

# Falmouth Broadband MLP

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*Bringing Better Broadband to Falmouth!*

## Request for Information

### Summary

Falmouth Broadband is issuing this Request for Information (RFI) to solicit potential partners in an effort to provide fiber optic broadband service to all of Falmouth's residents and businesses. Falmouth Broadband anticipates that this RFI will be a primary means of gathering input as it decides how best to pursue its goals. Falmouth Broadband will consider a wide range of construction, operation, ownership, and financing options associated with public-private agreements, non-exclusive franchises, and other appropriate alternatives in its development of a business model. This should include creative solutions maximizing the efficiency of investments by all parties while addressing Falmouth's needs.

Falmouth Broadband's purposes in the RFI process are as follows:

1. To identify qualified entities interested in engaging with Falmouth Broadband to make high-quality fiber-based Internet access available to every residence and business in Falmouth, either individually, in partnership with other providers, or in partnership with Falmouth Broadband. Respondents should clearly state how their organization would like to participate -- be it as a partner, investor, builder, general contractor, operator or any combination of these.
2. To identify and evaluate innovative, cost-effective, sustainable, resilient business models for high-quality Internet service. This includes identifying strategic-level conceptual terms and conditions under which selected providers would likely participate in such a project.
3. To learn more about what assets and contributions would facilitate the deployment of respondents' build solutions. Respondents interested in the build phase of the project should discuss financing, permitting, rights-of-way, property usage, conduit access, fiber connections, electricity requirements, facilities, and any other required or beneficial resources.
4. To understand respondents' approaches to eventual operations, respondents seeking as role as a network operator should discuss their ideas for ubiquitous service access, service offerings and pricing models, and customer service.
5. To solicit ideas on how the Falmouth network might be integrated into a regional network, including respondents' thoughts on minimum practical market size, and strategy for combining local services regionally.

A [Feasibility Study](#) and a high-level [Engineering Design](#) are available to aid in the preparation of responses. (These can be found through their embedded links or at [www.FalmouthNet.org](http://www.FalmouthNet.org), under Resources.)

Respondents are encouraged to provide any additional information that may help Falmouth Broadband understand their responses to this RFI or otherwise be beneficial to the project.

Falmouth Broadband expects to meet with some respondents to review the respondents' approach, capability, business model, and proposed key terms and conditions. Discussions may be expanded to jointly develop details of potential agreements, non-exclusive franchise, or other business arrangements.

Respondents are strongly encouraged to address all the above points as completely and clearly as possible. If there are multiple scenarios under which your company would be interested in engaging with Falmouth Broadband, please describe them.

This RFI does not constitute a solicitation of proposals, a commitment to conduct procurement, or an offer of a prospective contract. A more detailed Request for Proposals is anticipated before any contractual arrangement will be finalized. The Town of Falmouth and Falmouth Broadband will not be liable for any costs incurred by respondents in the preparation and submission of information in response to this RFI.

## Background

The Town of Falmouth, Massachusetts is a coastal town on Cape Cod, with a year-round population of about 32,000. Falmouth is the home of several world-class scientific research organizations including the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, the Marine Biological Laboratory, the Woods Hole Research Center, the Sea Education Association, and major research centers for NOAA and USGS. It also is the home of numerous spin-off marine technology companies. The town covers approximately 54 square miles and is organized around several small village centers.

The primary broadband service provider in Falmouth is Comcast, which currently offers DOCSIS 3.1 (cable) in most, but not all, areas.

Verizon offers DSL service but has stated multiple times that it does not plan to bring FIOS to Falmouth, or elsewhere on Cape Cod. Cell phone service is poor in many parts of the town and is frequently overburdened during the summer months.

T-Mobile offers Fixed Wireless Access Service, branded *T-Mobile Home Internet*, which T-Mobile says serves 20% of Falmouth.

OpenCape Corporation, <https://opencape.org/>, a non-profit based in Barnstable, MA, owns and operates a fiber optic network across Cape Cod and southeastern Massachusetts. It started as an ARRA-funded middle-mile service. It also operates a GPON network serving small businesses in the Main Street area and Woods Hole. OpenCape provides broadband services to most town buildings, including schools and libraries, and to the major businesses and research institutions in the town. It recently has begun to offer residential and small business broadband services in mixed-use buildings, but it does not offer service to most residences in Falmouth or elsewhere in the region. The OpenCape 128-strand fiber backbone passes through Falmouth, and there are more than 40 laterals constructed off of it. While OpenCape has about 45 miles of installed fiber, the Engineering Study suggests that a total of 450 miles

is required to serve the whole town. The OpenCape network is open-access, and Falmouth Broadband believes that OpenCape could play a role as an infrastructure resource and potential partner.

The residents and businesses of Falmouth have long found that the national communications providers have not adequately addressed their needs for a robust, modern communications infrastructure. Ever since the emergence of the Internet, there have been conversations with these companies about improving the service provided to the town. It is clear that Cape Cod is not a priority service area for the major providers. This is especially problematic for Falmouth, as a town that is a global center for oceanographic and climate research and related technology industries. Small businesses, many operated out of people's homes, are also important contributors to the local economy, and the lack of reliable, affordable Internet services is a significant problem for them. Similarly, there is a need for better Internet services to enable people to work at home to avoid long commutes or during vacations, and to support students of all ages that need to do online homework or research from home.

In summer Falmouth's population more than triples (105,000 vs 32,000), and the impact on a communications infrastructure that is already marginally adequate is often catastrophic. Our merchants, restaurants and the hospitality industry are routinely unable to process sales transactions expeditiously, and at times not at all. In recent summers, there have been service outages lasting multiple days in various parts of the town. A rainy day during the tourist season results in a severely overloaded system that is virtually unusable as our visitors gather around their computers and phones seeking entertainment. As businesses and the general population become more dependent upon reliable Internet connectivity, this poorly performing infrastructure becomes increasingly unacceptable. An inadequate communications infrastructure during the tourist season is not just an inconvenience, but also impacts the overall quality of our visitors' experiences, and accordingly the economic health of the town.

Falmouth has taken a number of steps to work towards improving its broadband infrastructure. A group of motivated residents formed FalmouthNet, Inc., a 501c3 corporation, as an advocacy group (FalmouthNet.org). FalmouthNet, working with the Falmouth Economic Development and Industrial Corporation, commissioned a Feasibility Study for a community network in 2019. Subsequently FalmouthNet commissioned a high-level Engineering Design which was completed in 2022. Both reports are available at FalmouthNet.org under the Resources menu and provide important information to respondents to this RFI.

Falmouth more recently established Falmouth Broadband MLP, a Municipal Light Plant governed by an elected five-member board in accordance with Massachusetts General Law Chapter 164. This mechanism allows a municipality in Massachusetts to offer utility services. This board is issuing this RFI and will be evaluating responses to it. Falmouth Broadband will also be the entity contracting to provide municipally-based broadband service.

## Response Requirements

All responses should be submitted electronically, using a standard file format (preferably PDF) to the email address [falmouthmlb@gmail.com](mailto:falmouthmlb@gmail.com). Acknowledgement of receipt of proposals will be made via return email.

## Questions Regarding RFI

Any questions regarding this RFI should be submitted by the date indicated below (under Calendar) to the email address above.

All questions received by the deadline, along with Falmouth Broadband's responses, will be distributed via email to all respondents per the calendar below. Please be sure to specify an email address to which the summary of questions and responses should be sent if it is not the originating address of the question.

## Availability of Proposals

Any items that the respondent wishes to protect under a non-disclosure agreement should NOT be included in this response.

## Qualifications

Responses are welcome from any entity with the ability to meet Falmouth's goals. This may include incumbent service providers, competitive providers, nonprofit organizations, public cooperatives, nontraditional providers, and any other interested, capable entities.

## References / Experience

Respondents should provide information describing the organization's experience, expertise, and track record relevant to the Falmouth network project. This should include references to previous work in similar projects over the past three years, with contacts. It is also very important to describe your company's experience and philosophy in collaborative endeavors. Several organizations are likely to participate in bringing the project together, and it will be essential that all work well within such an environment.

## Calendar

- 9 August 2023 – RFI released
- ~~28 August 2023 – Closing date for RFI inquiries~~
- 5 September 2023 – Closing date for RFI inquiries
- 5 September 2023 – Submit Intention to respond to [falmouthmlb@gmail.com](mailto:falmouthmlb@gmail.com)
- 8 September 2023 – RFI inquiry responses provided by Falmouth Broadband
- 18 September 2023 – RFI submissions due to [falmouthmlb@gmail.com](mailto:falmouthmlb@gmail.com)