

Community broadband forum should be emulated statewide

BY SUN COMMUNITY NEWS EDITORIAL BOARD

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Communities across the Adirondack Park should host forums to learn more about state initiatives that impact them, including the broadband initiative.

The state is nearing the end zone on their project to provide statewide universal broadband access.

After years of waiting for service, the Town of Johnsbury Community Development Corporation took the initiative to host a forum last week to glean details about the program.

The community-sponsored event at Tannery Pond featured a broad coalition of stakeholders, including elected state and local officials, local residents, internet service providers and the state architects of the program.

It was successful, and it appeared residents walked away with a better understanding of what has shaped up to be a critical initiative here in the Adirondack Park to make our communities sustainable.

The Town of Johnsbury Community Development Corporation should be commended for being assertive in pushing for concrete answers.

And the stakeholders should also be credited, including Adk Action, the event's moderator, and Frontier Communications, who put their best foot forward after taking some lumps by our Editorial Board.

Frontier, a chief beneficiary of grant funds during the multi-year project, didn't have to put themselves out there, but they did — even if they weren't exactly enthused about facing down an agitated public.

But warts and all, these are the types of community events that propel issues forward and generates good, solid results for state taxpayers.

And let's face it: The real world is a messy, turbulent place, and despite the state's effort to always put a positive spin on everything, conflict cannot always be avoided.

This effort produced real results.

The Town of Johnsbury became the first locality in the entire state to learn of specific details regarding the broadband program, including which providers will serve their community (Slic, Frontier, Spectrum, Hughes) and when they will receive the service (by the end of next year).

These are, after all, the main details residents want to know, not necessarily the dollar amount of grant funding.

Government officials and community organizations elsewhere across the state should consider hosting similar community forums — including the legislatures in Essex, Clinton, Franklin, Hamilton and Warren counties.

We support the state's broadband program, if not for which, many of our rural communities would be stuck in the Stone Age.

But after having been in the trenches for three years, and hearing the constant questions from local officials and residents, it appears there has been some breakdown in the communication process when it comes to obtaining useful information.

Perhaps these community forums will help smooth out those wrinkles.