

CABLE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

Tuesday, February 6, 2019--5 PM--Richmond Town Hall

Present: Jeffrey Diamond, Ed Fechner, Tom Grizey, Neal Pilson, Sean Wilson

Absent: David Wyatt

The fourth meeting of the CAC was called to order by Committee Co-Chair and Select Chair Neal Pilson at 5:00 PM.

As the first order of business, Richmond Town Manager Mark Pruhenski joined the Committee for a scheduled call with Melinda Kinney, Charter Communication's regional Government Affairs Manager covering Massachusetts among other states to discuss the upcoming license renewal negotiations for the town. Neal introduced the CAC and Ms. Kinney described her team's role at Charter. She further explained that she hoped to hire a new person who would be dedicated to Massachusetts and who would lead the negotiation from Charter's side.

According to Ms. Kinney, there are 530 Spectrum subscribers in Richmond.

Neal referred to the 5-town co-operative (Great Barrington, Lee, Lenox, Sheffield and Stockbridge) which represents those towns and to Rep. Smitty Pignatelli's recent letter suggesting that other Berkshire towns might also join for purposes of negotiating for cable services and asked Ms. Kinney for comment. Ms. Kinney replied that the negotiations could proceed for Richmond either singly or together with other towns, but, in her opinion, unless there were specific and unusual needs that the town wished to address, the fastest and least expensive process would be to negotiate the renewal singly. She further commented that she would need to confirm whether Richmond could join with other towns and which towns because of the technical configuration of the equipment and lines serving the town.

The committee then discussed, with Ms. Kinney, some initial ideas to include in the renewed license, including –

- increased coverage for remaining, unserved homes
- school grants to fund TV production facilities at Richmond Consolidated School
- municipal grants to enable recording and airing of public meetings for the town
- addition of telephone service to TV and internet (Ms. Kinney believed this was already feasible but would confirm)

Neal commented that Spectrum had included these provisions in other town license agreements and Ms. Kinney explained that these and any other capital investments would need to be recovered through the franchise fee that Spectrum charges to

Richmond subscribers, thereby increasing the cost of the service to town residents. She further explained that, while Charter might provide grant funding for recording town public meetings, the actual filming and airing of the meetings would need to be through one of the community television stations (PCTV in Pittsfield or CTSB in Lee).

Neal then asked what a typical timeline looked like and Ms. Kinney replied that the first step would be to hire a new staffer on her team to participate in the negotiations. She expected the new person to be onboard within 4-6 weeks. She then reported that similar negotiations typically take 6 months for a simple renegotiation, longer for a complex one, and that the key points for discussion were typically term, capital investment, service coverage and fee level.

At the conclusion of the call, the following next steps were agreed –

- Ms. Kinney to provide template of renewal agreement and introduce new staffer for renegotiations (mid-April)
- CAC to refine and prioritize list of desired requests for new agreement. Sean Wilson to work with Mark Pruhenski to develop article for town newsletter requesting feedback from residents on coverage gaps.

After disconnecting from the call, the Committee recapped and discussed the key learnings. The members agreed that the Committee should evaluate the cost/benefit of any capital investments, grants or other changes to the town's license agreement versus the cable fees paid by residents. It was also noted that the addition of telephone to the Spectrum services available to town, and the improved pricing by "bundling" phone, TV and internet, might offer residents the opportunity to reduce their overall telecommunication costs.

The Committee then proceeded with the remaining items on the agenda.

Neal referred to the draft minutes of the Committee's November 13th meeting, which had been circulated by email, and asked if there were any additions, deletions or amendments. There being no changes, a motion to accept the minutes as written was made, seconded and approved.

The CAC next discussed the December meeting of the 5-Town cable group, attended by Jeffrey Diamond, Ed Fechner, and Sean Wilson. The Committee's initial conclusion was that the group did not appear to offer significant advantage for Richmond and might increase the time and expense of the negotiation process. The Committee agreed to maintain communication with the 5-Town group and revisit the subject at a later meeting.

Neal reported that Jill Pompei had been appointed as interim Principal of Richmond Consolidated School and moved that she join the Committee to represent the school. The motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

The Committee agreed to meet again on Tuesday, April 9, at 5pm to prepare for the next meeting with Charter.

A motion to adjourn was made, seconded and approved and the meeting ended at 6:20pm.

Respectfully submitted by Sean Wilson, Secretary