

The Joint Cable Replacement Project - 2024 Q1 Update

In 2022 the Power Company and the Broadband Committee agreed that instead of installing a microwave dish on Coombs Mountain we should team up to install an undersea cable that would carry both power and fiber-optic Broadband to the island. The synergy of combining a new power cable and Broadband in the same project was compelling: the power company would get a new cable at a lower cost; and the Broadband project would get a more resilient, higher bandwidth, lower maintenance and more 'future-proof' solution.

To implement the project, we successfully applied for and won a \$300,000 grant from the Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) which required an equal matching fund. The Broadband project pledged \$115,000 (originally designated for the tower) and a group of generous islanders agreed to donate up to \$185,000 to create the full match.

As we undertook more detailed engineering and cost analyses it became clear that a custom power/Broadband cable would be more costly than 2 cables laid "side by side" (one for power and one for fiber optics) but with adjacent landing points in Stonington and Isle au Haut. Two cables would also simplify possible future repairs.

We are making good progress. In conjunction with the Broadband team in mid-December, we secured permits from the US Army Corps of Engineers to install the cables in the power company's undersea right of way. We have one additional regulatory hurdle to clear with NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act). We expect a "partial notice to proceed" from the NBRC before the end of February which will allow us to order the cables.

Since the Army Corps permit allows installation only between November 8th and March 15th and because our preferred barge company for installation was sold and relocated after the storms in late January, we project the fiber cable will be installed in the next window towards the end of 2024. And, because of long lead times for the power cable, the timing of its installation is still uncertain. The need to use a new cable installation contractor and extended timing has caused some cost pressure. As of now, the Broadband team is reallocating savings from other elements of their program, and we are working diligently to make the project work with minimal additional funding.

The power company is happy to be able to replace our aging cable without any impact to our members' electricity rates and we thank the Broadband team for being creative in ways to jointly make this project work while simultaneously avoiding a tall tower on Coombs Mtn.

Your Volunteer Power Company Board