

FIVE TOWN CABLE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Representing the Towns of Great Barrington, Lee, Lenox, Sheffield and Stockbridge
Minutes
September 8, 2020
6:30pm
MEETING HELD VIA ZOOM

Members Present: Linda Miller –Lenox
Tom Hatch – Great Barrington
Jim Brown – Great Barrington
Michael Kernan – Great Barrington
Rene Wood – Sheffield

Others Present: John Maher - Charter
George Doin - Charter
Rich Frederick – CTSB
Michael Mael – DTC
Dennis Arseneau – Potential Lenox Committee Member
Jim Biancolo – Lenox Resident
Denise Curtin – Recording Secretary

6:34pm Linda Miller called the meeting to order.

MINUTES: Linda Miller moved to dispense with the reading of the minutes of March 10, 2020. Motion was seconded by Tom Hatch.

Sheffield Area (underserved):

- Rene Wood informed the committee that she has been learning about our underserved areas in Sheffield.
- In our contract we have the ability to request strand maps from Charter.
- John Maher has been very cooperative in working to get this information.
- There is a conference call next week to discuss.
- Rene Wood wanted to compliment John Maher in being timely in responding with Sheffield residents.
- John Maher in turn passed on the compliment to George Doin as he helps John with everything in the Berkshires.

SPECTRUM REPORT:

- John Maher presented the Spectrum report. George Doin was also on the zoom call.

Pandemic –

- All Charter front line workers were given raises retroactive to March.
- Currently in the process of raising its minimum wage from \$15 to \$20 per hour.
- Charter also provided free internet service to nearly 450,000 students and teachers for 60 days and then it was extended.
- Charter also kept approximately 700,000 customers connected when they were unable to pay bills and forgave \$85 million in customers' overdue balances.

Rate Increase –

- The increase that is being passed through to viewers is the direct result of rising programming costs.
- Internet rates remain consistent.

Lee Office –

- Due to the Covid pandemic Charter made the decision to close the local office from April 8 – July 13th for the health and safety of their employees.

Subscriber Complaints –

- Choice package not available in Lenox. John Maher stated that all packaging issues should be directed to customer service.
- Continue to receive complaints regarding the billing date and payment windows.
- WSHM (Channel 3) not in HD – no plans to do so at this time.
- Birchwood Village in Lenox –
 - Sunday, Linda Miller took a walk around Birchwood Village to view the exposed wires, equipment exposed and open connectors.
 - George Doin spoke to the matter and stated that they are in process of repairing. However, due to the pandemic they are struggling in getting material and equipment in a timely manner.
 - George also stated that he walked the property with the property manager to see the wires laying on the surface and he said that they will take care of getting them buried.
 - George requested from Linda Miller to pinpoint exact areas that need attention and Linda said she would get specifics to him.
 - Linda Miller stated that as per our contract 3.19b “equipment is to be kept in proper condition”.
 - Linda Miller requested an October 1st completion date and George Doin said they are stretched thin and he is doing his best to get this completed asap.

P&L request –

- Michael Kernan asked for the Charter P&L and Balance sheets.
- Committee was told this is proprietary information and not available to the public, however Charter is a public company and we should be able to get this information off their website.
- It was also stated that we have the right to audit Spectrum, although we have no plans to do so.

2023 Contract –

- Michael Mael from DTC was on our Zoom call.
- Linda Miller indicated that we will be constituting a sub-committee as the liaison for license renewal discussions.
- The sub-committee will be negotiating and we will not just be accepting a re-do of the current contract exactly as it is now.
- We have significant issues as it is right now.
- Linda Miller asked Michael Mael - Is there any new information within the last 10 years regarding negotiations?
- The process hasn't changed.
- Charter was de-regulated about a year ago and DTC has appealed the decision to the courts, not the FCC.
- Michael Mael explained that the P & L was in fact proprietary. However, some communities do have it in their contracts to get this information as long as they keep it proprietary.
- Form 200 is a company balance sheet and that is a public document.

- Form 300 within the DTC is used to calculate the annual assessment which is assessed to each operator based on their revenue.
- Other communities like to see on a more granular level to be able to verify that the % of revenue franchise fees being passed through and collected by Charter and turned over to towns tie out to the revenue they receive. This is done on a town by town basis.
- Linda Miller asked if there were any newer Charter agreements out there with updated clauses about supplying information?
- Michael Mael said that the DTC website is updated with all licenses that have been renewed recently. He thinks Charter hasn't had any recent renewals since 2018.
- Linda Miller asked if we have to file any specific intent with DTC that we are starting to open contract negotiations?
- Michael Mael said that historically Form 626 letter is sent from the operator to the communities just as an indicator that we are opening the renewal window.
- The importance the letter being sent within that 6 month window protects both sides appellate rights in case any issues that have concerns with the process that both sides can appeal the decisions because everything was done within the timeframe.

CTSB REPORT:

- Rich Frederick presented the report.

Town Meetings, Graduations, Facebook broadcasts –

- In August CTSB recorded 29 town meetings, 28 of which were held virtually on Zoom and 5 of those meeting were broadcast live.
- All high school graduations were broadcast on their channel or on Facebook page.
- CTSB has been providing services remotely, in person and online via their new improved website and being able to stream videos live to the website and Facebook page.

Virus Update –

- We have followed all state guidelines for reopening the studio safely to the public and staff.
- Employees rotate days while others work from home.
- We have 3 pro Zoom accounts and are able to host meetings for up to 1,000 participants.

Membership –

- Remains close to an all-time high of 136 with 135 current members.

Videographers –

- Our paid videographers continue to do great work by recording public meetings, shows with public officials related to COVID and our former station manager, Leo Mahoney, has brought church services into our studio. This has been a great time to show the importance of community television.

Spectrum Update –

- CTSB received our annual check in March. The total of the checks for all five towns was \$489,119.57 which was down 3% from the previous year.
- Linda Miller told John Maher that CTSB is still not listed as CTSB.
 - We continue to receive questions from subscribers as to why.
 - The only way to find is to look for “government access”, “educational access” or “public or community access”.
 - John Maher said he thought we wanted it to say “local”, however it doesn’t even say that.
 - We want CTSB in the guide.
- Linda Miller asked John Maher about the PSA schedule that ran about a year ago and why we haven’t received it yet?
- Linda Miller reached out to the community to let them know that CTSB is always looking for volunteers and new members.

Committee thanked John, George and Rich for their reports.

OLD BUSINESS:

- Jim Brown indicated that the zip code still is not correct for Great Barrington.
- On the bill it states to contact Great Barrington, but shows the Lee zip code.
- John Maher asked if he could receive an email with a copy of the bill, and Jim Brown said he would send it.

CITIZEN SPEAK:

- Jim Biancolo from Lenox brought up the “choice package” not being available in Lenox.
- Are Choice packages different from Streaming packages?
- George Doin indicated that there a multitude of different packages available and you should contact customer service to discuss which packages are available to you in your area.
- Jim also asked if he should contact customer service if he has issues with his Roku, and George Doin said yes.

NEW BUSINESS –

- None.

OTHER BUSINESS –

- None.

NEXT MEETING DATE – Tuesday, December 8, 2020 at 6:30pm in Sheffield, if we are able to meet in person.

Motion made by Tom hatch to adjourn. Motion seconded by Michael Kernan. Motion carried unanimously.
Meeting adjourned 7:32pm by Linda Miller.

Respectfully submitted,
Denise Curtin
Recording Secretary