

IMPORTANT CENTURYLINK UPDATE.

On Sept. 26, members of the Hardwick, Hope, Knowlton and Blirstown committees had a meeting with members of CenturyLink upper management including our local field supervisor. We discussed a few different topics from the internet upgrade going on in our area to lack of proper response time, missed calls by CenturyLink, poor communication at CL between departments and poor customer service, tree cutting. The following is are responses from CenturyLink, some issues we are waiting for some answers on that the others I will try and give you the best summary here in this post.

In attendance for our towns, Blirstown – Mayor Lance, Deb Waldron, Hardwick Mayor Duffy and Jim Perry, Hope Mayor Tim McDonough and also James Moore one of our technical consultants, Knowlton Mayor Adele Starrs.

1.) Status on the upgrades to internet service.

As many of you are aware approximately 1 year ago Mayor McDonough, Mayor Starr and myself worked out a program with CL to upgrade our DSL internet in our area through a grant from the FCC. The grant was called a Connect America Fund II (CAF II) that offers incentive funding to local telephone companies serving rural areas that the FCC has determined to have no broadband service or speeds less than 10Mbps down and 1Mbps up (10/1). Only certain areas within our 362. 496 and 459 exchanges were eligible. This information on the areas came from the FCC. The project included upgrades to 7 existing 'switches' across the North Warren towns and 12 new switches within the towns to expand service and speeds throughout our area. The total project is expected to be completed by the end of 2018.

As of today 13 of the switches have been completed. A few are up and running and many are now in the testing stage and also being added to the CL system. IF THE SWITCH IN YOUR AREA HAS NOT BEEN ADDED TO THE SYSTEM YET THEN WHEN YOU CALL IT WILL BE REPORTED AS NOT HAVING HIGH SPEED. The process to test and add the area to the system is approximately 7-14 days. SO in other words within 2 weeks of this 13 areas will be ready for the faster speeds.

You will NOT be automatically updated to the better speeds. Signs will go up near the areas and we have asked the person responsible for the signs to notify us so we can also let people know here that their area is ready. To get the upgrade you will need to call (908)735-3000 or go to this website to see if you are eligible.

<https://shop.centurylink.com/MasterWebPortal/freeRange/shop/guidedShoppingStart?bones#module=start>

If it does not reflect that you are eligible, check back weekly to see if upgrades have been completed.

2.) We spoke of a lot of the technical issues that go into this project which I am not going to go into here. However, I do want to state where ever one of these new or upgraded switches are anyone within 18,000 feet should notice some kind of increase. The closer you are the more of the increase. I personally know of a few homes that are within a half mile that went from 1 or 2 mbs to 40-60 mbs. Remember just because you might drive from the switch to your home and see it says a half mile for example, that doesn't mean that is the same route the cable from the switch to your house takes. One other thing to mention here is that the type of gauge wire used by CL that the signal is running over makes a difference. They are not changing out these wires that have been around long before this upgrade. The higher the gauge the less distance better speeds will travel. CL stated that there are numerous types of gauge throughout our area.

3.) Pricing - CL Price for life for RESIDENTIAL customers is

\$45 for up to 25 MPBS (remember the project tells us that the CAF2 grant guarantees minimum of 10 MBPS. So if you are within the CAF2 area you should be able to get at least 10 and closer you are the higher the speed).

\$55 for speed greater than 25 MPBS if you are close enough to receive that. If you bundle along with phone and/or TV then your price will be different. The prices above are internet only however you should still find a great price for bundles.

We are waiting for answers on installation cost but how it looks now there should be NO fee to upgrade however if you are a new customer you will have an installation fee. Also we are waiting to find out if modems need to be replaced if there is an additional cost.

4.) Poor communication issues between CL and customers.

We bought up the issue of poor customer service support. One department not knowing what the other is doing or wrong information given to customers.

- The response to this goes back to what I mentioned earlier about the switch being installed, Tested, and the system updated. CL admitted that in some areas they put up the signs prematurely which cause confusion. The area manager said this will not happen again. Once the system is upgraded and switches tested that is when the signs in that area will go out and we will be notified that certain areas are ready. When we are notified we will try and post that your area is ready.

The towns have also asked for a direct local rep to deal with when we have issues in the towns that our Mayors or committee people can have direct contact with when issues occur.

5.) Install dates missed or 3-4 weeks out.

This was a big concern for all those present at the meeting. CL admits they have only a few techs in our area to cover ground. We said that this is something that seriously needs to be addressed. They are working on bringing in contractors to help but contractors are their own bosses and are going where the money and work is. Right now, that area seems to be the Carolinas. The local manager is working on getting better coverage for our area and will be communicating to us the plan to improve the service.

We also mentioned the missed appointments and people losing work days to be home and nobody shows up and they don't even get a call. They agreed this isn't good customer service and again are going to work on a plan to fix that.

To wrap this up, we feel that it was a productive meeting but there are still some answers we are waiting for. Adele, Tim and I have worked hard on this for over a year, however, right from the start we knew this would be a slow process and even CL said the end of 2018. We even mentioned that at the town hall meeting we had on this at NWRHS last October. Please have patience. With Mayor Lance and Committeewoman Waldron now working along side of us we are hopeful that internet service and customer support from CL will be improved.

Here are some numbers and additional info.

Distance of the new fiber optic builds in each Township

Hardwick— 16,665 Feet
Knowlton— 7,359 Feet
Hope— 30,702 Feet
Blairstown— 4,543 Feet

Number of current broadband devices and new proposed broadband devices in the CAF II build areas.

Hardwick – 2 old and 3 new devices
Knowlton – 1 old and 6 new devices
Hope – 1 old and 4 new devices
Blairstown – 2 new devices

The old device offered at least 10/1 and the upgrade extends the range but does not improve the speed.

The new devices will offer up to 80M— the speed is dependent upon the distance from the device.

Below are the number of households by township, besides Knowlton, that are expected to see an improvement in the broadband speed available at their locations : I will update this once I have Knowlton's numbers.

Hardwick Township	280 Households
Hope Township	186 Households
Blairstown Township	230 Households

We realize all your frustrations, believe me we are just as frustrated as you. But thank you for your patience and please realize the committees in Hardwick, Hope, Knowlton and Blairstown are all working hard to get this resolved. Also this is just one step to bring change and upgrades to our telecommunication infrastructure somewhere into the 21st century. We are already talking

with CenturyLink on what next after the CAF2 project is done and other ways to improve the DSL and phone service in our area. We are also working with Congressman Josh Gottheimer's office to bring Service Electric to the table to improve our area and the Congressman said they believe there will be more money authorized in next year's budget to continue the development of the rural areas infrastructure that he promises to help us receive.