

JANUARY 2020

HALIFAX NEWS

INTERNET CONNECTIVITY

How We Can Get True High-Speed Broadband in Halifax

Halifax's broadband (internet) service is now among the worst in Vermont, but there are actions we can take in the next few months to get the best service currently available. A remedy for our low coverage and slow speeds is being studied for deployment here; it will need our support to become a reality.

Underserved and Slow

According to the most recent Department of Public Service (DPS) records, 44% of buildings in Halifax are underserved, meaning they get internet speeds of less than 4 megabits per second (Mbps) download and 1 Mbps upload ("4 Mbps/1 Mbps") from wired and wireless service providers. This is the second worst percentage in Windham county, lagging only behind Somerset, an unincorporated town with 26 buildings and 4 permanent residents. Of the 252 towns that DPS studied state-wide, 243 have better coverage than Halifax.

For Halifax residents who get service, our speeds are slow. Vermont has set a target of obtaining 100 Mbps/100 Mbps speeds at every residence by 2024. But according to DPS, our school is the only building in Halifax now attaining these speeds. Similarly, no one gets even 25 Mbps/3 Mbps, the current FCC minimum standard for broadband service. In contrast, 73% of buildings in Windham County and in the State get the FCC minimum speeds. What's more, the FCC minimum standard is itself becoming obsolete and will increase.

Broadband Value

In the past, everyone lived without high-speed internet. While this is still possible, it places us at a disadvantage. Broadband enables students to research any subject from home in seconds; enables businesses to communicate clearly and quickly with customers and suppliers; gives individuals the opportunity of working from home; allows us to consult with medical professionals remotely using telemedicine applications; and makes new entertainment options available, including options that can replace cable or satellite TV ("cord cutting").

Technical Options

A network of fiber optic cables reaching every home on the grid ("fiber to the home") is one of two technically proven broadband technologies that are commercially available now. The second, coaxial copper cable to the home (e.g., cable TV) is an older technology that is more technically limiting. Both types of cable are strung on existing utility poles, just like telephone wire, so they can reach every location that has electricity now without disrupting the landscape.



4G LTE wireless, as used by VTel, is an improvement for some but is slow relative to fiber to the home and does not serve every home due to our hilly terrain and forest cover. 5G wireless requires even shorter distances to the antenna so will have limited use. Bonded DSL, as provided by Consolidated Communications, does not achieve the FCC's minimum standard. Two other technologies, second generation broadband over powerlines and low earth-orbit satellites, are in early stages of commercial development and do not offer practical alternatives now.

The question for commercial vendors is whether the investment to install a fiber network will yield an attractive financial return. Communities with our low density are not an attractive target for commercial investment. But there could be another way.

Communications Union District

In East Central Vermont, 24 towns have banded together to form the East Central Vermont Telecommunications District ("ECFiber") in order to provide fiber to every underserved location in the member towns. This organization was started by a working group of 14 towns and ValleyNet, a local non-profit. They learned how to raise funds, obtain management leadership, plan a network, and begin construction. Ten additional towns joined as the venture proved its ability to deliver reliable, high-speed service. By the end of next year, ECFiber expects to complete construction to about 20,000 premises on 1,400 miles of network, reaching every previously underserved location in the area. ECFiber is not alone. According to the Institute for Local Self Reliance, over 800 communities nationwide are served by municipally owned or cooperative networks.

In June 2015, Gov. Scott signed legislation to formally establish Communications Union Districts as municipal entities that have the legal ability to finance, construct, and operate broadband infrastructure on behalf of participating towns. ECFiber was the model that the legislation formalized into Vermont law. The legislation specifically directs that any and all costs of these Districts will not be borne by the taxpayers of district towns; the Districts must find ways to be self-supporting.

In June 2019, Gov. Scott came to Dover to sign legislation co-sponsored by Rep. Laura Sibilgia to provide additional incentives and assistance to Communications Union Districts.

In September, Sibilgia and seven other Windham County legislators led a public meeting in Wilmington to publicize the incentives and to call for volunteers to help establish a District. Ann Manwaring of Wilmington convened a working group to begin the effort. So far, nine towns are participating. Tristan Roberts, Stephan Chait, and David Jones have represented Halifax informally at these meetings. The Windham Regional Commission has partnered with ECFiber/ValleyNet and the Rural Innovation Strategies to develop a draft technical and business plan for a Windham County District.

Next Steps

The Selectboard has agreed to put to a vote at Town Meeting in March whether Halifax should be a founding member of a Windham County District. The Broadband Committee will attend Town Meeting and an informational session before the meeting to explain the proposal and answer questions.

The Selectboard has asked for volunteers to reform the Broadband Committee. If you are interested, you should act fast; their choices will be made in the first few days of January. Send an email expressing your interest to Robbin Gabriel, Selectboard Secretary (HalifaxSecretary@gmail.com) before January 3, 2020.

The Windham Regional Commission will ask full and part-time residents of Windham County towns to complete a survey to indicate the demand for service. Getting everyone to respond to the survey will present the clearest picture of our needs. The Broadband Committee will provide further information in the coming months.

- *David Jones, Halifax, Vermont*



Enjoying the weather? A local resident offers an adaptation of a poem written by Lorene Kidder.

WINTER IN HALIFAX

Winter in Halifax

And the gentle breezes blow

20 miles an hour at 35 below

How I love when the snow

Is up to your butt

You take a breath of winter

And your nose gets frozen shut

Yes, the weather here is wonderful

So, I guess I'll hang around

I could never leave Halifax

Because I'm frozen to the ground!

Winter finally arrived on December 21st after well over 2 feet of snow had fallen in multiple snowstorms. It's nice to see the sun in late December, and good to be past the shortest day of the year – 9 hours and 1 minute of daylight. In winter, the days grow longer. And we are having some great star-viewing weather. As an after-work bonus, driving home after sundown I see Venus phenomenally bright in the western sky.

TOWN NEWS

BENEFIT BREAKFAST! SATURDAY, JANUARY 11, 2020 – 8-11 AM

Saturday, January 11 from 8 am to 11 am there will be another great breakfast in the Halifax Community Hall at 20 Brook Road, West Halifax. Cost is \$8 adults, \$7 seniors, \$3 kids under 12, for 3 kinds of pancakes with Halifax maple syrup, Eggs Benedict, scrambled eggs, sausage, hash brown potato bake, and coffee & juice. Proceeds benefit the Halifax Historical Society.

SENIOR MEAL (CELEBRATING 20 YEARS IN HALIFAX)

Friday, January 17, 2020 is the next meal at the Halifax Community Hall, 20 Brook Road, West Halifax, serving at noon. The menu: turkey, potatoes, stuffing, squash, vegetable, rolls and bread pudding for dessert. All seniors are welcome. A call to Joan is appreciated 802.368.7733. A free-will donation of \$ 3.00 is asked.

Set up a ride to the Meal by calling Moovers several days before the event at 1-888-869-6287 Monday-Friday 8:00 am-4:30 pm.



WEST HALIFAX BIBLE CHURCH had a very nice, well attended Candlelight service on December 21st. It is always a special evening. This year there were 82 in attendance.

HALIFAX COMMUNITY CLUB enjoyed a lively end-of-year dinner at the New England House in West Brattleboro, with 11 persons and 2 service dogs in attendance. Thank you, HCC members, for your service in 2019, and Happy New Year! See you the first Monday in May 2020, mud season permitting.

HALIFAX HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Deb Spieker, the winner of the 50/50 Halifax Historical Society lottery this fall, was excited – never having won anything before. She lives in So. Windsor, CT, and spends a lot of time at their family (second generation) property on Old Lane Road. As she was talking about her family ties to Halifax, she said, “You know, I think, instead of sending me the money, I’d like to donate my winnings (\$138) to help the Historical Society. Please put it towards whatever is needed.” A very generous and much-appreciated act! Want to join the HHS? Contact GretchenB@myfairpoint.net. More info: <https://www.facebook.com/Halifax-Vermont-Historical-Society-11356359997907/>

HISTORICAL TIDBIT

Earl Aldrich of Wilmington dropped by Hanson Road this week to share some of his raspberries and a photograph from some time ago. The text on the back of the monochrome photo reads, “This is the new mode of traveling we have in Wilmington. Mr. A. G. Sargent’s team he drew his syrup into town this way. It is a mule and ox – some team.” The “36” likely is the year the photograph was taken. Utility poles were installed prior to the arrival of electricity -- Vermont Electric Cooperative was established in 1938, but telephone lines went in 25 years earlier on the poles, and Wilmington businesses were advertising their telephone numbers in 1936. Some readers may recall that there was a telephone in Plymouth Notch, VT on August 3, 1923, playing a role in the swearing-in of an American president (<https://czresearch.com/newsletter/HalifaxNewsletter2018-Aug.pdf>).



FIRE DEPARTMENT NEWS

On Nov. 20th, six men responded to a call on Tony Hanson Road to assist rescue with an elderly man who had fallen and hit his head. Deerfield Valley Rescue responded but there was no transport.

On Dec. 8, four men responded to a call on Route 112 of an alarm sounding. It was mistakenly activated, so they were turned around en route.

On Dec. 8, five men and one truck responded to a call at Halifax Falls for an alarm sounding.

On Dec. 14, in icy rainy conditions, nine men and one truck responded to a car off the road on Route 112. There were no injuries. The car was completely off the road, and a wrecker was not obtainable. It was a miserable night to be out. The three occupants were fine, but it would have been a long cold night if they had spent it in their car, so they were driven to the Halifax fire station and spent a warm, dry night in the meeting room of the station. They were very appreciative to be warm and to have a recliner and a sofa to sleep on and a bathroom to use. No wreckers were moving that icy night. The two ladies and one man were transported in the morning to their vehicle after securing a wrecker, then they were on their way to Mt. Snow. I am sure this will be a memorable ski trip they will talk about to their friends for years to come.

On Dec. 15, three men and one truck responded to Pennell Hill for a tree on wires. They were turned back en route.

On Dec. 15, 10 men and one truck responded to Winn Hill for wires on a house. The power company came and took care of the situation.

On Dec. 21, 11 men and one truck responded to a motor vehicle crashed into a bridge on Branch Road. The Vermont State Police came and took the driver with them. A wrecker took care of the vehicle.

On Dec. 21, eight men and one truck responded to a home on Branch Road reporting the smell of propane. They shut off the LP gas and made sure the house was free of the smell.

The firemen have had a very busy year. Our thanks go out to them.

The Fire Dept. has monthly 50/50 raffle tickets available, \$ 10.00 a month. Contact Wayne 802-368-7733.

JOAN'S SIGHTINGS

The birds at the feeder have increased with snow on the ground. Not really any new and different birds but I am enjoying what I do see. Many (5 or 6) male & female Cardinals; the Junco population has gone down, but we still have several, and a couple of Titmice, some Chickadees, plus Mourning Doves -- sometimes as many as 15, Blue Jays in great abundance -- counted 17 one time, still a couple of woodpeckers, a Downy and a Hairy. The Blackbird headed south, I guess; have not seen it for a while. Have the Sparrows still but not as many as usual. A couple of White-breasted nuthatch are here. I am sorry to read that the Crow population is declining. I know there are a lot fewer here than used to be. I miss their Caw, Caw, Caw! I did have a visit of four Jake turkeys a while ago. I ran and got the corn for them but have not seen them again. Must be they are finding something to eat beneath the snow. I know the acorn crop was good this year.

LOVE MY BIRDS!!!!!!!!!!!!!! I hope you are enjoying them, too.

Send your animal sightings to Joan at: jwcinvt@gmail.com - Joan Courser

On Hanson Road we are seeing a lot of blue jays, tufted titmice, dark-eyed juncos, nuthatches, sparrows, black cap chickadees, and crows in the yard and field, turkeys and barred owl and hawks on the road, and a little owl out on Green River by Deer Park Road. We are seeing red squirrels and grey squirrels, too, and a lot of mouse, raccoon, deer, fox and coyote tracks.



Thea Bransby's hand-decorated Christmas tree cookies are pictured

NEWSLETTER - We are in our 37th year in 2020. Edie Fenton and Joan Courser started it in 1983. It does not seem possible. Thank you to our faithful followers. Our wish to you all is for a healthy, happy 2020.

NEED TO PAY FOR YOUR MAILED (PAPER) NEWSLETTER? SEND \$7 CHECK MADE OUT TO "HALIFAX NEWSLETTER" TO JOAN COURSER, P O BOX 27, WEST HALIFAX VT 05358.

Newsletter
P O Box 27
West Halifax VT 05358



Fireplace tools



Green River, Halifax

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Saturday, January 11 from 8 to 11 AM at the
Hall. \$8 adults, \$7 seniors, \$3 kids under 12.
More details in this edition of the Newsletter.*

NEWSLETTER - Send your Halifax story
to Joan JWCinVt@gmail.com
(802.368.7733; PO Box 27 05358) or
Laurel LaurelACopeland@gmail.com.