

Charlemont Fiber Network Status 2022

Broadband in Charlemont is now available throughout the town in all Fiber Service Areas (FSAs). Customers are being connected in all parts of town with the anticipation that all installation activity will be completed by the end of August 2022.

Getting Connected

Internet service is provided by Whip City Fiber, a division of Westfield Gas and Electric. You can sign up for service at www.whipcityfiber.com/charlemont or by calling 413-485-1251. Internet service is \$79.99 per month for 1 Gbps. Optional phone service is an additional \$19.99 per month.

All town subsidies for broadband will end on August 31 2022.

Any resident who signs up for service before August 31, 2022 qualify for a \$1400 subsidy towards the cost of a standard installation. After August 31, 2022, the installation cost for new customers may be up to \$1000 or more. We recommend all residents at minimum sign up for a "cold drop", which brings a network connection to the outside of the building but does not include any inside wiring or installation. The town is offering a \$500 "cold drop" subsidy to help offset the cost of this exterior service drop, which will reduce the cost of activating service in the future.

For more details, including information on "cold drops" and special subsidies for rental properties, see the town's drop policy on the town website or at www.charlemontconnect.org.

Affordability Programs

A federal program called ACP (the Affordable Connectivity Program) provides a discount of \$30/month for qualified households (\$39/month if combined with the FCC Lifeline program). Qualification can be based on income, having a student at Hawlemont, or other factors. See whipcityfiber.com/charlemont for details.

Finances

The project is currently projected to come in under budget. The town approved a borrowing authorization of \$1.75 million dollars to build the network, but we currently estimate we will need only around \$1.1 million dollars for long-term debt. The town has received over \$1.9 million dollars in state and federal funding for the project to date and we anticipate receiving up to \$450,000 of additional grant funding.

Over 460 homes have signed up for service, a 65% take rate. We are projecting a surplus for the current fiscal year. We are on track for the network to be fully self-supporting, with subscriber revenue covering all debt payments, resulting in no impact on the town tax rate.

Financial Summary

All figures are projections (except the borrowing authorization) and rounded

Town borrowing authorization	\$1,750,000
Total network build cost	\$3,500,000
Total grant funding	\$2,400,000
Total projected long-term debt	\$1,100,000
Retained earnings (end of FY22)	\$25,000
FY23 total budget	\$495,000
FY23 retained earnings increase	
Before debt service	\$89,000
After debt service	\$83,000
Annual debt service (FY24 onwards)	\$85,000

Future Plans

Although much has been accomplished over the past year, the broadband committee is still working hard to finish many important tasks.

The construction phase of the project will wrap up by August, when town subsidies for connecting to the network will end. This summer, we will be focused on getting any homes online that are not yet been able to get connected, installing any remaining underground connections, and installing “cold drops” for residents who choose this option.

Charlemont is working with the towns of Colrain, Heath, Leyden and Rowe to implement a five-town “mesh network” that will interconnect the towns. This mesh network will allow the towns to share backhaul bandwidth, providing greater capacity and resiliency against outages while saving money for all of the towns. The towns have applied for state grant funding to help defray the up-front cost of this work, with Colrain as the lead town on the grant application.

By the end of the year, we expect to transition from network construction to network operation and will officially close out the construction project and the associated state and federal grants.