

## **CABLE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING**

**Monday, June 18, 2018--6 PM--Richmond Town Hall**

Present: Sean Wilson, Ed Fechner, Monica Zanin, Tom Grizey, Neal Pilson

Absent: David Wyatt

The first meeting of the CAC was called to order by member and Select Board Chair Neal Pilson at 6:05 PM. Neal advised that he would be willing to serve as temporary Chair of the Committee until the Committee elected a permanent Chair. As a Selectman, Neal said he would prefer not to serve as Chair of the CAC. Neal also offered to take notes and prepare the minutes for the June 18 meeting.

The Committee members introduced themselves, described their relevant experience and reviewed the agenda. It was decided to elect a permanent Chair and Secretary at the next meeting.

Neal pointed out the goal of the Committee was to provide guidance, commentary and support to the Board of Selectman as the time approached for the town to negotiate a new cable franchise agreement with TimeWarner Cable (was Charter and now is Spectrum).

In order to educate themselves about the cable universe in Berkshire County, the Committee members felt they needed the following information:

1. A copy of the current Richmond Cable agreement (copies were made available to each member).
2. Also circulated were copies of the proposed West Stockbridge and Egremont cable agreements.
3. The members asked Neal to request that Town Administrator Mark Pruhensky secure a copy of the TWC template for franchise agreements with towns of relatively the same size as Richmond.
4. The Committee asked for information on the annual cable franchise fees paid by TWC to Richmond.
5. The Committee also asked how many homes in Richmond are serviced by TWC and what services are provided (TV, Internet, phone)? It was pointed out that Richmond Networkx apparently has an exclusive franchise for phone services in the town. The Committee asked to see a copy of that agreement and expressed the opinion that the

town would have more leverage in its negotiations with TWC if the town could grant a phone service contract as well as TV and Internet.

6. The Committee felt it would be helpful to talk to Egremont and West Stockbridge officials about the status of their discussions with TWC. We should also contact the 5 Town Cable Consortium (Lenox, Lee, Stockbridge, Gt. Barrington and Sheffield) to ascertain the status of their negotiations with TWC.

7. The Committee also discussed the current media articles about the possibility of having our cable carrier bring in TV signals from Boston and Springfield so Richmond residents could get MA news, sports (namely the Patriots and Red Sox) and weather from MA stations rather than rely on the Albany stations. Neal pointed out the history going back 50 years of an industry compromise by and among stations, cable companies and program suppliers that led to the FCC rules about the 75 mile exclusive zone for local TV stations and the "must carry" rules that govern what channels and programs can be carried by cable systems in those zones. He suggested that this topic might be outside the scope of the Richmond Committee's competence to change or influence.

The Committee discussed the provisions of the current ten year agreement with TWC and noted the expiration date of January 17, 2021. Also noted was the fact that there are no specified negotiation dates set forth in the agreement. Neal advised that the town has received a notice from TWC to begin discussions on a new agreement and he suggested the first meeting could take place in the fall of this year. He said he would ask the Town Administrator to schedule such a meeting.

The Committee then agreed on the following "Next Steps" to prepare for their next meeting:

1. Each member should read and familiarize themselves with the franchise agreements already discussed and whatever additional agreements can be secured. Sean offered to meet with the West Stockbridge committee chairman to get his input.
2. At the next meeting, the Committee should discuss the current Richmond agreement in detail and prepare a "Wish List" of terms and conditions it would like to see in any new agreement including TV equipment for RCS, a local access channel, a revised fee structure for residents, etc.
3. A timetable for discussions with TWC should be discussed.
4. A permanent Chair and Secretary will be chosen.
5. Hopefully Town Administrator Mark Pruhensky can attend the next meeting.

The next meeting date and time for the CAC was set for **Wednesday, August 1 at 6 PM** at Town Hall.

On motion, the meeting adjourned at 7:06 PM.

If the members have any suggested edits, corrections or additions to these minutes, please send to the writer before the next meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Neal Pilson, temporary Secretary