



NWCONNECT

My name is Jessica Fowler and I am a Selectman from Sharon and Chair of NWCONNECT which is a citizen advocacy group working towards an improved telecommunications infrastructure for the northwest corner of Connecticut. This is a volunteer group of elected officials and individuals with extensive legal, marketing and telecommunications experience. We are working with 21 municipalities within the Northwest Hills Council of Government Region and to our knowledge are the only group in active and ongoing discussions with an incumbent carrier regarding the build out of a high speed broadband internet for a State of Connecticut municipality. I have three points to make this morning:

#1 THE NORTHWEST CORNER NEEDS ENHANCED CELLULAR

In the Town of Sharon as well as the rest of the northwest corner we enjoy a beautiful and bucolic countryside with low-density demographics. Unfortunately the trade off comes with unserved residents and businesses as well as poor to nonexistent cellular service. This is a trade off that doesn't work in the 21st Century, especially for an area with declining and aging demographic and whose biggest export is high school students.

With the advance of mobile technology and the use of cellular devices weaknesses in our cellular network have become more and more glaring and more of a challenge- especially in regards to the safety and health of our residents. There are numerous instances of residents needing immediate help but finding themselves in cell phone "dead zones" with no connectivity whatsoever.

- In the summer of 2014 a Washington Depot resident waited upside down in his car, cell phone in hand, for a passing motorist to notice him. The accident occurred in a cell phone dead zone.
- Geer, a gradual care facility in Canaan, CT experienced a landline and Internet outage a month ago. An emergency in the memory care unit arose and a nurse had to go outside with her cell phone and try to find somewhere with two bars to call emergency services. Geer is in a cell phone dead zone.
- As a rural hospital, Sharon Hospital relies on its ability to reach its doctors and medical staff remotely and quickly to call them in when needed. Many of its personnel live in the region- yes- cell phone dead zones can have a direct impact on the quality of care our residents receive and impact our ability to attract medical professionals to the northwest corner
- A Salisbury Central School student's mother wrote to us: "Several times my son has had to stop doing his homework because of losing our internet connection and I've driven him to my job so he could finish. Cellular service has also been an issue there was a point this summer he was locked out and was unable to call me because there was no service"

#2 WE UNDERSTAND WHAT WE NEED TO DO

It's simple for us.

- We need Distributed Antenna Systems to augment towers in our rural areas now, and almost certainly in urban areas in the near future. These antennas need fiber optic connections. CATV companies will not install them nor are they likely to let communities use their lines for community mobile antennas.
- A community funded venture, with anyone, can carry this mandate as a condition of business, and make our mobile infrastructure a safety, health and educational asset instead of a disaster in the making.

#3 WE ARE EAGER TO HELP CREATE THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT'S FIRST PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP MODEL FOR TELECOMMUNICATIONS

The funding from this program may accelerate an incumbent carrier's deployment of Fiber to the Home by removing the economic burden created by new capital expenses without the compensatory revenue, or the funding may create a new communications operation devoted to Fiber to the Home networks in that community. The latter may be realized through public/private partnerships or a municipal utility. We are eager to explore these partnership arrangements.

We see this Broadband Pilot Project as giving us the ability to help ourselves be strong and productive within a partnership. Using this state seed funding, along with other local private and public funding, could be the foundation for a far larger investment by fiber network investors. Every arrangement has been worked out somewhere in the United States. We have examples to follow and models to build on. NWCONNect sits poised and ready to help our communities and other municipalities make decisions about this important infrastructure.