

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Broadband Vote: November 8, 2022

On Behalf of Williston, Essex, Essex Junction, Shelburne and South Burlington

Winooski, VT – On November 8, voters in five Chittenden County municipalities – Williston, Essex, Essex Junction, Shelburne, and South Burlington – will decide whether they will join to form a **communications union district**. This is an organization where two or more towns form a municipal entity to facilitate the delivery of high-speed internet to residents and businesses.

Communications union districts were enabled by Vermont legislation in 2015; **since then, nine have formed**, covering 208 of Vermont's 252 towns. A communications union district can only fund a broadband buildout via grants, loans, private investment, or revenue bonds. The district may not levy taxes or accept local tax revenue. Rob Fish, Deputy Director of Vermont Community Broadband Board (VCBB), notes that "High speed internet providers are more likely to be interested in a single entity covering multiple towns with a greater number of addresses than a single town. By working together as a communications union district, the towns are more likely to attract a provider, negotiate a better deal for residents, and ensure accountability."

Currently, according to the Vermont Department of Public Service, approximately 4% of e911 addresses in Chittenden County do not have access to wired connection of at least 25 download/3 upload Mbps. Another 75% of e911 addresses have access to speeds of 25 download/3 upload Mbps through a connection provided by a cable company. The remaining addresses have access to fiber internet capable of speeds in excess of 100 download/100 upload Mbps. While download speeds of 25 Mbps are often sufficient for much of today's needs, upload speeds of 3 Mbps are not sufficient for households with multiple users calling, video chatting, and streaming. Only fiber internet can provide for nearly unlimited upload and download speeds. Fiber internet service is becoming increasingly necessary with multiple devices connected for online uses such as school, telework, telehealth, etc.

According to Erik Wells, Williston Town Manager, "A communications union district is the best option we have right now to bring high-speed broadband internet access to members of the community who cannot access it today. Being able to connect to reliable broadband is critical in today's world. By working together through a communications union district, we have the ability to make this a reality."

Municipalities who will be voting in November on whether to create a communications union district are Williston, Essex, Essex Junction, Shelburne, and South Burlington. However, once a communications union district is formed, other municipalities may join by Selectboard vote.

Charlie Baker, Executive Director of Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission, explains that a communications union district could leverage public funds. "Development of a communications union district

will be a big step forward in achieving complete broadband coverage in the region, and it would provide public oversight on the use of public funds to leverage private investment to build a high-speed fiber network. By working together, municipalities are more likely to obtain high-speed internet for all of Chittenden County.”

According to Andy Watts, Town of Essex Selectboard Chair, “All Town of Essex residents should have access to high-speed broadband internet and a communications union district is currently the best solution to ensure that access is in place. It would also allow for more choice for those who may already have access, but who wish to have a choice in provider or have a seat at the table to hold a provider accountable for deliverables.”

Andrew Bolduc, South Burlington Deputy City Manager, agrees. “A regional communications union district presents an opportunity for the South Burlington community to have a strategic voice and seat at the table in the continued build-out of broadband infrastructure in our community. Not only will this provide an opportunity to finally connect our remaining underserved residences, but it will provide a conduit for state and federal infrastructure dollars and a centralized public voice in further build-out negotiations with providers.”

The state and communications union districts serving 208 of Vermont’s 252 towns have set a policy goal of every address having internet access of at least 100/100 Mbps. Fiber is currently the only technology to attain those speeds. See a map of internet speeds in Chittenden County at:

<https://tinyurl.com/ccrpcbroadband>

Lee Krohn, Shelburne Town Manager, notes, “We look forward to working with our partner municipalities toward hopeful formation of a communications union district. This appears to be our best chance to help encourage and facilitate broadband expansion to underserved areas in our communities.”

Visit ccrpcvt.org/broadband for complete information, including answers to frequently asked questions and a [2-page infographic](#) that summarizes this vote and its implications.

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