



CABLE TELEVISION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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**Cable Television Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, April 5, 2023 @ 6:00pm
Esther Howland Room, 3rd floor Worcester City Hall
Approved May 2, 2023**

THIS MEETING IS IN PERSON and Virtual via WEBEX

To join meeting online using WebEx platform:

- † go to www.webex.com
- † click the "join" button on the top right side of the screen
- † enter the meeting ID, 160 794 8474

To attend via phone:

- † call 1-415-655-0001
- enter the access code: 160 794 8474

1. Call meeting to order
6:00pm

2. Roll Call

Present: John Keough, Steven Quist, Philip Lwasa, Sergio Bacelis, Jeff Levering. Judith Warren (Director, Cable Services)

3. Approve Minutes from March 1, 2023

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

4. Ascertainment Consultant Update (Buske)

Buske: Updated board on continuing work on compliance tables and focus group preparation.

Quist: Education focus group has been canceled

5. Membership Update (Warren)

Warren: Citizens Advisory Committee nominated a new member who will be approved at the next City Council meeting. He will be able to join the May meeting.

6. Legislative Update (Levering)

Levering: There is an effort in the State House to gain revenue for PEG access across the state through streaming services. A draft letter for the City Manager is being prepared to urge legislators to support this initiative.

7. Spectrum Meeting

a. Introduction of Spectrum Representatives (Levering)

b. Committee Questions (Quist)

John Maher: Presented information about Charter's operations including coverage areas, employment, and community initiatives.

Levering: Do Charter/Spectrum storefronts currently sell devices such as Roku or Fire Sticks. Maher: Not aware of such items.

Quist: Which community in Massachusetts has the most lucrative contract? Maher: Worcester is the largest.

Quist: What specific technological advances in cable have been implemented over the past 10 years that have directly benefited subscribers and PEG channels? Maher: High definition, not offered to PEG channels.

Quist: does the contract require high definition? Maher: We are in full compliance with the current contract.

Quist: Have you been able to provide information that the committee has requested? Maher: Warren emails us about issues in the city, which we correct. Not aware of any outstanding requests for information.

Warren: There have been several emails regarding broadcast speeds, number of channels included, and estimates for charges. This information has not come in. Information on franchise fees required follow-up to get a response. It is a struggle to get information regarding origination sites. Information about franchise fees has not been received. Maher: Recently responded to programming and broadcast fee questions.

Quist: Spectrum charges a broadcast fee to cover cost of local channels. What channels, specifically, are Worcester residents paying for? Maher: Whatever channels are received in Worcester. Quist: Can we

receive that list via email?

Levering: If the specific number of channels is what Worcester residents pay fee for, what happens for residents using Spectrum Choice who are not receiving those channels, or are only receiving some. Are they paying broadcast fee? Maher: They should not be, but unsure. Levering: requested this information

Quist: Under contract, Worcester is guaranteed 4 PEG channels, but only 3 are being utilized. What is the process to start the 4th channel if the City chose? Maher: it would need to be requested in writing. Quist: What next? Maher: Location would need to be surveyed for logistics, determine costs, etc before equipment could be set out.

Keough: Are there any restrictions as to who can apply for this channel, such as what organization? How do they apply? Maher: Request must come through the City and City Manager? Keough: Are there any restrictions on who (individual vs community organization)? Maher: Typically programming is Public, Educational, and Government, but it is up to the City Manager ultimately.

Quist: Who pays the cost for new location? Maher: Charter/Spectrum would be responsible if it is in the contract. These funds come from cable subscribers, and Charter/Spectrum collects them.

Quist: PEG channels moved from low channel numbers to high numbers. How did this benefit the subscribers of Worcester? Maher: We did this with every community. Quist: Why? Maher: We did this in every community. Quist: What was the reasoning? Maher: I was not involved in this decision making. Quist: Are you involved in bringing channels back to where they are easily found? Maher: We (Charter/Spectrum) have a right to put channels wherever we want...would not change where the channels are. Quist: You don't think that would help the city/subscribers? 80% in the next two years are looking to leave? Maher: We listen to our customers. Quist: Why do you think customers want to leave? Maher: That is a personal decision....there are a lot of options where people can get service from.

Keough: Movement of PEG channels from lower number to a higher channel...can you see how that would affect customers without income options to change services, who may have a hard time with technology (eg: older folks who cant find channels). Maher: Channels have been changed for a number of years...where would you want them to go? Quist: Back where they were. Maher: That would be difficult.

Quist: Do you support newer technology such as roku and firesticks that would save residents money? What steps have you taken to help Worcester residents use these devices versus the expensive Spectrum boxes?What kind of business does not accept its own equipment back when people try to return it via the postal service? Maher: (regarding Roku/Firesticks) Customers are happy to do whatever they want with those services. Quist: Have you offered it? Maher: We don't sell those products. We support them but we don't sell them.

Quist: Billing notifications are abysmal with subscribers...subscribers are getting bills the day before they are due, which is like having a bill that is due upon receipt (not permitted under contract). Community survey respondents said they did not receive clear communication about cost changes, can you comment on that? Maher: We have a right to collect fees that are due to us, if it was in error we correct the error....we try to communicate any changes to programming or prices. Levering: People did not receive notification of price changes, or thought it was difficult to understand or find on statements. Maher: It's on the statement.

Keough: in relation to low income offerings - Spectrum Internet Assist and Broadband Accessibility Package...lower income residents are being offered substandard services. This is one of the largest types of feedback we have received. The speeds being offered limit access to content...is there any work on there being a better option for this? Maher: This is an option people can choose. Keough: Can you communicate information with us that we can relay to current customers with complaints? Maher: That is our current program being offered. We started the hundred megabit option at a different price point... Keough: Do you know if, in different contracts across the country, certain speeds are required in relation to cable? Maher: No

Quist: PEG channels produce content in high definition, yet signals are not distributed that way. Contract stipulates there is to be no degradation of quality in transmission. Any comment? Maher: No. Quist: Do you provide high definition for PEG channels? Maher: We do not. .. There is a separate business transaction where we could get a circuit for high definition but we do not do it with the current contract.

Keough: When PEG channels produce content in high definition, but it is received in standard definition. The contract states there is to be no degradation of the signal, so how is the content being changed to standard definition? Response: this is a format change, not degradation of service. Quist: Can you clarify this for Judy. Keough: Has "format change" been negotiated in other contracts? Maher: No. Quist: does any other community in Massachusetts have its PEG channels in high definition. Maher: Not that I am aware of.

Quist: In a citywide survey, a large number of TV subscribers intend to cancel in the next two years due to cost, or wont subscribe due to cost. Spectrum implemented an option called Spectrum Choice where subscribers only pay for what they use. What steps has Spectrum taken to ensure that Worcester subscribers are aware of this option and what does this service cost? Maher: Folks can choose from various options. Quist: How do you reach customers to make subscribers aware of Spectrum Choice? Maher: Industry doesn't have a la carte programming, it is too difficult to do. It may move in that direction...we haven't got there yet.

Quist: What can spectrum do to better manage costs to retain television subscribers or entice former subscribers back? Maher: If programming costs went down that would help, we dont have any control over that. Quist: What were your gross profits last year? Maher: No idea. Our stock prices cut in half over the last several years. Quist: What about Massachusetts numbers? Maher: I don't have access to that information. I would not provide that. It is not public information...we are a public company but i would not provide community or state specific information.

Levering: It keeps coming up that cost is a driver for customers to leave...is spectrum thinking creatively about affordable packages, such as Spectrum choice, and better communicating them to the community? Maher: Other services, such as YouTube TV, have to pay programming fees. They are expensive, it is an industry problem. Levering: What about a la carte/unbundling? Maher: There are contractual reasons we cannot do that.

Lwasa: How do you prioritize customer satisfaction and how are you addressing the concerns raised by customers? Maher: Every customer contact we have is recorded. We do listen to our customers when they have concerns. We want our customers to be happy with our service and our customer service.

8. Adjournment

Next meeting set for May 2.

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

Adjourned 6:55pm