

Meeting Minutes

Cable Advisory Committee

50 Officer Familia Way f/k/a Skyline Drive, Meeting Room A, Worcester

May 2, 2023 @ 6:00pm

Meeting is in person and access via WebEx

Approved June 14, 2023

To join meeting online using WebEx platform:

- ❖ go to www.webex.com
- ❖ click the "join" button on the top right side of the screen
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To attend via phone:

- ❖ call 1-415-655-0001
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1. Call meeting to Order

2. Roll Call

Present: Stephen Quist, John Keough, Philip Lwasa, Jeffrey Levering, William Nay. Judith Warren (Director Worcester Cable Services). Susan Buske (PEG Renewal Consultant). Sergio Bacelis joined late.

3. Membership Update (Warren)

Warren: William Nay is CTAC's new member; has a background in PEG access and has been involved in renewal process previously

4. Approve Minutes from April 5, 2023

Moved: Levering; Seconded: Quist; Roll Call (5 Yes, 0 No)

5. Ascertainment Consultant Update (Buske)

Buske: Focus groups had good turnout with good feedback. Compliance audit is in process: table has been made

6. Education Signal Quality Update (Warren)

Warren: Charter reached out to test the signal, Christine (Director, WEA-TV) can provide additional information

Christine: Charter did not tell Christine when they were coming. Work was done to improve the signal, but for further improvements, Charter would have to go underground which requires collaboration with Verizon. Despite improvements, remote origination for Ed Channel is still utilizing old technology and an upgrade to fiber is desired. Unsure if fiber needs can be addressed under current contract.

Warren: Fiber can be discussed now, regardless.

Quist: Is fiber in contract? Does the contract say things should be using latest/current technology?

Buske: Contract has general language that technology must be kept up-to-date, but does not specify details. Some additional specific fiber-drops for remote origination are specified, however.

Quist: This at least shows a lack of advance in technology.

Christine: Ed Channel has fiber drop from Worcester Tech, but not from Administration building

Quist: Was Administration building originally intended to be a remote origination site?

Warren: Yes

Mauro: Two contracts ago PEG was ensured equal quality/technology to other channels, but previous contract did not have this language

Warren: Will reach out to Charter again, including Christine, to work together to finalize quality improvements.

Quist: Do other public buildings have fiber?

Warren: If they do it would be for the City's network, not specifically PEG purposes.

Christine: iNet is used in most places, and there is a push to disconnect this system

Buske: Section 6.1 provides for installation of fiber or comparable technology in specific locations, including the Administration building.

7. Legislative Update (Levering)

Levering: Have been tracking streaming bill, which would attempt to get streaming services to provide 5% of annual revenue to state/PEG. Bill is currently in committee, with a public hearing to come.

Quist: We can reach out to Sen. Moore to discuss

Levering: So far been unable to discuss due to scheduling issues

Quist: A discussion within Worcester could provide an opportunity for the public who cannot attend hearing in Boston to speak to their concerns

Nay: Has there been discussion with City councilors, etc, to gauge support?

Levering: Outreach has not occurred. Working with City Manager to help this process.

Quist: Mass Access info– there is an amendment to state level legislation to provide a grant program that supports PEG stations, through Mass Access or Alliance for Community Media. Has been merged with other amendments.

8. Spectrum Meeting – Open Questions (Levering)

Levering: In previous meeting, CTAC asked questions to Spectrum representatives. Many questions were answered, to some extent, but several have been left open.

- What stations are City residents paying broadcast fee for?

- Is there a broadcast fee for Spectrum Choice, and is this based on channels that are selected?

- Does Spectrum still believe they are following the contract, considering downgrading of PEG signal from HD to SD.

Keough: Charter said they did not consider this a signal change, but a programming change. They used the term “conversion down”, this constitutes an admission of changing the signal. Federal law for down conversion requires notice outside the license. This is an issue for the Law Department.

- Quist: Can we add this to list of contract non-compliance concerns

- Buske: We will address this issue in addition to others in compliance review. When table is completed there will be a process with the Law Department to provide this list to Spectrum for review

- Keough: Senior discount question: Spectrum believed effective competition was

established and no longer had to provide the discount. City considers senior discount valid for the life of the contract.

9. Members comments to Contract and Broadband

Keough: Thank you to the chair for the opportunity to give a basic statement. From the moment I came to be a part of the board I recognized that the people here, almost all volunteers, were committed to a diligent approach to the work we have volunteered for. It has both inspired and uplifted me. Most people don't care about this work but I was hopeful that City Manager Batista would. By going on the record in a public radio show and in print that he intends to renew the cable license with Charter/Spectrum he has undercut the work we are doing here. He has also stated that municipal broadband is very impossible although he has since walked that back. I can't really speak to municipal broadband because our purview is cable television. For the city to maximize its potential gain in a new license agreement the chance for non-renewal has to be present. It has to be available, it has to be on the table. Taking it off the table is foolish at best and negligent at worst. I will avoid making any suggestion that it's nefarious. I wanted to be clear, I'm not saying that the license shouldn't be renewed or that it should. I am saying that this board should be allowed to do its work without interference, otherwise why nominate us? Why give us any authority? What's the point of the Buske group? This public statement was not well timed and I publicly stand against it.

Keough: Moved to put forth a letter from the committee asking the City Manager what he means by renewal of the cable license.

Quist: Seconded with friendly amendment:

- A member of CTAC should be added to negotiation team for contract negotiations.
- This committee should vote to hire a cable attorney to represent us in negotiations.
- request city manager to appear before CTAC so board can discuss in detail what they are asking for and responsibilities
- Advisory committee should be changed from advisory committee to commission

Keough: No objections to amendments.

Levering: Suggested reviewing recommendations from 2013 CTAC to see what made it into the final contract. Recommended a special meeting to draft new motion/communication for City Manager so board can vote on what to do.

Keough: Revised motion: For committee to work on letter together over next two weeks to create a consensus language about our suggestions. Two members would work on letter and present it to CTAC for approval; Seconded: Quist; Roll Call (6 Yes, 0 No)

10.Adjournment

Next Meeting: May 10, 6pm (Virtual)

Following Meeting: June 7, 6pm (Location TBD)

Nay: Requested information regarding Verizon wires being run in Worcester.

Keough: According to City Council minutes, these wires use existing infrastructure

Nay: To Buske - Much of eastern Massachusetts has multiple cable providers, using public rights of way. How can we address this?

Buske: Cable TV franchise laws have nothing to do with other services, such as phone or broadband. Massachusetts or municipal law may address use of public rights of way for these services, but cable has specific rules.

Moved: Levering; Seconded: Quist; Roll Call (6 Yes, 0 No)