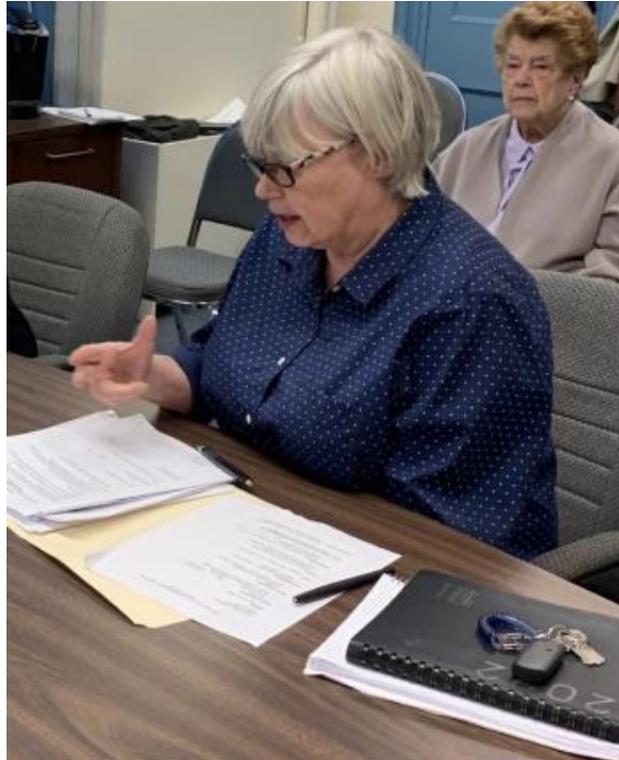


## County developing broadband application for dispensing \$1.5M in ARPA funds

[boothbayregister.com/article/county-developing-broadband-application-dispensing-15m-arpa-funds/165650](https://www.boothbayregister.com/article/county-developing-broadband-application-dispensing-15m-arpa-funds/165650)



At the Sept. 20 commissioners' meeting, Executive Director Mary Ellen Barnes explains requirements proposed by Lincoln County Regional Planning Commission for towns to get a share of \$1.5 million in county ARPA funds. BILL PEARSON/Boothbay Register

Lincoln County towns will have a couple options in seeking broadband grants over the next two years. Lincoln County Regional Planning Commission is developing a broadband grant application for distributing \$1.5 million for local projects. Lincoln County received \$6.7 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds and designated a significant portion for broadband expansion.

During the Sept. 20 commissioners' meeting, LCRPC Executive Director Mary Ellen Barnes outlined goals of a potential grant application. She proposed limiting county grants to \$100,000 and requiring towns to provide an equal match. Another proposed condition would base grants on what percentage of a town is unserved or underserved in broadband options. Barnes estimated that two towns were close to potentially submitting an application. "There is quite a bit of work needed in filling out an application," she said. "We're going to want to know what internet service providers a community is working with, and other funding sources."

Barnes believes communities who secure a county broadband grant will be successful in seeking funding from the newly created Maine Connectivity Authority which will award grants in 2022 and 2023. The MCA was established in 2021 as a quasi-governmental agency charged with achieving universal access to affordable high-speed broadband. Barnes reported Maine is using \$110 million in ARPA funds to implement the MCA's goals.

In other action, Barnes reported on a memorandum of understanding with Midcoast Council of Governments. Under the agreement, Lincoln County will notify local businesses about grant opportunities if MCOG receives a federal grant. "This will bring significant funding to local businesses. This happened on Sept. 8 so all the details are still being worked out," she said.

Barnes described LCRPC's role in the MUA as "getting the word out" to local businesses and providing support, promotion and marketing for the grant. She also updated commissioners on progress toward a contract with Camion Associates to provide a county-wide housing study. "We are still fine-tuning contract details and the study should take no more than six months to complete."