

Good afternoon. I am Arthur McGuire and I'm here on behalf of the Taghkanic Broadband Committee which I chaired. Other members are Nancy Rutter, Susan Raymond, Chris Tallackson and Joyce Thompson, who is also a Town Board member. We live in the smallest town in Columbia County, population 1310. We still don't have our own zip code but we do now have high speed fiber broadband throughout the town. This was largely brought to us by GTel, a local, family-owned company.

In response to Gov. Cuomo's 2015 announcement of the \$500 million New NY Broadband grant program, our committee was formed in early 2016 to advocate for Taghkanic's inclusion. We started our journey by attending Patti Matheney and Dave Berman's Connect Columbia meetings in Ghent. We also attended Columbia County's Broadband Subcommittee meetings and reviewed, and re-reviewed, those lovely census block maps of areas purportedly served and unserved.

At the time, the only cable internet in Taghkanic was provided by Mid-Hudson Cable in a small part of the town and another tiny sliver was covered by what is now Consolidated Communications. GTel provide DSL service on a little over a mile on one road. The rest of Taghkanic had satellite internet or no service at all.

We contacted representatives of our suppliers. Mid-Hudson was planning to upgrade its existing customers but wasn't interested in expanding its Taghkanic footprint. Ditto for Consolidated when we reached them. GTel expressed polite interest.

Our turning point was a snowy winter day in December 2016 when our entire committee attended a NYS Broadband Program Office public hearing in Livingston Town Hall. Jason Shelton, recently hired General Manager at GTel, was interested in expanding its internet business. Although he made a detailed PowerPoint presentation with maps and a court stenographer was present, the entire audience that day was the Taghkanic Broadband Committee. We testified about Taghkanic's need and began ongoing communications with GTel and Jason, encouraging them to expand in Taghkanic.

When the Phase I application period for the NYS Broadband grants opened, Jason Shelton announced to the County Broadband Committee and to us that GTel was applying to cover Germantown, Livingston, Gallatin and all of Taghkanic with high speed fiber broadband.

Many hurdles remained. Although GTel applied for all the census blocks in Taghkanic over the course of the three grant phases, Mid-Hudson and Consolidated were allocated the blocks for their existing customers. We were concerned that we would have a balkanized setup with some neighborhoods having one carrier and the next neighborhood a different carrier. We were relieved when GTel

determined that to get to all its awarded census blocks, it was going to run fiber at its own cost through the blocks for which it was not awarded grants.

The construction process itself was challenging, from engineering to obtaining permits from other utilities to add fiber to their poles at a reasonable cost to installing new poles where condition or additional weight required it. Three borings under the Taconic Parkway were required with delay caused by the permitting process and further delay caused by the loss of a huge drill bit under the roadway. The Town of Taghkanic and our committee worked closely with GTel and Frank Boscarillo, its new General Manager for the construction phase, and assisted where we could with letters supporting its applications and financing.

Our committee decided to be more aggressive in our advocacy by holding a public information meeting to show there was an eager community wanting broadband service. Basically, there was money to be made in Taghkanic.

On May 18, 2019, our committee held an Open House in our Fire Station with speaker Dave Berman, representatives from Consolidated, Mid-Hudson, ViaSat and GTel and a representative from Rep. Delgado's office. The Fire Station was Standing Room Only with about 180 residents.

Each company representative gave a detailed description of their service and held one-on-one conversations with all interested residents to inform them how and when they could expect broadband installation in their homes. The first installation occurred in May 2019.

Our committee started a campaign to bridge the gap between our residents and GTel by monitoring their progress in monthly internet postings in our town's TGazette Newsletter. Information included what roads were being wired, how the excavation underneath the Taconic Parkway was progressing and how to visit the GTel website to encourage residents to sign up for installation. We also sent these postings to GTel's General Manager.

Our committee decided we needed a road trip. We visited "The Hut", GTel's substation located in Gallatin, to see how the fiber was coming from headquarters and then to individual homes and posted this information in our newsletter.

By late February 2020, most of the town had been wired with fiber optic high speed broadband just in time to give our residents complete broadband service as Covid hit our world in mid-March. As the

second homeowners retreated to our town, they now could contact GTel for installation and work remotely from their home.

We thought our work was done but realized that many of our residents were having difficulty paying for the service. We recently published a Financial Guide for residents in need of assistance to cover expenses for installation or monthly fees. We posted this in the Columbia Paper and even received a helpful editorial from its publisher, Parry Teasdale.

We think our success was a combination of good luck and hard work. We were counter-intuitively lucky to have such a small, low-density population that none of the majors were significantly present or interested in expanding in Taghkanic. This presented an opportunity for a bid by a local company looking to cover the entire town. We had people we could meet, with whom we could persist. We ended up with a truly collaborative relationship where we could help them while they helped us.