

FIVE TOWN CABLE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Representing the Towns of Great Barrington, Lee, Lenox, Sheffield and Stockbridge
Minutes
December 13, 2016
6:30pm
Sheffield Town Hall
21 Depot Square
Sheffield, MA

Members Present: Linda Miller –Lenox
Steven Moritz – Lee
Tom Hatch – Great Barrington
William Lehman – Stockbridge
Rene Wood - Sheffield

Others Present: Tom Cohan - Charter
John Fogarty – Time Warner
Leo Mahoney – CTSB
Will Ryan – Board President, CTSB
Denise Curtin – Recording Secretary
Tom Wickham – Lee Selectman
Jennifer Tabakin – Great Barrington Town Manager
Member of press

6:30pm Linda Miller called the meeting to order.
Quorum present. All 5 towns represented.

MINUTES: Linda Miller moved to dispense with the reading of the minutes of September 13, 2016 meeting and to accept the minutes as submitted with no changes. Seconded by Rene Wood and Tom Hatch. The motion carried unanimously.

Committee members introduced themselves to attendees.

CTSB REPORT:

Leo Mahoney was present to give report.

Fall Festival of Shakespeare:

- The production of the 28th Fall Festival of Shakespeare and Company has concluded and everything went well with the exception of a snowstorm. Never in all of the 28 years have they ever had to cancel a performance.
- The Chatham and Taconic Hills students were very disappointed especially after 12 weeks of preparation. It was decided that the performance would be held on December 3rd. CTSB was contacted and asked if they could record this performance. We gladly obliged and recorded from the balcony with a single camera. We then added in the custom opens and the other special clips that are on the first 8 shows. In addition, we are giving Chatham and Taconic Hills free streams and discounted discs if ordered by January 30, 2017.
- Regular cost of the released plays are \$12.95 for lifetime streaming, per show and \$3.95 for individual show.

Fiber upgrade update:

- This project is going into its' 10th month. Time Warner Cable has not made the connections in their head-end needed to activate the fiber. Time Warner was to make changes to their patch-bay so that CTSB could test the fiber after the interface equipment was installed at the town halls. Nothing can move forward until this is completed and tested. We have escalated this issue to this committee.
- We received the cards that are required for the fiber to come into the town halls, however, these cards are analog cards. Leo has questioned this equipment as it is analog and would not allow CTSB to send an HD signal to the head-end. CTSB purchased \$14k in fiber gear to replace the analog cards. We felt that it was not cost worthy to install the analog cards and then have to go back and change them out to digital. CTSB is requesting to be reimbursed out of the peg fee capital for this upgrade.
- Checks received for 2016 have had deductions taken out and marked for "construction funds". We have never seen deductions from our checks before. Of the \$115,995 dollars, \$7,217 was removed to put into the construction fund.
- Discussion took place later in the meeting when Charter presented their report.
- CTSB is always welcoming new members. It is \$15.00 per year. We do accept members outside of the 5 towns. The members from the 5 towns have priority for equipment use. All members are entitled to use all equipment, the studio, editing, and training workshops.
- CTSB will hold a members meet and greet on January 18, 2017. Invitations will be sent in early January.
- Solar – Yes, CTSB has gone solar effective December 12th. The system we have has enough power to operate the station at full capacity with surplus energy sold back to the electric company. The project was completely funded by Lee Bank.

CHARTER REPORT:

- The committee received the Charter report prior to this meeting, along with several news releases. Included in this was information related to the low cost, high speed internet service that will be available to families that qualify with students eligible for free/reduced lunch. Also senior citizens who are 65 and older who receive Supplemental Security Income program benefits. Question was asked if Charter would see if excluding current customers who would otherwise qualify was under Charter's control, rather than it being a federal requirement, and if so, if they would consider modifying their offering to make it available to current customers.
- Discussion regarding the Capital grant and peg operating fees ensued, particularly the \$212k capital amount and the .19 per subscriber and how these are calculated.
- Relating to the \$212k, John Fogarty referenced 5.7 Peg Access Capital Funding section (a) of the contract that a portion states..the Licensee shall provide a combined total of \$212,000 to be used for PEG capital equipment to the five Towns (Lee, Lenox, Stockbridge, Great Barrington, Sheffield)no later than ninety (90) days prior to such payment date. The total capital/facilities payment will be made in one payment, 90 days after the Effective Date of this license. The equipment purchased with the capital funding provided under this Section will be generally comparable to the equipment listed on Exhibit F.
- That amount can be re-couped under federal law. \$50k has been partially re-couped as shown in Exhibit A spreadsheet that was given to the committee prior to this meeting.
- As stated in Section 5.7 (c) In no case shall said capital funding be counted against or included in the five percent (5%) PEG access funding pursuant to Section 5.7(a) above.
- As per Exhibit B sent to committee prior there is a total balance remaining in the PEG Fee of \$38,252.04.

Fiber Upgrade –

- Leo Mahoney from CTSB, as stated earlier, purchased HD equipment for the fiber upgrade as the equipment provided was analog.
- Tom Cohan said that you received what was required to give you as per industry standard. If you want to upgrade then it's up to you.
- Question was asked "could we return" the analog equipment? Tom Cohan said he would look into it.
- Estimate of project completion will be active on January 31, 2017 as per Tom Cohan.
- Questions arose as to what is "industry standard". Is it SD or HD? Are you giving us low standard or high standard?
- Tom said at the moment it is a mix of channels related to bandwidth.
- David Parker from Lee asked if all channels go to HD then would Peg channels go to HD?
- Tom Cohan indicated that people are more interested in high speed internet than TV programming.
- Jennifer Tabakin, Town Manager of Great Barrington asked if Great Barrington and south county will have access to higher speed internet to supply local businesses.
- Tom Cohan indicated that Charter/Spectrum can provide local businesses with any speed internet. She asked how many of the businesses in town have access to high speed internet – Tom replied he was not able to discuss individual businesses service.
- Linda Miller indicated that this meeting was specific to cable television and suggested that Jennifer and Tom discuss at another time.
- Asa Hardcastle is a member of the Tech Committee in Great Barrington and questioned the concept of bandwidth relating to downloading/uploading quickly? These kinds of questions are asked by potential businesses looking to move into town.
- Again, suggestion was made that the Tech committee invite Charter to one of their meetings.
- Jennifer asked why is this not able to be talked about at this meeting? Linda replied that officially we can't discuss anything outside of our franchise.

Customer Survey –

- A draft of the customer survey was sent to the committee prior to meeting.
- Plan is to send out in June of 2017.
- Linda Miller said that the draft needs a lot of work. The committee will re-draft what we think needs to be in the survey with the kind of questions we want answered. Once re-drafted we will send to Tom Cohan.

Merger –

- When will merger be final? Tom Cohan said that it should be final end of 1st quarter of 2017.
- He also said that Charter is the name of the company, however, Spectrum is the name of the service and that is what you will see on their trucks and equipment.

Channel 19 Guide (scrolling television guide channel)

- People are very upset that this channel has been eliminated.
- Tom Cohan indicated that this electronic program guide is available to subscribers with set top boxes. What happens to the basic subscriber who can't afford a set-top box?
- Tom stated that the programming guide can be found in your local paper. However, our local paper The Berkshire Eagle does not carry the entire programming guide and many people don't get the local paper.

- Tom indicated that this was a corporate decision and nothing was going to change.

Communication –

- Needs to improve!
- Committee needs to get notification when any correspondence is going to be sent out to our towns.
- Tom Cohan said that he will add the committee members to receive any communication that is sent out to the towns.
- Linda requested that any communication going out to the public that the committee should be notified at least a day before it is released.

Customer question –

- Committee member received a question from a Stockbridge resident that “if living in Stockbridge, just over the Great Barrington/Housatonic line can this subscriber bundle services even though they have a 274 phone number?”
- Answer was that Charter has no control over phone numbers, this is all done by the phone company and would be a phone company issue.
- Jim Biancolo, local subscriber couldn’t be at the meeting tonight but submitted a list of questions that he would like answers to. Linda provided a copy to Tom Cohan and Tom will try to answer and will contact Jim directly.

OLD BUSINESS –

- None

NEW BUSINESS –

- Tom Hatch, Great Barrington representative, wanted to make known that his phone number is not listed in the local phone book. If you need to reach him for any issues related to your cable please go to the town website. Log on to [Townofgb.org/Town government/List of committees/Advisory committees/Cable committee/](http://Townofgb.org/Town%20government/List%20of%20committees/Advisory%20committees/Cable%20committee/) click on Tom’s name and you will get his email address.

CITIZEN SPEAK TIME -

Tom Wickham – Lee Selectman

- Asked if there was any update on the monies appropriated for legal counsel if we need it.
- Linda Miller said that we were working on the issue and hopefully will not need any of the monies appropriated by each of the towns for legal counsel.
- Right now Charter has committed to providing the set top boxes free for one year. Once the announcement becomes official by Charter that a fee will be imposed for each set top box then this committee will get active about a breach of our contract.
- Rene Wood suggested that we may consider an executive session if this moves forward to legal proceedings.
- Rene will look at the criteria for holding an executive session.

Next meeting of the Five Town Cable Advisory Committee will be held Tuesday, March 14, 2016 in Lenox at 6:30pm.

Motion made by Steve Moritz to adjourn. Motion seconded by David Parker and motion carried unanimously. Meeting adjourned 8:20pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Denise Curtin
Recording Secretary