

FIVE TOWN CABLE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Representing the Towns of Great Barrington, Lee, Lenox, Sheffield and Stockbridge
Minutes
March 20, 2018
6:30pm
Sheffield Town Hall
One Depot Square
Sheffield, MA

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

Others Present: Melinda Kinney - Charter
John Fogarty – Charter
George Doin - Charter
Leo Mahoney – CTSB
Denise Curtin – Recording Secretary
Members of the Press
Local Residents

6:32pm Linda Miller called the meeting to order.

MINUTES: Linda Miller moved to dispense with the reading of the minutes of December 19, 2017.
Motion was seconded by Tom Hatch.
Rene Wood asked to make some amendments to the minutes before accepting them.
Suggested amendments were read by Rene. All were agreed upon, with the exception of one statement related to the information received from legal counsel. It was suggested the statement would remain as is and that the attorney email be attached to the minutes when distributed to the 5 towns.
Linda Miller made a motion to accept the minutes as corrected. Motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

CTSB REPORT:

Leo Mahoney was present to give the report.

- 2017 Scholarship Award of \$1,000 was given to Angelique Nejaime.
- Fiber in the high schools was discussed. Leo said that he and Will (CTSB) met with Jim Sikit at Mt. Everett High School to tell him that the school would be connected on fiber soon. Jim indicated that their equipment is out of date and not feasible to use. Leo offered up a long term loan for an HD camera for the school to use.
- Upgrade to fiber at 4 high schools is still NOT underway. Garth(Charter) met with me and our operations manager, Chris for a site survey and Garth told us that he would “work up numbers” and get them to his boss. There is some confusion related to the “cost” of the project as Melinda had already sent me the cost of the project and it has already been approved by the CTSB Board. Melinda said she would look into who generated those numbers.

- There is a drop dead date of the 2nd week of May now. We need schools up and ready by that timeframe for annual town meetings in Lenox, Mt. Everett and Lee. Great Barrington does not want live coverage of the meeting. The Sheffield meeting, held at Mt. Everett High School, is scheduled for May 7, 2018.
- PEG channels -
 - Peg channels have been moved to digital channels 1301, 1302 and 1303.
 - CTSB gets several calls per week from customers wondering where they can find these channels.
 - We are finding it very difficult to help our elderly customers who just don't understand the new equipment and the changes that have been made and that some elderly residents at the Lee Senior Center find that the connection is bad. George Doin from Spectrum said that he would follow-up on the connection.
- Stats were given for the December/January/February timeframe that included studio time, training time, editing, and class time. There were 53 meetings covered, 24 of which were live and 155 hours of recorded time.
- Membership numbers have dropped a bit, but are expected to climb back toward the 130 number once people renew.
- Much discussion ensued regarding the location of the peg channels and why they now reside in the 1300's.
 - How do customers go through basic channels to the 1300 channels to find the peg channels?
 - Are they in the basic tier? John Fogarty from Spectrum said that they are legally required to put local broadcast stations and peg channels in the basic tier package.
 - Who decides what channel goes where? Spectrum programming group makes these decisions.
 - Why can't you find "CTSB" in the search on the guide? You have to input "public access", "government access", etc. to locate these channels.
 - It was stated that there is a function in the "guide" that you can program your "favorite" channels and eliminate the in-between channels.
 - Rene asked if there was a listing of what channels are in just the basic tier. Melinda said she would put in the follow-up report a list of the channels on basic tier.
 - Melinda said that a public service announcement could be done telling customers where these channels are now. They have found it very helpful in other parts of the country.
- Steve Moritz asked Leo if our meetings are archived. Leo said yes they are and he would let him know how far back they go.
- CTSB has received checks for 3 of the towns. 1 is scheduled for receipt tomorrow and the last check should also be tomorrow.
- Linda indicated that there are penalties that are incurred when these checks are not received on time.
- Melinda said that she has spoken to CTSB regarding doing direct deposit to eliminate this in the future. She will follow-up.

SPECTRUM REPORT:

- Melinda Kinney and John Fogarty present to give report. George Doin was also present.
- Breach of License-
 - This issue was discussed at previous meetings and Spectrum is comfortable with their position that they are not in breach of the licensing agreement.

Peg Fee pass through –

Spectrum indicated that as of March 2018 there was \$145k remaining to be recouped by Charter of the initial \$212k grant.

Linda Miller said that the \$212k was a "grant" initially given by Time Warner for capital support.

Linda read the definition of "grant".

There was disagreement on both sides about the "grant" and the "peg access" fees and how each was being used.

It was agreed upon to table the discussion to a later time.

Digital Transition update –

- Project still on track.
- George Doin indicated that they are still extremely busy and are bringing more technicians into the area to assist them.
- Steve Moritz made note that he has received nothing but high praise for your technicians.

High School Sports coverage –

- Melinda checked with programming and at this time there are no Berkshire County High School football games scheduled to air.
- Linda indicated that football season is over and we're now onto baseball. Why can't we in Berkshire County at least be able to get scores of our county High School sports and local news covered on the Spectrum news channels? Melinda will look into this.

Same channel, Different tiers –

- Tom Hatch asked why are some channels in different tiers in different towns (i.e. Pittsfield vs. Great Barrington). He specifically mentioned BET.
- John Fogarty said that all contracts are negotiated with programming behind the scenes. The channel contracts are negotiated with programmers. These are highly confidential agreements and won't be shared.

Equipment charges and other pricing –

- Why is it a different price for boxes for Legacy Time Warner and Spectrum customers? Melinda doesn't think they are the same boxes but will check on it.
- Steve Moritz asked if there was a master list of what people pay based on where they are? Melinda said there was a list and will email it to Steve.
- What determines when a customer goes from Legacy Time Warner to Spectrum? Melinda said that when a customer moves into a new package they would be transferred to a Spectrum customer.
- Tom Hatch spoke about how channel 10 has blocked programming when channel 5 has duplicate programming. He would like to know why some programs are still blocked when they are not duplicates.
 - Melinda will follow-up with engineering team as to why this happens.
- Linda Miller visited the Lanesboro committee and wants to know why customers have to travel to Chicopee to change out equipment. George Doin spoke to this and said that it was because they are presently 2 different billing systems. Integration is in progress.
- Rene Wood still feels that the communication between the committee and Spectrum is very poor. She has asked Anna Lucey for over 3 months now for various answers and has had no response.

Linda Miller asked that anybody who is having issues, no matter what the issue is, please call the Attorney General's office and file your complaint. The phone number is 617-727-8400. The only way the AG can take action is if enough people contact her office.

There is also a website to which you can address your complaints. www.mass.gov/get-consumer-support.

CITIZEN SPEAK –

- Sheffield resident, Katie Woodhouse addressed Melinda and John and said that in the last few months her bill has increased nearly 50%. This is a very ethical concern. Many people rely on their television and internet to keep in touch with the world. To be paying \$200 a month is unethical! Melinda asked her to

Speak off-line at the conclusion of the meeting to get her account information and she will look into it for her.

- Ashley Falls resident Paul Tepper is wondering why when 2 of his 3 boxes don't work he is not allowed to switch them out. When he calls he is told they will "reboot" his system. He was told tonight by the Spectrum reps that if he went to the Lee office that he could certainly switch out the boxes for new ones.
 - He also indicated that the channel listings don't match what they actually get.
 - What is the "secure connection" that we get charged \$1.00 per month for? Spectrum could not answer the question and Melinda said she would look into it.

OLD BUSINESS –

- No old business.

NEW BUSINESS –

- Town Executives progress was discussed. All towns agreed to have Christopher Ketchen represent them.
- Linda has called Chris but hasn't heard back from him yet as to their progress.
- Rene said that Great Barrington is working independently on their progress report.
- Elizabeth Warren's office is working on action from the FCC and Congress to help deal with problems with the FCC current regulations.

OTHER BUSINESS –

- Broadband Expansion – does not directly affect us but does affect our neighbors and is on hold right now
- Rene has spoken to Senator Hinds regarding the Spectrum issues that we are experiencing.
- Linda spoke about our five towns together don't have enough sway with corporations like Charter. Our needs are very different.
- Suggestion was made to, at some point, consider the establishment of a single cable advisory committee for ALL of Berkshire County. If all of Berkshire County spoke with 1 voice it might get us more clout and attention.

NEXT MEETING DATE – Tuesday, June 12, 2018 at Lenox Town Hall.

Motion made by Steve Moritz to adjourn. Motion seconded by Tom Hatch. Motion carried unanimously.
Meeting adjourned 8:25pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Denise Curtin
Recording Secretary