

***Town of Weymouth  
Massachusetts***

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# **Press Release**

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## **Weymouth to begin Municipal Fiber Master Planning Process to Encourage Cable Provider Competition**

*Using funding secured from the Host Community Agreement with Algonquin Gas Transmission, the Town will look at developing a municipal fiber utility to provide competitive and improved internet service throughout town.*

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Weymouth, MA – Several cities and towns across the country are building or expanding municipal broadband networks in an attempt to improve infrastructure, close gaps in coverage, and ultimately reduce costs through increased competition that results from publicly-managing and funding this resource. In 2019, Mayor Hedlund began investigating the possibility of a municipal fiber network and potentially partnering with the city of Quincy as they began investigating fiber expansion.

After discussions with project proponents who have constructed municipal fiber utilities in other cities and towns across the country, the Mayor will submit a measure to the Town Council for \$25,000 to complete a broadband master plan as the first step in the process. The source of the funding will be from the [Host Community Agreement](#) executed earlier this year with Algonquin Gas Transmission, aligning with the agreement's goals to improve IT issues in North Weymouth, as well as throughout town, and advance a municipal fiber program that will allow for heightened communications capabilities through hardening of wireless internet infrastructure and interoperable communications technology.

"For years we have heard complaints from residents about the lack of competition for internet service providers in Town and are frequently asked why this is," **said Mayor**

**Robert Hedlund.** "This project would specifically look into the feasibility of the Town operating its own broadband network, as a public utility, that could attract new and varied internet service providers to hopefully increase service and reduce prices while also ensuring our interoperable communications are not susceptible to issues that could arise with a privately-operated network."

This model is implemented in many small, isolated communities that are looking to close coverage gaps or the "last mile" of broadband coverage for those that are underserved or not serviced at all by private service providers. However, many other larger communities also provide the fiber infrastructure through municipal light plants as a way of moderating cost and promoting competition amongst internet service providers.

Many of these communities leverage existing municipal networks to expand a reliable service not only to their public facilities but also to private entities including businesses and homes, often referred to as fiber-to-home. As technology advances and fiber-optic cabling becomes industry standard, it is more important to have these networks in communities that would like to attract businesses and improve the customer - in this case resident - experience.

This project would specifically look at: how Weymouth could implement a municipal fiber network; the cost and funding model needed for the infrastructure build-out (for both the Town and residents); and if there is enough buy-in from residents and businesses to make it cost effective. The \$25,000 funding request would go toward hiring a consultant to conduct town-wide surveys to gauge needs and interest as well as the development of an implementation plan with long-term cost projections.

As part of the plan, the Mayor will establish an Advisory Committee, comprised of critical Town Staff and leaders such as IT specialists, school and council representatives, and community members to ensure resident engagement and feedback is present in all phases of the process.

"Overall, the ultimate goal is quality improvement for residents," **said Mayor Hedlund.** "A municipal fiber network is not only more cost effective in terms of competition for internet service providers, but also is more resilient in the event of a public safety concern or weather event. This would benefit not only the individual resident but also Town services and our larger critical infrastructure such as the power plant or South Shore Hospital."

Because municipal broadband is an infrastructure project - much like the provision of water, sewer, electricity, and roadways - leveraging economies of scale in large metro-areas has been proven to be a cost-effective way to implement these services. As such, Mayor Hedlund has been in communication with Mayor Koch while Quincy moves forward with their municipal fiber project on a site-specific basis. Weymouth and Quincy could eventually leverage their combined customer base for better pricing or to reduce maintenance costs.

Many municipalities that operate their own networks have seen additional benefits to other operations such as free public wifi, traffic signal synchronization, public safety video cameras, and real-time parking information. Overall there are many benefits from the operation of a municipal fiber network and the master plan will look into their affordability.

Mayor Hedlund will submit the measure to Town Council to request \$25,000 to fund the broadband master plan at their March meeting. If approved, the Town will issue a request for proposals to engage a consultant in the early spring. The study would be completed over the course of 6-8 months with final recommendations to be presented in late fall.

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