DIGITAL EQUITY PLAN

Hubbardston
Massachusetts

June 2025

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1 Introduction

1.1 Project Background

Chapter 231 of the Acts of 2008 established the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) as a new division within the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative to provide for a program to achieve the deployment of affordable and ubiquitous broadband access for every citizen of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.[1] This legislation provided funding to MBI to oversee and administer across the commonwealth.

Additionally, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) allocated $147 million to Massachusetts under the BEAD program to build out broadband infrastructure to remaining unserved[2] and underserved[3] locations across the state.[4] The NTIA has also allocated $1 million to Massachusetts to develop a State Digital Equity Plan and another $14.1 million to implement that plan under the Digital Equity Act. Funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) were then used to establish a Municipal Digital Equity Planning Program, supporting these efforts at the local level. Specifically, the Municipal Digital Equity Planning activities will accomplish two goals:

1. Guide municipal decision-making and investments that will increase access, adoption, and usage of the internet for the populations most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Prepare municipalities to submit grant proposals to existing or forthcoming state or federal programs to support digital equity activities.

1.2 What is Broadband?

The term broadband, also known as high-speed internet, is the transmission of data using a wide range of frequencies that allows for the fast and efficient transfer of large amounts of information. In contrast to traditional Digital Subscriber Lines (DSL) or dial-up access, which requires a telephone line to connect, broadband remains consistently connected to the internet without the need for manual connection initiation.

Broadband can be split into two (2) types, fixed and mobile. Generally speaking, fixed broadband includes those types of connections with a physical wire and cables to the home (e.g.: VDSL (Very High Speed Digital Subscriber Line), fiber optic, cable modem, fixed antenna, and satellite) and wireless broadband includes anything without a physical wire connection (e.g.: mobile and cellular). Broadband speed can vary based on factors such as technology, level of service, or congestion. In March 2024, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) voted to increase the threshold for

[1] Source: https://broadband.masstech.org/

[2] An unserved service project is defined as a project in which not less than 80 percent of broadband-serviceable locations served by the project are unserved locations. An “Unserved Service Project” may be as small as a single unserved broadband serviceable location (NOFO Section I.C.ee). An unserved location is defined as a broadband-serviceable location that the Broadband DATA Maps show as (a) having no access to broadband service, or (b) lacking access to Reliable Broadband Service offered with - (i) a speed of not less than 25 Mbps for downloads; and (ii) a speed of not less than 3 Mbps for uploads; and (iii) latency less than or equal to 100 milliseconds (NOFO Section I.C.dd).

[3] An underserved service project is defined as a project in which not less than 80 percent of broadband-serviceable locations served by the project are unserved locations or underserved locations. An “Underserved Service Project” may be as small as a single underserved broadband serviceable location (NOFO Section I.C.cc). An underserved location is defined as a broadband-serviceable location that is (a) not an unserved location, and (b) that the Broadband DATA Maps show as lacking access to Reliable Broadband Service offered with - (i) a speed of not less than 100 Mbps for downloads; and (ii) a speed of not less than 20 Mbps for uploads; and (iii) latency less than or equal to 100 milliseconds (NOFO Section I.C.bb).

[4] The current federal administration has halted the continuation of the Digital Equity Act and terminated grants to states as of May 12, 2025, including MA’s award of $14.1 million.

speed from 25 megabits per second (Mbps) download speed and 3 Mbps upload speed to 100 Mbps download speed and 20 Mbps upload speed.

There are three (3) main metrics that must be all adequate for the internet to be considered high-speed.

- **Speed** is typically measured in Mbps, which is a measurement of the amount of data capable of being transmitted each second.
- **Bandwidth** is the connection's capacity for transmitting data. Broadband is like an internet highway, the higher the bandwidth, the more lanes your internet highway has and the more devices you can connect simultaneously.
- **Latency** is the time it takes for the information to reach its destination related to potential delays. It is critical to applications that use live connections. The effects of high latency include jittery connections and frequent pauses while connected.

In 2015, the FCC defined high-speed internet as download speeds of at least 25 Mbps and upload speeds of at least 3 Mbps. In order to keep up with the increasing data demands, a new definition of "high-speed" is recommended by the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). The law sets a minimum threshold of 100 Mbps download speeds and 20 Mbps upload for new projects to receive federal broadband funds.

1.3 What is Digital Equity and Why is it Important?

Digital equity is a concept that ensures individuals and communities have equitable access to and use of information technology, enabling them to fully participate in social and economic life. It recognizes that in today's digital age, access to technology and the internet is essential for various aspects of life, including education, employment, healthcare, and civic engagement.

According to the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA), "Digital Equity is a condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy, and economy. Digital Equity is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services."

1.4 Vision and Goals

As a small, rural community, Hubbardston faces unique challenges in providing equitable access to digital resources. Many of the Town's residents, particularly those in more remote areas, struggle with limited internet availability and high costs. This lack of access has been particularly detrimental during the COVID-19 pandemic, as students have shifted to remote learning and many adults have transitioned to working from home. By creating a strategic digital equity plan, Hubbardston will be better equipped to make informed decisions and investments that will increase internet access, adoption, and digital skills among residents.

Consistent with the Massachusetts Broadband Strategic Plan, the strategy involves these four (4) pillars.

- **Extend and Improve Broadband Access and Infrastructure.** Investments in reliable infrastructure where it's lacking, which may be found in pocket locations along town edges, low-density areas, and low- income urban neighborhoods.
- **Reaching Target Populations through Partnerships.** Best practice from the Mass Internet Connect implementation experience is that it is vital to have a distribution partner trusted in the community with the ability to reach the target population and deliver support on devices, subsidies, and digital literacy training.

- **Digital Literacy**. Go beyond connectivity by providing the necessary digital and computer skills for vulnerable populations. More than one out of four participants in the Mass Internet Connect program with MassHire has requested Digital Literacy support.
- **Adoption and Affordability.** Getting devices to people who need them and directing consumers to broadband service subsidies and low-cost service options.

2 Community Engagement

2.1 Steering Committee

The input of various municipal staff was incorporated into the Digital Equity Plan through the Digital Equity Steering Committee (the Committee). The Committee included several representatives from the Council on Aging, Town Cable Commission, Town Planning Board, Library, and Town Administration. The consultant interviewed members of the Committee for their feedback regarding existing conditions and challenges facing the community. In addition, a series of Steering Committee Meetings promoted collaboration between the consultants and all Committee members.

- **Steering Committee Meeting #1 (September 5, 2024)** – Introduced the Committee leads to the consultant team, established a list of additional Committee members, and discussed the overall plan development process.
- **Steering Committee Meeting #2 (September 11, 2024)** – Additional Committee members joined to provide input regarding their experiences in the Town and context from the broader community, strategized survey distribution, scheduled the public engagement charette, and brainstormed a list of Stakeholders.
- **Steering Committee Meeting #3 (June 12, 2025)** – Presented to the committee the recap of the milestones that were completed and presented on the draft recommendations. Feedback from the committee included open access network, the issues with one sole provided in Town, and the two (2) cell towers that were recently built.

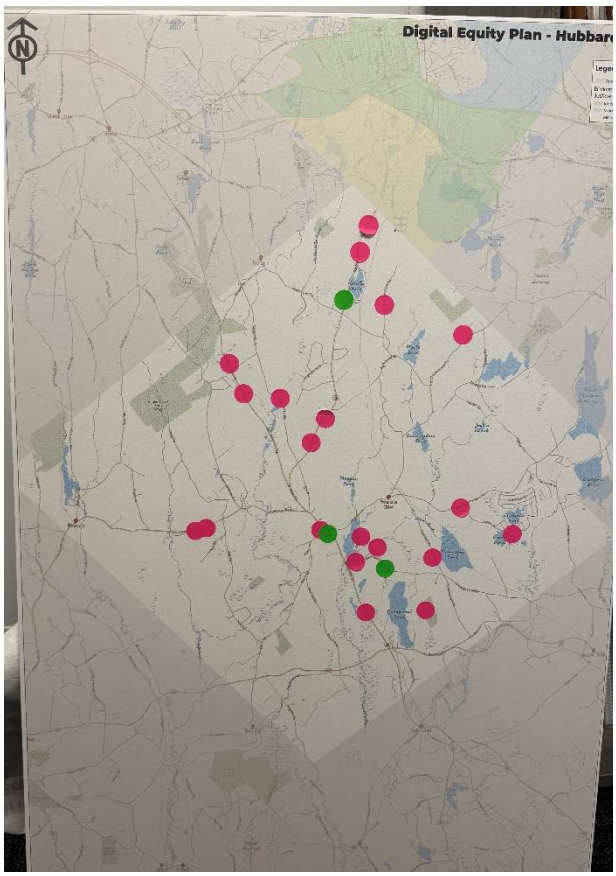
2.2 Stakeholder Interviews

No individual interviews have been conducted beyond those conducted while on-site at the pop-up event and at the public charrette. There were follow-up conversations with the Town Administrator and members of the study committee who may represent key stakeholders in the town.

2.3 Community Outreach and Workshops

In addition to the Steering Committee meetings that were held, the broader Hubbardston community was involved in the development of the Plan through community events where citizens provided input on the challenges they face with digital access and literacy. These public engagement sessions included informal **Digital Equity Fairs** at the Senior Center/Council on Aging and the Library, and a formal **charette** at the Senior Center/Council on Aging.

The events, held on December 16, 2024, provided opportunities for citizens to learn about Digital Equity and provide input for its incorporation into the Plan. The Digital Equity Fair was an informal event for citizens with limited availability, and the Public Hearing included a formal presentation explaining the concept of digital equity, the state of broadband in Hubbardston, and how public input would be incorporated into the Plan.



2.4 Community Surveys

MBI also prepared a survey to assess broadband access and needs across the state. This anonymous survey included questions regarding residents' internet service provider, type(s), quality, and cost, as well as questions regarding their personal experiences with device access and desires to participate in training opportunities. As of January 2, 2025, Hubbardston residents had submitted 14 responses to the survey. Some of the information gathered from these responses includes the following:

- On average, respondents are spending $127 per month on their internet subscription.
- 29% of respondents indicated their internet services "does not work well enough" to support their daily needs.
- 21% of respondents indicated they were interested in training, with a preference (68%) toward online trainings.

3 Community Assessment

Hubbardston is a small, rural community in Worcester County, Massachusetts. Hubbardston is a town, governed by town meetings attended by its residents. 4,328 residents call Hubbardston home, across 1,553 households and 1,170 families. Vulnerable groups such as seniors, non-native English speakers, low-income residents, and those who live in remote areas of the town face unique challenges in accessing reliable and affordable internet.

Hubbardston is home to 4,328 residents across about 41.1 square miles, giving the town an overall population density of about 105.3 people per square mile.

As noted in the Hubbardston Master Plan, the community character is composed of several faces, each with defining natural and built features: large tracts of forests, wetlands, and water, farms, historic buildings and sites, municipal buildings, a town center, and residential homes dotted throughout the town. Land devoted to residential uses accounts for about 4.8% or 1,290 acres of the town's total acreage. The town's land use map is shown in Figure 1.

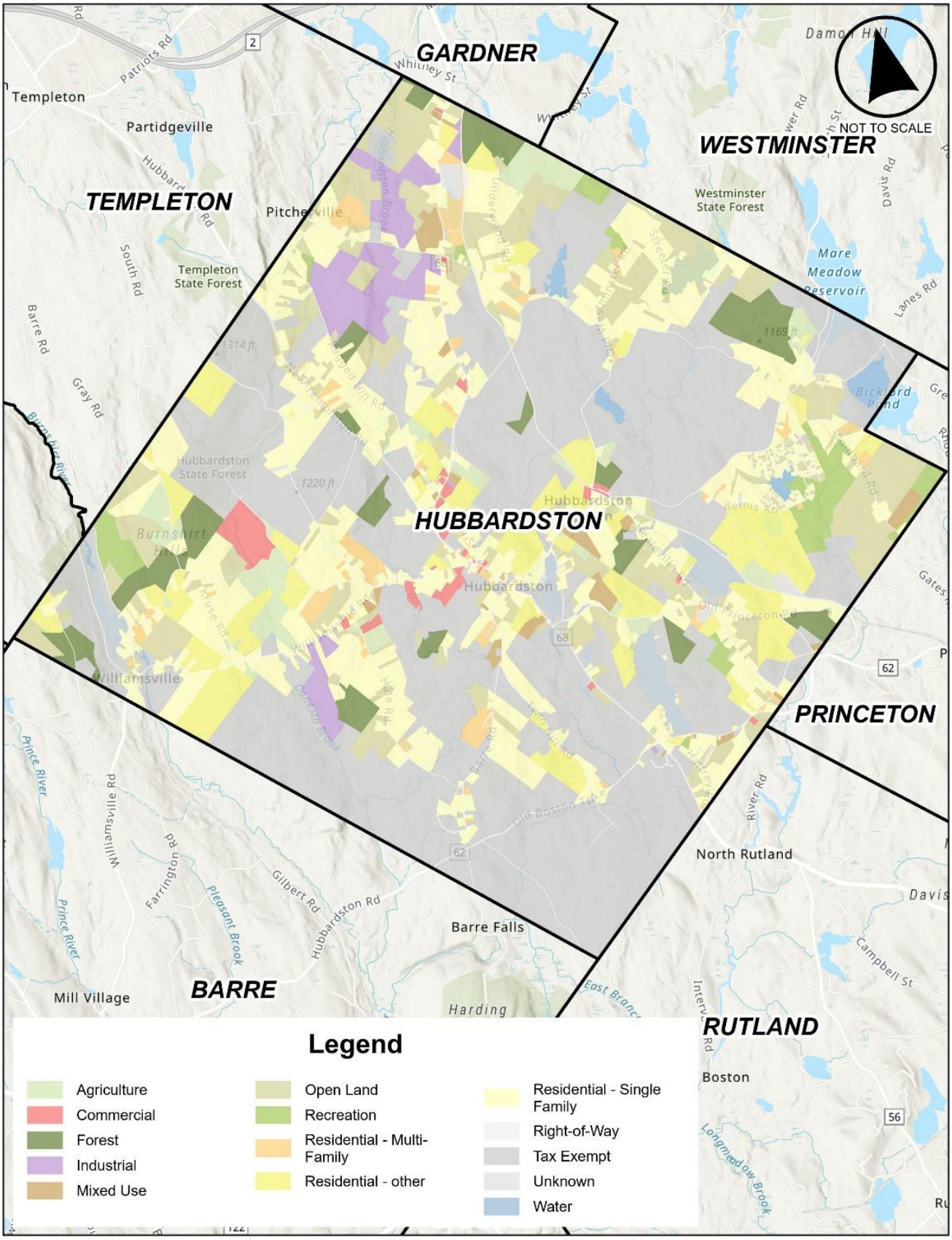


Figure 1: Hubbardston Land Use Map

3.1 Demographics

KEY DEMOGRAPHICS INFORMATION

Table 1: Summary of Demographic information

Population	Household Ownerships	Race	Language	Education	Disabilities	Median Household Income	Median Age
4,328	8% occupied units are rental units 92% occupied units are owned	7.6% are non-White	5.0% speak language other than English at home	30.7% have a Bachelor's degree or Higher	10.9% are disabled	$114,922	42.3

All data from US Census

Housing data can provide meaningful context to economic strain in addition to income. In Hubbardston, 92% of occupied units are owned. Among owner-occupied households, approximately 27% are considered "cost burdened," meaning they pay 30% or more of their income on housing. For the 8% of occupied units that are rented, the percentage of cost burden increases to 51%. For these cost burdened owners and renters, high internet costs may contribute to additional financial hardship.

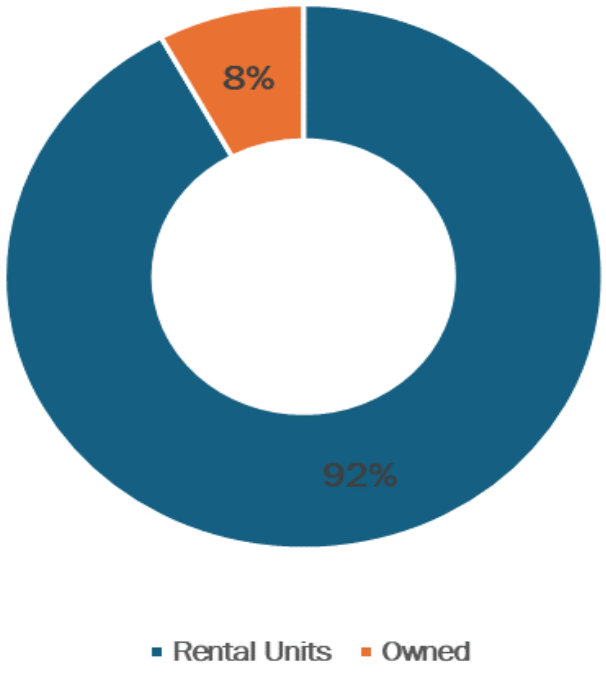


Figure 2: Property ownership in Hubbardston

Most of the population of Hubbardston is white (92.4%). This statistic does not distinguish Hispanic and Non-Hispanic origin. The majority of non-white residents are multiracial. It is important to

consider challenges faced by historically marginalized communities but based on the racial distribution shown in Figure 3, it is unlikely that this is the most significant barrier for broadband access in the community.

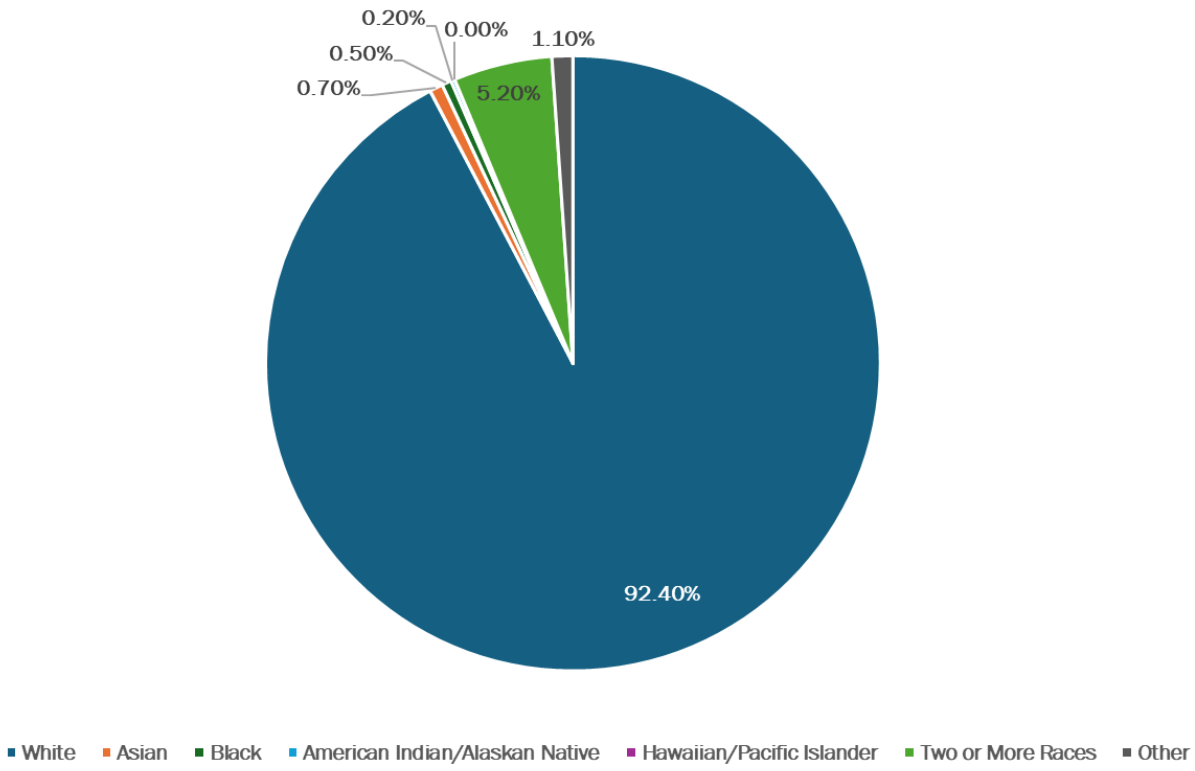


Figure 3: Racial Distribution of Hubbardston residents

Other considerations toward digital literacy and access include language and education barriers. In Hubbardston, about 5% of the population speaks a language other than English at home. For residents not fluent in English, existing broadband resources may be inaccessible. Educationally, 40.9% of the Hubbardston population does not have a college degree, with 30.7% having obtained a bachelor's degree or higher. This could indicate that greater resources may be required to bridge digital literacy gaps for residents without a college education.

Understanding disabilities is crucial because it promotes inclusivity, fosters a more equitable society, and ensures individuals with disabilities have the same opportunities as everyone else. It is important to note that residents may have multiple types of disabilities and may require different accommodations to bridge digital literacy gaps as shown in Figure 4. There is 10.9% of the population of Hubbardston that has some form of disability which may impact their access to broadband.

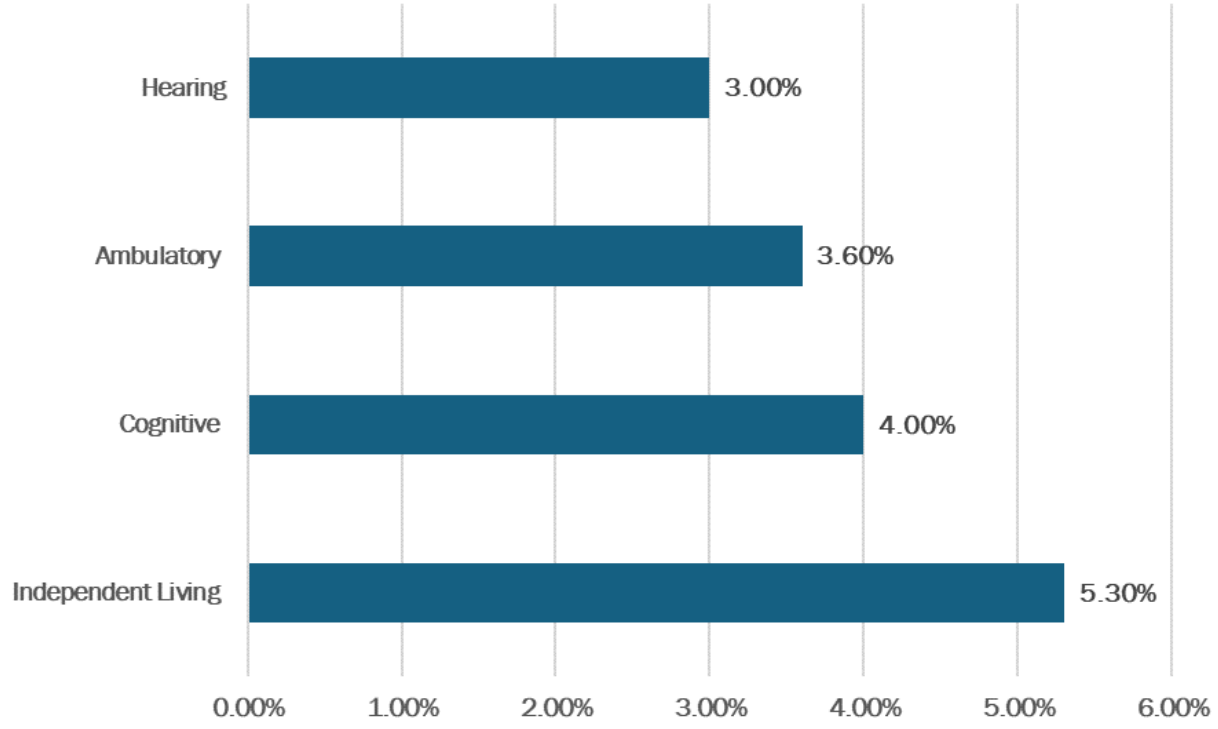


Figure 4: Most common disabilities among Hubbardston residents, US 2020 Census

Income can be another source of inequity in broadband access. Depending on whether residents live in an urban or rural area, costs for quality internet can be burdensome for low-income residents. In Hubbardston, the median household income is $114,922. However, 19.1% of the population lives on a household income of less than $50,000. For nonfamily households, dwellings occupied by one person or by two or more unrelated individuals, the median income drops to $59,750. Figure 5 shows the overall distribution of income among Hubbardston residents.

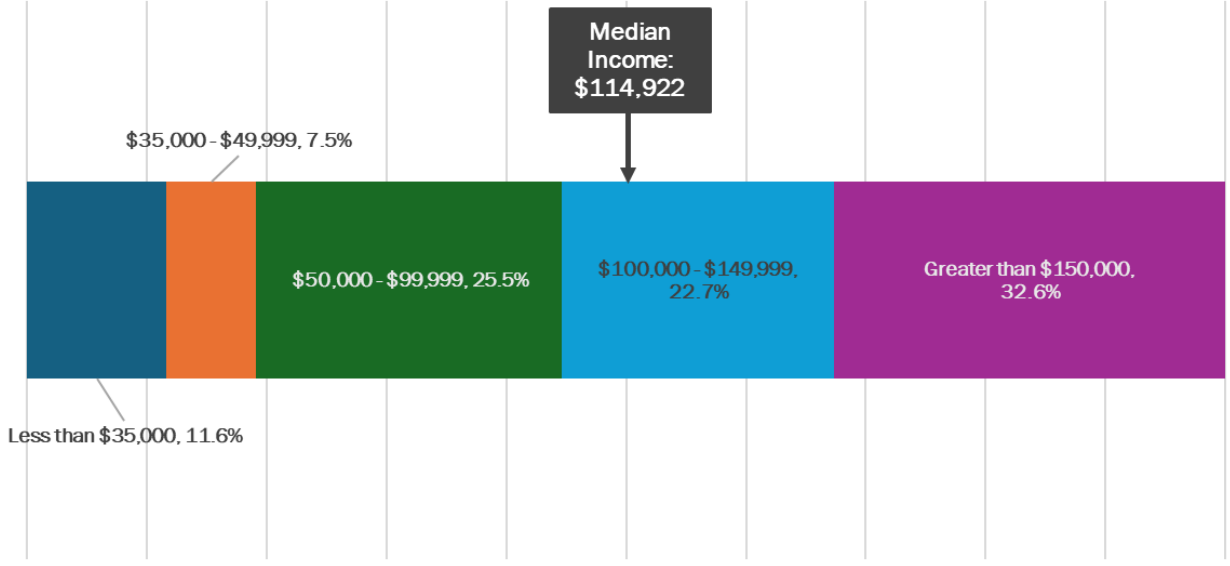


Figure 5: Income Distribution of Hubbardston residents, MBI

With a median age of 42.3 years and more than 29% of the population over the age of 60, the median age in Hubbardston is nearly 2 years older than Worcester County as a whole. Figure 6 provides a detailed breakdown of age in Hubbardston. Older adult residents often face unique challenges in connecting to broadband internet and technology, which they can access due to more significant gaps in digital literacy and the ability or desire to travel. However, with expanding online services that make lives easier, they stand to gain the most from this connection.

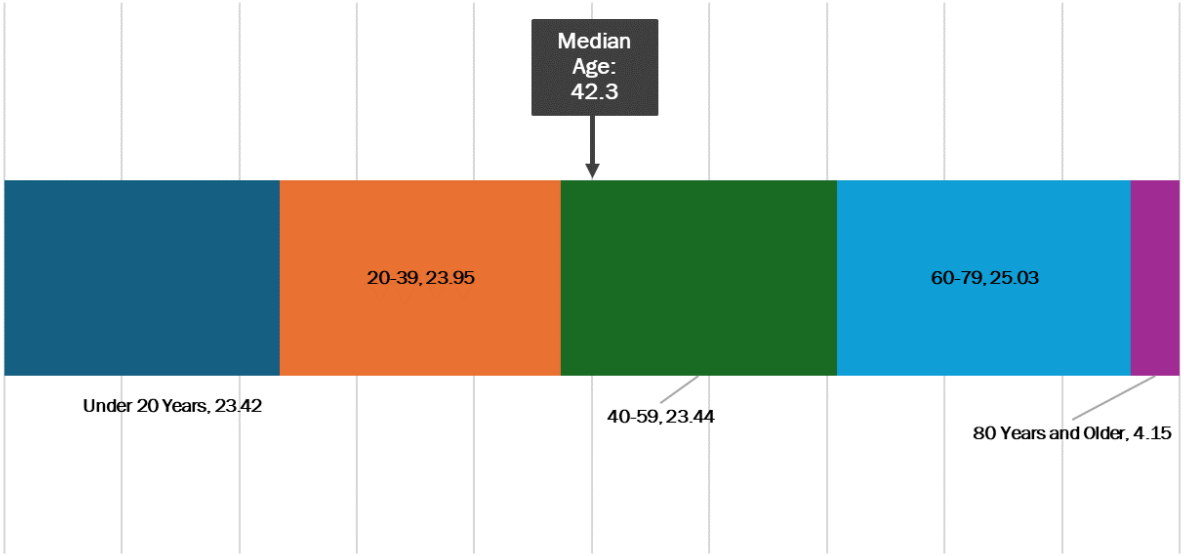


Figure 6: Age Distribution of Hubbardston residents, MBI

3.2 Broadband Access

In Hubbardston, there are six (6) providers of fixed internet connections. Providers vary in their market focus, whether residential, commercial, or both. These providers are listed with their offered speeds, in Table 2. Providers with broadband speeds includes Spectrum and Starlink. Note that some of these providers represent fixed options offered by wireless providers (the ability to install a Wi-Fi router in your home, which is served[5] by wireless internet). Currently, Spectrum is the only provider offering fixed (or wired) internet in Hubbardston.

Table 2: Summary of Fixed Providers in Hubbardston

	Residential		Commercial	
Provider	Download (Mbps)	Upload (Mbps)	Download (Mbps)	Upload (Mbps)
Spectrum	1,000	35	1,000	35
HughesNet*	100	5	-	-
Starlink*	220	25	-	-
Viasat*	50	3	50	4
AT&T	-	-	-	-
T-Mobile*	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
Verizon*	-	-	10	1

* Provider offers Wi-Fi in the home serviced by wireless internet or satellite
‡ Reported by residents, not through the FCC

[5] The National Broadband Map shows that a location has broadband service available at a speed of at least 100 Mbps for downloads and at least 20 Mbps for uploads and latency less than or equal to 100 milliseconds using Technology Codes 71 or 72, that location will be treated as "served."

Wireless internet (cellular or satellite) is also available from three (3) providers. These providers are provided along with their associated networks and speeds in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of wireless internet providers in Hubbardston

Provider	Network	Download	Upload
New Cingular	4G LTE	-	-
AT&T	4G LTE	-	-
T-Mobile	5G-NR	7	1
Verizon	5G-NR	7	1

According to the FCC, 90.79% of Hubbardston is adequately served, while 9.21% are unserved. All locations that are served meet standards for broadband speeds (25/3), but in remote areas of Hubbardston, no services are available. Furthermore, this only reflects the speeds offered by the providers and does not necessarily reflect what individuals are able to afford, nor does it reflect quality issues that may be present. The speeds of "served" locations are at least 100/20 Mbps across Hubbardston, qualifying as broadband.

According to public data, MassBroadband 123 (previously operated by Axia NGNetworks USA, now operated by Local Linx) and Windstream are two metro networks with resources in or near Hubbardston, as shown in Figure 7, that are not currently servicing Hubbardston residents or businesses.

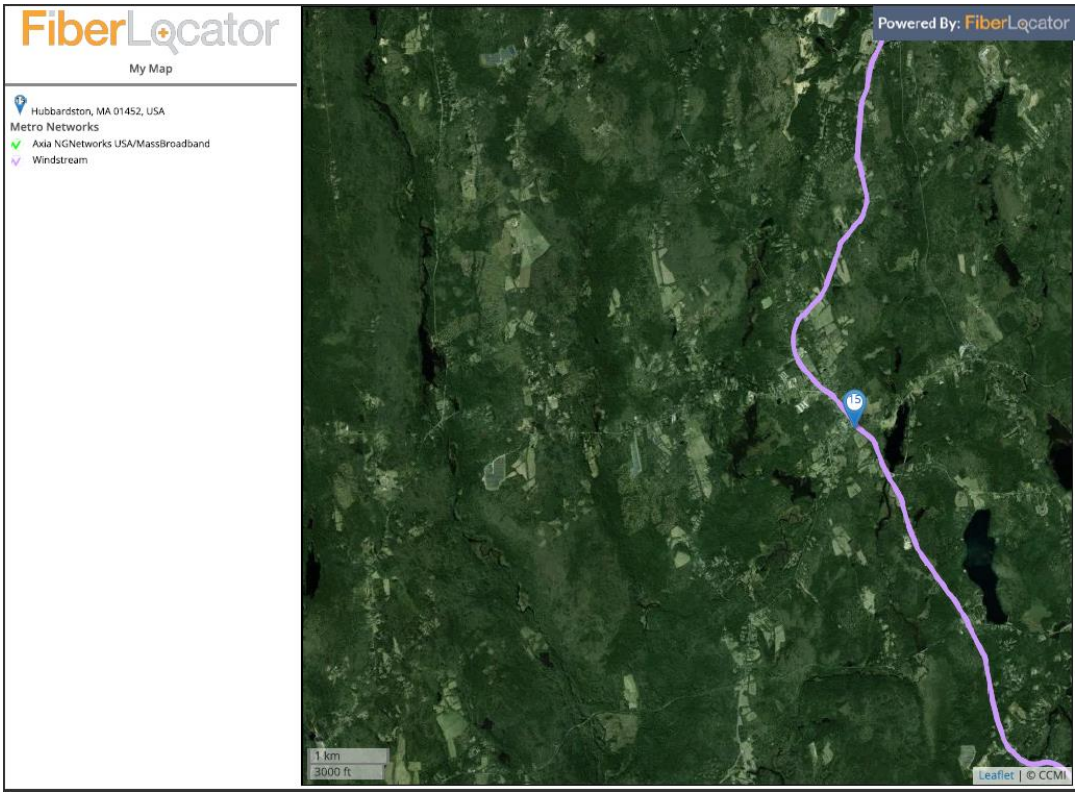


Figure 7: Fiber Providers in or Near Hubbardston

The **MassBroadband 123** network is part of a middle-mile fiber network built and owned by MBI (MassBroadband 123) to help bridge the gap between towns and internet service providers (ISPs) and bring broadband internet to communities without an existing network. This infrastructure is primarily located along the Town's primary corridors (Route 68 and Route 62) and would require expansion to reach most residents. However, it could serve as a backbone to bring a new ISP into the area or be utilized by the town to initiate a municipal broadband network.

In the case of **Windstream**, infrastructure would need to be built to bring the resources into the Town, as well as to the residents and business. However, a dark fiber provider like MassBroadband 123 could be used to bridge the gap. Bringing fixed competition into the area would provide options to the residents that are currently lacking.

3.2.1 Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) Enrollment

The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) offered monthly service and device discounts to eligible households to reduce the burden of internet and technology. Households were eligible for ACP if their income was at or below 200% of the federal poverty guidelines or if they received benefits from certain assistance programs or grants. In February 2024, the zip code which Hubbardston primarily occupies had 144 ACP subscribers[6]. It is estimated that about 582 individuals out of 4,297 and 107 families out of 1,170 would qualify based on income alone. This program was ended on June 1st, 2024, but it is possible that it will receive additional funding in the future.

A program called Lifeline, established in 1985, is also available to support low-income households access broadband services. However, not all residents who previously received assistance from the ACP program may qualify for Lifeline, suggesting a potential gap in residents' ability to afford internet services.

However, while the ACP offered a $30 per month subsidy, the Lifeline subsidy is only up to $9.25 per month.

3.3 Community Anchor Institutions (CAIs)

Community anchor institutions (CAIs), such as schools, libraries, healthcare providers, public safety entities, and community support organizations, play an important role in providing outreach, access, equipment, and support services to help vulnerable populations, including low-income individuals, the unemployed, and older adults, make greater use of broadband services. These institutions serve as resources and allies in bridging the digital divide and ensuring that everyone has access to the benefits and opportunities that broadband connectivity can bring. In Hubbardston, there are several locations which either currently offer technical resources or have high potential to serve as CAIs in the future.

The **Hubbardston Public Schools** currently provide Chromebooks to their students, but do not have any kind of program listed to ensure that their students have internet access outside of the classroom. Schools have the opportunity to connect parents to broadband resources that will help their students succeed. As public institutions, they could also host seminars or classes about staying connected with technology and the internet.

Hubbardston Public Library provides guests access to computers and the internet. For those in remote areas where broadband is not currently offered or those who are burdened by the cost of technology or monthly internet, these resources allow residents to stay connected. In the future, the library could expand its current programming to include technology classes or information sessions connecting residents to broadband internet.

[6] Based on data published by Universal Service Administrative Co. at https://www.usac.org/about/affordable-connectivity-program/acp-enrollment-and-claims-tracker/

The **Hubbardston Senior Center** offers scheduled technology services as part of their monthly programming. Additional services, such as advertised access to computers and internet, could encourage seniors to better use online resources for healthcare and connection to their families.

Religious Institutions such as Hubbardston Federated Church and Evangelical Congregational Church can play a large role in bridging technology gaps for residents of Hubbardston. Religious institutions often host classes and support groups for people in need, which could include technology classes. Additionally, religious leaders can be a helpful tool for identifying need within the community due to their close relationship with their congregation. Altogether, Hubbardston religious institutions could serve as invaluable resources to create programming specific to the needs of the public.

The **Hubbardston Police Department** plays an important role in the town as a public safety entity. It additionally is responsible for many safety programs, including computer and internet safety. By informing residents about how to avoid phishing scams and fraud, they can feel more confident using internet resources. Additionally, in the case of an emergency, the police can help unserved residents get connected to important resources they may otherwise not have access to.

3.4 Device Access

In Hubbardston, approximately 1,452 households out of 1,553 have a computer, while 1,410 have a broadband internet subscription.

4 Key Findings

From public input and interviews, challenges, opportunities, and resources were identified throughout Hubbardston in regard to digital literacy and access.

4.1 Barriers and Challenges

The Town is very rural and has complex **topography** including a high tree coverage. This makes cell phone coverage across the Town inconsistent/unreliable, putting a stronger emphasis on fixed (wired) options.

There is also a **high remote work and homeschool population** living in the Town, particularly since the pandemic, which further emphasizes the need for reliable, high speed internet.

However, there is currently only **one fixed broadband provider** in the Town which limits residents' options. Additionally, customers have shared that customer service from this provider is not adequate for meeting their needs in terms of both reliability and service. Additionally, according to residents, streaming-level or video call-level speeds are not affordable.

Several residents also shared during the public engagement sessions that they do not feel safe on the internet. This indicates an opportunity for education within the community, especially the aging population.

Lastly, as has been discussed at length at the committee level, the issue of lack of competition caused largely by regulations at the federal (FCC) and/or State levels limits or certainly discourages multiple providers willing to consider serving communities, especially a rural, somewhat remote community such as Hubbardston. As an example, two cell towers were approved for installation in the recent past to have multiple providers using for their transmitters, yet that is not occurring.

4.2 Assets and Strengths

There is a **computer and Wi-Fi available at the Library** for public use. As has been noted above, the physical characteristics of the town, lack of direct hard wire broadband connectivity and the low reliability or gaps in the cell service result in the need for many residents to visit the library to

connect and complete their respective tasks. However, it was noted that the location of the computer is not private and could make it difficult to conduct a work meeting or perform sensitive tasks (pay bills, etc.). Having only one computer also means availability of the computer is limited. Library hours also limit the ability to use these resources after-hours or on days the Library is closed (including Fridays and Sundays). Since the Town Hall has relocated to a new building, some building space within the municipal building is being repurposed to provide additional workspace. The project will repurpose former office spaces into multipurpose rooms suitable for library activities, including story time and other community programs.

5 Recommendations and Conclusion

5.1 Action Plan

The Town of Hubbardston's Digital Equity Plan provides a framework to unite existing work efforts and build new initiatives under a focused, evidence-based strategy for cooperative effort. Achieving digital equity for all residents will require a concerted effort by the government, community-based organizations, higher education organizations, and individuals who are committed to the goals of the Digital Equity Plan. To achieve this vision and goals, the Digital Equity Steering Committee/ Broadband Committee is committed to taking the following strategies, as shown in Table 4. Each strategy identifies the focus areas, lead organization, cost, funding opportunities", and timeframe.

The cost is an approximation of the financial cost (capital or operational), defined as follows:

- "$": less than $5,000
- "$$": $5,000 to $50,000
- "$$$": more than $50,000

The timeframe is the anticipated length of time for the completion of a given strategy, defined as follows:

- "short-term": 0 months to one (1) year
- "mid-term": one (1) to three (3) years
- "long-term": more than three (3) years

Table 5 depicts the nine (9) focus area icons for the different strategies.

Table 4. Action Plan

Focus Area(s)	Strategy	Description	Lead Organization	Cost	Funding Opportunities	Timeframe
	Town's Website Digital Services/ Resources	Create or enhance the Town's website, specifically focused on digital services/resources, which can include a refresh of the Broadband Committee's page and provide weblinks to the Library resources and Police Department. This website may include short training videos on various topics of "how to", security protections, etc.	Broadband Committee/Town Staff/Police Department	$*	Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program	Short-term
	Digital Management and Promotion	Continue the broadband committee that was established for the purpose of the MBI Digital Equity Plan development.	Town Administration and Selectboard	$	N/A	Short-term
	Establish "Digital Navigators"	Create a group of "Digital Navigators" at Library, Senior Center, Hospital, Housing Authorities, and Public Safety Facility. A Digital Navigator typically involves assisting individuals, especially those from marginalized communities, in accessing and utilizing technology to improve their lives. These could possibly be through high school community service volunteers or retirees instead of pay for service entities.	Digital Equity Steering Committee/Broadband Committee, Hubbardston Public Schools	$*	AARP, Healthy Aging Funds	Short-term
	Continue working to expand "wired" internet options across the Town	Pursue discussions with existing and potential service providers such as FiberSpring (South Hadley), Whip City (Westfield) or private firms to bring more options to homes, especially those with existing "wireless" internet barriers.	Town Administration	$	BEAD Program‡	Mid-term
	Purchase additional digital devices for public use at the	Acquire additional tablets, desktop/laptop computers, printers, hot spots, and instructional materials. Modernize the	Town IT Department, Hubbardston Public Library, Senior Center	$$$	AARP, Healthy Aging Funds, Community	Mid-term

Focus Area(s)	Strategy	Description	Lead Organization	Cost	Funding Opportunities	Timeframe
	Library and Senior Center	space/equipment for residents and visitors.			Compact IT Grant Program, Healthy Aging Funds	
	Increase device support staff at Library and Senior Center	Provide additional staff or volunteers at Library and Senior Center to manage new digital devices and provide troubleshooting support to the public.	Library, Council on Aging	$$	AARP, Healthy Aging Funds	Mid-term
	Create a digital library of on-demand digital skills training	Create/compile a library of on-demand training that can be hosted in-person or viewed online on the Town's broadband/digital website for free.	Digital Equity Steering Committee/Broadband Committee, Library	$	Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program	Mid-term
	Provide digital skills workshops	Host in-person workshops covering online safety, digital skills, and device troubleshooting	Broadband Committee, Library and schools	$*	Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program	Mid-term
	Update the Town's Bylaws and land development regulations to require developers to install conduits for future use	While the potential of new major development is relatively low in the town, require developers to install conduit(s) for future use by internet/cable providers as part of their approvals and construction.	Town Administration	$	N/A	Mid-term
	Increasing Infrastructure *"Dig Once Polices"*[7]	Whether it is town utility or roadway construction projects, or other utility providers' projects, the town should require, as part of the local granting right-of-way access, to install conduit banks for future cabling or ensure new utility poles have adequate capacity to carry	Town Administration and Related Departments	$	N/A	Short-term

[7] Some Dig Once policies focus on the installation of new broadband and telecommunications infrastructure during the excavation phase of major infrastructure projects. Other Dig Once policies focus less on telecommunications and more on aligning departments and agencies so multiple investments can be made simultaneously, such as upgrading water and sewer lines while rehabilitating a roadway.

Focus Area(s)	Strategy	Description	Lead Organization	Cost	Funding Opportunities	Timeframe
		broadband fiber. (This is not an MBI requirement or action.)				
	Modify law and regulations to allow Open Access Type Networks	With real or perceived ability to foster competition, this action would further encourage multiple providers to serve the town with the intention of reducing gaps in service, improving reliability and overall service, and possibly reducing customer costs.	Broadband Committee	$	N/A	Short-term initiation; Long-term solution

* This strategy could be accomplished at no cost by volunteers but may require paid staff.

‡ The Town of Hubbardston is not eligible to apply directly for BEAD Deployment funds, but unserved and underserved passings may be connected as part of this program.

Table 5. Focus Area Legend

Focus Area Icon	Focus Area Description	Focus Area Icon	Focus Area Description
	Staff Capacity for Digital Equity		Digital Literacy
	Wi-Fi Access and Innovative Connectivity Technology		Device Distribution and Refurbishment
	Public Space Modernization		Education, Outreach, and Adoption
	Connectivity for Economic Hardship		Access Diversification
	Policies for Future Access		

5.2 Funding Opportunities

Various funding programs are available to help address the needs listed in Section 4. Project-specific applications should be researched and prepared in advance of the application deadlines, but the following programs have been identified as being applicable for the Town of Hubbardston identified needs.

- BEAD Program: https://broadband.masstech.org/bead-program
- MBI Digital Equity Implementation: https://broadband.masstech.org/digital-equity-implementation
- USDA's Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grants: https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/telecommunications-programs/distance-learning-telemedicine-grants
- Affordable Housing Trust: https://www.mass.gov/info-details/affordable-housing-trust-fund-ahtf
- Residential Retrofit Program: https://broadband.masstech.org/retrofit
- Community Compact IT Grant: https://www.mass.gov/community-compact-it-grant-program
- Community Compact Municipal Fiber Grant: https://www.mass.gov/municipal-fiber-grant-program
- Gap Network Grant: https://broadband.masstech.org/gap-networks-grant-program
- Massachusetts Community Health & Healthy Aging Funds: https://mahealthfunds.org/
- AARP Foundation Grants: https://www.aarp.org/aarp-foundation/grants/
- Retrofit Ancillary Grantee (RANGE) Program: https://broadband.masstech.org/RANGE
- Launchpad Program: https://broadband.masstech.org/launchpad-program

5.3 Conclusion

The Town of Hubbardston has completed a holistic analysis of its existing infrastructure with regard to digital equity. In the short term, supporting digital literacy education and technology resources in the public realm can help Hubbardston residents feel more comfortable with the infrastructure and assets already in place. Helping seniors and members of the public feel more confident in using digital resources for their everyday lives, like telehealth appointments or supporting school-age children with homework, can build habits that will improve confidence and comfort. Most importantly for the future success of the community and maintaining its population, the Town, working together with the MBI and the State, must find ways to increase reliable fiber service to all parts of the community.

Sharing the successes of these programs while mid and long-term funding is being secured can provide a continued sense of sponsorship among the residents, who can act as project champions in future endeavors.

Hubbardston
Massachusetts