting the growth needs of:
  - Businesses, both small and large, and Entrepreneurs
  - Home-based Businesses, and Telecommuters
- Encouraging technology based companies to expand and/or locate in the region
- Supporting the growth of Saint Joseph's College both on campus and online
- Growing the tourism economy by providing opportunities for extended stay vacations
- Supporting aging in place strategies with telemedicine and home monitoring
- Increasing the digital capacities of the municipalities to provide online services, Smart City, micro grid, and traffic control infrastructure
- Increasing digital access for residents to schools, libraries, and town halls
- Supporting the development of key sites and corridors for both increased residential densities and business attraction and retention
- Creating Downtown WiFi hotspots
- Increasing the reliability and redundancy of the digital infrastructure

Following two years of organizing, goal setting, and research culminating in the report "High Speed Broadband in the Lakes Region" prepared by TILSON and included in this compilation, the Lakes Region Broadband Partnership, working with AXIOM Technologies, applied for and on May 25, 2017, was awarded a \$15,000 Community Broadband Planning Grant from Maine's ConnectME Authority.

During this planning process several critical concerns of the Lakes Region Broadband Committee were addressed:

- Fiber Optic connections in the region, while available, were not being made available by internet service providers at an affordable price, especially for small businesses, and only in limited areas
- There was not enough competition to drive pricing down, and many felt the one or two providers available to any given location were not responsive to the overall needs of the region
- As a major economic driver for the state, this region wanted to build on its success and be a viable option for businesses looking to relocate, perhaps attracting different types of businesses that need high capacity, highly reliable internet connections
- A strong feeling that the communities wanted to take control of their own destiny

The focus of the Community Broadband Planning Grant was the design of 40 miles of "open-access" fiber backbone with service provider access points, the review of and enhancement of Digital Inclusion services throughout the region, and the development of a long-term management plan. The results of this work has provided the information necessary for the Partnership, and more importantly the region's residents and businesses, to move forward with implementing next steps and realizing their economic and social goals. Included in this compilation are the "Regional Technology Plan", the "Digital Inclusion Plan", and the "Broadband Opportunity Council Funding Report" all of which are presented by AXIOM Technologies. A summary of the Technology Plan and a premise location map of the Partnership towns follow this Executive Summary.

## Cumberland County Government

In recent months Cumberland County Government has taken an active role in both planning and implementing their vision of fiber broadband service throughout Cumberland County. The County has secured a CDBG Planning Grant to map existing open-access fiber facilities throughout the county as well as develop an ownership/operational model for the deployment of a municipally owned open access fiber network.

The County has also secured a CDBG Infrastructure grant to provide partial funding for the fiber backbone segment that runs from the Route 302/35/115 intersection to Gray Downtown.

### Acknowledgements

We would be remiss if we did not thank the many residents, officials, and business owners and managers who participated in the work of the Partnership. In particular we appreciate the support of the Towns of Gray, Raymond, Standish, and Windham, their Managers and Staff, Cumberland County Government, Gray-New Gloucester, SAD 6, and RSU14 School and Adult Education Staff, the professionals at TILSON and AXIOM, and the Windham Economic Development Corporation.

It is with great pleasure that we present to you the findings and proceedings of the Lakes Region Broadband Partnership's planning and research activities to date.

Thomas Bartell, Executive Director  
Windham Economic Development Corporation  
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