On Friday January 12th Charlie attended a regional broadband meeting in Brooklin sponsored by the Island Institute.

This was a follow-on meeting to a similar one held in Stonington in September. Representatives from Penobscot, Surry, Brooklin, Swan's Island, Stonington, and IAH were there. Each locale had the opportunity to give the status of their efforts. The take-away here is that all the communities are like us in that they have some coverage but are looking to find ways to improve underserved areas. Surry, in particular, has great access in some parts of town while others are effectively unserved. Right now IAH is a little further along in that we have already gone through the RFI/design process while the others are still addressing where or how to begin.

The major focus of the meeting was presenting and discussing funding options. A list of some sources was provided and were discussed. It is important to note that all the grant opportunities require matching funds, typically 50%, from the community or other entity that is applying and are very competitive. Also some are available to private entities, not municipalities and vice versa. The possibility of multiple communities getting together in a single revenue bonding plan was also mentioned; not sure if that's applicable here though. In all this regard an important point is that the infrastructure ownership and operational model really dictates which financing options might be available.

Two representatives from the Cranberry Isles telephoned in to give this meeting an update on the status of their major broadband project. About a year ago the Cranberries voted to authorize a substantial bond issue for a fiber based broadband build-out. They have gone through the same process we are in the midst of. That is, RFI, responses, selection of result, and contracts for build. Axiom is their selected partner and are right now in the middle of the build. They hope/expect to be complete by summer. The build will provide fiber to the premise on Great

Cranberry with wireless solutions to the smaller islands. Their model is that the town owns the infrastructure and will contract with Axiom to operate it and act as ISP. The operational contract is a 10 year plan which is reviewed every three years. On the surface this model where one entity owns the infrastructure and contracts out its operation seems worth a look when/if we get that far. Although grants were applied for they were not forthcoming so the Cranberries project is currently financed with a bank loan.

The meeting wrapped up with a general discussion of how to present broadband improvement as an opportunity. This focused mostly on tax rates and property value improvements if reliable broadband is available at a location.

If you have questions or are interested in participating contact any of the committee members.