

STATE OF VERMONT
PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION

Case No. 21-0045-PET

Petition of Pear Networks LLC d/b/a Kingdom	)
Fiber for designation as an Eligible	)
Telecommunications Carrier in 27 northern	)
Vermont census block groups	)

**DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SERVICE COMMENTS REGARDING PETITION OF
KINGDOM FIBER FOR
ELIGIBLE TELECOMMUNICATIONS CARRIER DESIGNATION**

On January 7, 2021, Pear Networks LLC d/b/a Kingdom Fiber (“Kingdom Fiber”) filed with the Public Utility Commission (“Commission”) a petition seeking designation as an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier (“ETC”) for the purpose of deploying and providing voice and broadband service in those census blocks for which Kingdom Fiber’s designated bidder was selected as winning bidder in Vermont under the Federal Communications Commission’s (“FCC”) Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (“RDOF”) Phase I Auction (Auction 904). As a condition for Kingdom Fiber’s receipt of federal funding and building in those census blocks (the “RDOF Census Blocks”) specified in its petition, the company is required to obtain designation as an ETC.

The Department of Public Service (“Department”) has reviewed Kingdom Fiber’s petition and, as further explained in Prefiled Testimony, conducted an analysis of the awarded RDOF Census Blocks in order to corroborate the locations to which Kingdom Fiber is required to build and deploy voice and broadband service consistent with the FCC’s RDOF rules.¹ For the

¹ Federal Communications Commission, *In the Matter of Rural Digital Opportunity Fund*, Report and Order, January 30, 2020, ¶¶ 7, 31-65, <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/FCC-20-5A1.pdf> (“RDOF Order”). Although this analysis lies outside the scope of the criteria for granting ETC status, it is nonetheless an important facet for the Department, as the public interest representative, to consider in crafting its recommendation.

reasons stated herein and in Prefiled Testimony, the Department is satisfied that the information provided demonstrates in sufficient detail compliance with all applicable federal requirements for designation as an ETC, including 47 C.F.R. §§ 54.101 and 54.400 *et seq.* As stated in Prefiled Testimony, grant of ETC designation to Kingdom Fiber will allow for the company to provide critical voice and broadband services to consumers within its designated service territory, including eligible low-income consumers.

The Department is encouraged by the diverse and robust participation in RDOF Phase I in order for providers to build and serve those unserved areas of the state. That said, while RDOF awardees must comply with certain milestones as required by the FCC, the Department notes that the Commission continues to serve as the primary authority for ETC designation and the requisite ETC obligations.² Therefore, for the reasons stated in Prefiled Testimony and in order to best serve the public interest and ensure proper oversight of Kingdom Fiber's ETC obligations as they relate to the RDOF Census Blocks, the Department recommends the following:

1. That the Commission require Kingdom Fiber to file with the Commission and the Department any and all deployment milestone reports filed with the FCC during the RDOF support term, which shall include the number of locations served with stand-alone voice in the applicable RDOF Census Block.³

2. To the extent Kingdom Fiber does not indicate in its petition or certifications the various marketing and outreach efforts used in advertising the required Lifeline services, the Commission require Kingdom Fiber to file no less than 60 days prior to the time it begins to

² The Department also notes that pursuant to any Certificate of Public Good issued to a provider to operate in the state, the provider is subject to the jurisdiction of the Commission and required to comply with all Commission Rules. The Department disputes any assertions that certain subjects and benefits referenced in RDOF ETC petitions pertain to non-jurisdictional products and services (apart from broadband) and therefore reserves the right to further discuss and act on the matter.

³ *RDOF Order*, ¶¶ 7, 31-65.

provide service in the RDOF Census Blocks a marketing plan that describes the marketing and outreach efforts Kingdom Fiber will use in advertising the availability of the required services and explain how it will be effective in reaching eligible consumers. While some of the following information is highlighted in Kingdom Fiber's petition, the Department recommends that, consistent with other ETC designations,⁴ the marketing plan specifically describe:

- A. Whether information about the required services is clearly displayed on the Kingdom Fiber website, as applicable;
- B. Kingdom Fiber's use of multiple outreach methods;
- C. The frequency of its outreach efforts;
- D. Whether Kingdom Fiber will provide outreach materials to relevant community institutions;
- E. Whether it will advertise in multiple languages if appropriate;
- F. The use of clear and plain language when describing the required services;
and
- G. Possible cooperation with other ETCs for the joint production, placement and use of outreach materials.

3. That the Commission require Kingdom Fiber to file the marketing plan with the Commission and the Department by June 30 of the year following initiation of service in the RDOF Census Blocks and each year thereafter for the duration of the RDOF program.

It is the position of the Department that grant of Kingdom Fiber's ETC designation request will promote the general good of the state and further state telecommunications policies and planning goals as outlined in 30 V.S.A. § 202c. The Department therefore recommends that,

⁴ See, e.g., *In re Designation of Eligible Telecommunications Carriers Under the Telecommunications Act of 1996*, Docket 7969, Order of 5/23/2013 at 9.

subject to the above conditions, the Commission approve Kingdom Fiber's request without further hearings or investigation.

Dated at Waterbury, Vermont this 24th day of March, 2021.

VERMONT DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SERVICE

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