

FIVE TOWN CABLE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Representing the Towns of Great Barrington, Lee, Lenox, Sheffield and Stockbridge
Minutes
March 8, 2022
6:30pm
Sheffield Town Hall, Sheffield, MA

MEETING WAS HELD IN PERSON FOLLOWING COVID PROTOCOLS

Members Present: Linda Miller –Lenox
Dennis Arseneau - Lenox
Michael Canales – Stockbridge
Tom Hatch – Great Barrington
Rene Wood – Sheffield
Bobby Paley - Lee

Others Present: John Maher - Charter
Rich Frederick – CTSB

6:35pm Linda Miller called the meeting to order.

MINUTES: Motion made by Bobby Paley to dispense with the reading of the minutes of December 14, 2021 and approve as presented.
Seconded by Michael Canales.
Motion carried unanimously.

CTSB REPORT:

- Rich Frederick presented the CTSB report.

Current Happenings

- CTSB, in partnership with the Lee Library, has announced the 2nd short film contest with entries due on April 15th 2022. This year's theme is "Think Spring", and we look forward to seeing the creative works from our community.
- The Lee Historical Society, along with Phil Smith, is currently airing on our public channel and social media sites, "Rock Stars and Paper Tigers". This is about the history of Lee paper mills and marble quarries.
- We are now over 140 members.
- The Farmington River School in Otis is working on some ideas to get their kids involved with CTSB and South Berk Kids and are discussing some programming ideas.
- Our outdoor weather camera will be online in a couple of weeks.

Busy Season

- Spring is one of our busy seasons with high school graduations and annual town meetings. These all happen during the end of May into the first few weeks of June.
- In addition, CTSB will be recording and streaming the 2022 Mona Sherman Memorial Lecture on Saturday, May 28th. This year's speaker will be Congressman Jamie Raskin, head of the January 6th Commission and author of Unthinkable: Trauma, Truth, and the Trials of American Democracy. CTSB plans to stream this event in partnership with Olli and the Mahaiwe Theater.

- We will also be working on another event in August which is the Elizabeth Freeman Memorial being held in Sheffield.

Zoom Remote Meetings

- The CTSB Zoom accounts are now mostly webinar based are now available to be used by some towns and school committees by logging in under a newly created CTSB email account. This allows for meetings to be hosted and recorded without using CTSB staff.

Annual Report and Funding

- We will begin working on our annual report in the coming weeks.
- This year our report will be more readable with supporting photos and highlighted facts.
- If our funding is consistent, Rich Frederick will be asking the board to consider hiring a part-time videographer to supplement our loss of part time videographers.
- If we lose funding, then this may cause layoffs.

Other

- Rich Frederick says that their building and equipment is the best it has ever been, and they have an amazing staff.
- Michael Canales stated that the direction that meetings are going will possibly be all hybrid, remote meetings.
- Decision at the state level has not been made yet.
- Question was asked about compensation from other towns using CTSB outside of our five towns.
- If personnel are on-site in studio the staff will be happy to help and answer any questions that may arise.
- If the outside town is creating a production that CTSB does not work on, then they will have to produce it themselves.
- Still working on “kitchen, cooking” shows.
- Linda Miller thinks we should reach out to local restaurants/chefs to do some teaching shows.
- Bobby Paley asked about how much “sponshorships” would cost. Rich Frederick responded that he was unsure. It would depend on the production and staffing needs.
- Bobby Paley asked for information and she would look into it.

SPECTRUM REPORT

John Maher presented the Spectrum report.

Price Adjustments

- The upcoming price adjustments have been sent out to customers.
- Broadcast TV charges are up \$3.00 - \$3.50, varied by community.
- Digital receivers increased by \$1.00.
- Rene Wood asked how do you get these price increases, where do they come from?
- John Maher replied that it is totally deregulated, and programming fees all go up and they in turn pass along the cost increases.
- Is there no state oversight, you can just increase and pass along?
- Linda Miller asked why equipment price increase? Boxes haven’t changed, they haven’t been upgraded, so why the increase?
- Dennis Arseneau said a typical basic subscriber is now paying approximately \$161.00 per year.

- We have received 45 written complaints over the past month.
- The committee is shocked and outraged by these increases.
- Rene Wood stated that John Maher is in a position to listen and carry our concerns back to corporate.
- Dennis Arseneau and Rene Wood will put our concerns in a letter and forward to our chairman.
- Michael Canales said we have a monopoly here and we can't do anything about it. The state has failed to get competition.
- Dennis Arseneau asked if John Maher could please send a rate card to us.
- Linda Miller asked why it is so hard to find rates on the website? This should be user friendly. She would like this put in the letter also.

Billing

- We are still concerned that subscribers are receiving their bills on the day it is due, or after and they are getting charged late fees.
- We ask John Maher to please raise this up the flagpole.
- Tom Hatch asked how much time before a late fee is assessed?
- John Maher said 30 days and the late fee is \$8.95. 60 days before it would go to collection.
- Dennis Arseneau said that on-line billing is very easy, however there are a lot of people who do not want to put their credit card number online.

Lee Office

- Tom Hatch said that the Lee office does not accept payments anymore. Is that true?
- They don't have their hours posted on the door anymore either.
- He said he was unable to exchange equipment at the Lee office. John Maher said it was because they ran out of inventory. Tom Hatch went to Pittsfield office with no problems.
- You are also unable to call this office directly, you have to go through the 800 #.
- Are they trying to close this office?
- Rene Wood said that they have to give us notice if they are planning to close the office.
- John Maher to get answers to our questions.

Complaints

- Michael Canales is concerned that we have 0 complaints logged.
- Dennis Arseneau said that this issue is being addressed by counsel and is not for discussion at this meeting.

Linda Miller asked John Maher to have answers to our questions in writing within 30 days.

Rene Wood said John Maher is very responsive and does get answers to us.

LICENSE RENEWAL

- The License renewal sub-committee currently consists of Linda Miller, Dennis Arseneau and Rene Wood.
- The mission of the sub-committee is to take a comprehensive review and in-depth analysis of our communities' cable related needs to ultimately negotiate the best cable tv license renewal possible for our communities.
- Dennis Arseneau thanked Linda Miller and Rene Wood for their experience and expertise in town government which is very helpful with working on this renewal.
- Rene Wood in turn thanked Dennis Arseneau for doing such great research to find other Charter contract renewals that we can review and help us with our negotiations.

Before the license renewal negotiations, we need to:

1. Review the cable operator's performance on existing lines and identify cable related needs and interests of our communities.
 2. Do survey to get input from our customers to respond digitally.
 3. Review other agreements across the state with other companies.
 4. Draft a 5 town ascertainment report in advance of negotiations.
- Rene Wood told the committee that we have received commitments from all 5 towns to provide funding for legal counsel during the negotiation period.
 - Linda Miller is preparing to work on holding the public hearings.
 - Last license renewal hearings we took dollars to run an ad for the hearing.

CITIZEN SPEAK

- None.

NEW BUSINESS

- None.

OTHER BUSINESS

- Michael Canales stated that he was confused as to what this committee is all about.
- He does not feel that we are very productive and wants to know how we can become more productive.
- Rene Wood indicated that this was not her favorite committee as we seem to get nothing accomplished and discuss more personal issues.
- We should be focused more on complaints from our communities and how can we get things resolved.
- How can we do our job differently in helping people with their issues?

This committee needs members, as well as additional members at CTSB.

Motion made to adjourn by Rene Wood, seconded by Tom Hatch. Motion carried unanimously and meeting was adjourned at 7:50pm.

NEXT MEETING DATE – Tuesday, June 14, 2022 at 6:30pm in Lenox, MA.

Respectfully submitted,
Denise Curtin
Recording Secretary