

Montague Cable Advisory Committee
2nd Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall
Meeting Minutes for January 25, 2024.

Meeting convened 1/25/2024 7:10 pm. This meeting is taped.

Members present: Kristi Bodin, Jason Burbank, Ryne Hager, Richard Kuklewicz,

Also present: Steve Ellis, Town Administrator, Dean Garvin, MCTV manager, Dana Faldasz, MCTV Board chair, Deirdre Pleasant MCTV taping.

1. We welcome our new members, Kristi and Ryne.
2. We review the mission statement for the committee, found on the town website. Repeated here:

Provide advice to the Selectboard on matters related to Cable in the Town of Montague;

Provide liaison between the residents of Montague and the Cable Provider (currently Comcast), and to act as advocate for the residents with the Cable Provider regarding issues such as service, extensions of cable lines to rural residents, installation, rates, etc.;

Coordinate the franchising process of the Cable Provider, currently Comcast;

Oversee Montague's local public access station, currently Montague Community Television, Inc.

Jason, Kristi and Ryne note their strong interest in attending to the internet access available to the town through the Cable system.

3. Near Term Priorities: These include learning or reacquainting ourselves with the MCTV contract and our responsibility to provide feedback and periodic (at least annual) reviews. Steve provided handouts for the current contract and sample annual reports. Similarly for the Comcast contract renewal, we should begin our learning process. Steve has provided handouts from the State Department of Telecommunications and Cable which explain the process and its legal basis. If legal representation is used we will need to recommend a provider. The Comcast contract expires on August 31, 2025. This should give us time to complete the needed ascertainment process and issue an RFP if needed. The MCTV contract expires on June 30, 2026.
4. Need to recruit a fifth member. We note the benefit to the committee to obtain a quorum and make use of diverse knowledge and skills of multiple members. We are encouraged to invite anyone interested to apply,
5. Review of MCTV Annual reports and prep for review process: Steve notes we are outside of the 6 month window specified for our review of MCTV Annual reports, but we offer to do an informal review at our next meeting to provide feedback useful to the preparation of the 2023 Annual report. Jason asks that Dean send us the financial component of the 2022 Annual Report which we do not seem to have. We agree to move the 2023 report date out to 3/31/2024 so that it can include actual tax data. The following are preliminary comments or discussion points:
 - a. Ryne asks if there are any analytics available on viewership for either MCTV cable channel or for the Vimeo archives. Seems there are no cable channel data but it may be available for Vimeo. Dean will look into.
 - b. Steve notes that MCTV has taken on significant effort in facilitating town related meetings in a hybrid ((in person and online) format and this should be noted in their annual report
 - c. Serving residents who do not have Comcast's cable television package, can they see PEG access live? Can it be streamed live over an internet connection?
 - d. Fund raising on the part of MCTV. Any opportunities foreseen?
 - e. Community engagement, particularly into less served non English speaking communities. Steve notes resources at the school district in this area.
6. Preparation for Comcast contract negotiations.
 - a. The ascertainment process by which a community assesses the performance of its cable operator is an essential part of relicensing. Last done in 2015 with a public hearings as we recollect, as opposed to surveys.
 - b. Rich considers such a public hearing essential.

- c. We consider it a priority to maintain the PEG access function as cable television subscriptions diminish in the face of increasing internet streaming.
- d. Steve shares information about possible law firms to help with the process. August and Epstein were used for the last renewal, and KP Law who is the town's present attorney is another possibility.
- e. He notes there is a formal process using an rfp and an informal process which only entails direct negotiations.
- f. Current coverage of the cable system includes approximately 98.5% of town residences, with 37 houses left out. Steve says 14 of the 37 may be helped by "GAP" grants. The town is currently assessing digital equity issues.
- g. Ryne inquires if Comcast provides any viewer statistics. Apparently not to anyone's knowledge.

Next meeting is planned for 2/8/2024 at 5:30 pm via Zoom.

Rich moves to adjourn, seconded by Kristi, all are in favor. The meeting adjourned at 8:32 pm.