

Montague Cable Advisory Committee  
Meeting was remote by Zoom  
Meeting Minutes for April 9, 2024.

Meeting convened 4/9/2024 5:30 pm via Zoom. This meeting was recorded.

Members present: Kristi Bodin, Jason Burbank, Ryne Hager, Richard Kuklewicz (partially)  
Also present: Steve Ellis, Dean Garvin (partially), Walter Ramsey

## Cable Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes Draft

Meeting was called to order at 5:33 pm. All votes taken by Roll Call.

### 1) Review of prior minutes - 5:34

Minutes of prior meeting were reviewed and approved without modification. Jason moved for approval, Ryne seconded, and the vote to adopt the minutes was unanimous.

### 2) Review of the 2023 Annual Report

Members started with the Profit and Loss Budget for the year of 2023 following a short discussion of the available documents.

Steven noted that most income comes from the PEG access contract. Dean noted that there was a grant related to covid that is mostly sitting in a bank account, though it could be used for various things. Ryne asked if the statements met the requirements of the MCCI agreement and upon review it appears they may, though it's unclear if the report was fully audited. Dean noted that some of the expenses regarding inventory are described in the narrative report document and the utility and use cases of a remote transmitter included were discussed.

The accounting of purchases and inventories were discussed, with purchases noted in the quarterly reports. Total equipment inventory was not included in the report, but Dean said that information could be provided.

Assets regarding bank accounts were discussed, and Dean noted that the current balances, estimated by Jason at around  $\frac{1}{3}$  of a million dollars, were included in the report. Stephen mentioned that we may need to understand the long-term vision for those funds going forward when entering negotiations with Comcast. Rich stated that a plan to replace older equipment, like cameras, could also be useful information to consider. Dean mentioned that MCC's new cameras are more resilient than older Sony models and have not needed to be replaced.

Steven pointed out we were running short on time with Dean and that the MCCI Evaluation Rubric may be worth reviewing, asking the board if they agreed. Ryne asked if this were an academic exercise or if the date for evaluation had passed, but Steven pointed out that this was a requirement. The group moved on to a discussion of scope and quality of program.

The group reviewed the 2023 government production list of meetings and forums that were broadcast by MCTV, discussing some of the examples and benefits of having non-volunteers record the meetings, as well as some specific examples of the people who record the meetings and events. Ryne pointed out that the videos are produced on a budget of around 600 per video, which was a very good value. Rich agreed and pointed out they've done a good job producing content.

Moving to a discussion of outreach, Dean said that the primary efforts happened through going out and shooting events and discussed examples of businesses and organizations they have worked with in the area. Steven raised the the subject of training for outreach, and Dean noted that it was handled on a per-person basis — cameras are straightforward. A drone was mentioned as a possible future purchase, to the surprise of Ryne, who assumed that one would already have been purchased.

Running short on time, Dean gave a very brief summary of the vision going forward, specifically related to improving our interconnect/drop with Comcast for better digital broadcast, noting we are already in a better position than “the other side of the river.” This was noted as a detail to focus on in the upcoming contract, and that Dean may want to meet with more members of the board to describe and design a more detailed vision during the ascertainment process with Comcast, so capital expense requirements can be discussed during ascertainment.

Jason noted, when Dean had to leave, that there were lingering questions regarding analog vs. digital recording/equipment, and our relationship with Greenfield is less understood. Follow-up questions for Dean will be sent to Steve Ellis by Tuesday so communications can be consolidated. Goals for 2024 should be considered by the next meeting.

### 3) Learnings from Al Williams and Kathy Bisbee

Ryne reviewed his notes from the meeting, pointing out that we were encouraged to pursue an informal process, at least to start, rather than jump straight to the formal process. The scope of what we could ask for was also larger than expected, and that we should be aggressive in considering the ways that the benefit of public broadcasting could be used in unanticipated ways. The importance of the ascertainment process was also stressed by Steven.

There was a short discussion on the nature of digital and analogue cable and how that may impact MCTV, and that could be a weak point for MCTV, and that could be a way to better utilize resources.

Steve's takeaways from the meeting were primarily three:

1. Know what we want, can dream bigger, and a community center is just a remarketing of PEG access.
2. Start with an informal process and only go to a formal process if we run into problems.
3. We are no longer early in the process, we need to get things in motion. As we have conversations with Comcast, things will have to be "kicked upstairs," and it may take time to get answers. We won't have the luxury of close negotiations, this will be a spread-out process.

Jason also pointed out that MCTV should be involved in the statement of needs for ascertainment, and that they should be encouraged to think big and strategically.

Steven pointed out that we have been trying to have a public community room/studio in the annex for some time. Would outfitting that room with equipment. MCTV's offices are a very small space, but they could have permanent space in this broadcast room. The utility to the community was briefly discussed, with many members in agreement.

Rich pointed out that affordable access for seniors is also a concern. Ryne mentioned that the Affordable Connectivity Program is ending. Steven said that the FRCOG is looking for ways to extend that, but is currently coming up empty. Is there anything we can do about that in regards to Comcast? We can always ask.

Rich left the meeting during this discussion.

Jason believes that, given the costs of service, it may not be critical to subsidize or reduce the costs. Ryne pointed out that there could be benefits that apply either way, simply in terms of data acquired in ascertainment that could be used for other efforts to bring affordable cable to the town.

Steven pointed out that we should engage with those making plans for digital equity in the area. The committee expressed interest in having Ryne engage with Maureen, though he can't specifically attend a meeting for that group in the next week. Introductions between the two will be arranged.

Kristi pointed out that she felt the authority of the committee in regards to internet connectivity is limited, and that Comcast's pricing model is not transparent. Ryne and Kristi both agreed that it was time to get an attorney, which led to the next item on the agenda.

## 4) Action Plan

The group discussed how to engage an attorney, Steven mentioned the attorneys that had previously sent us quotes and Jason asked if we had time to meet with them. Kristi and Ryne agreed that the results between attorneys may not be that substantially different, and Kristi

pointed out that one of the options listed had slightly more experience in the relevant subject. Bill August costs 240 an hour, but with more experience, he could take less time to do the work.

Ryne asked if we had context from our past contracts to estimate time or cost, and if those numbers were not immediately available, however they were not. Details regarding the process and benefits of engaging legal counsel were discussed, as well as the requirement to bring this before the selectboard. Kristi noted that a “fee letter” could serve this purpose tied to a specific number of agreed-upon hours that could be used to measure the total work required.

Steve said he would reach out to August tomorrow, cc Jason, and that a date to have the meeting could be determined. At this meeting, the MCTV evaluation could be determined, and we could talk with August about first steps in the informal process. This would require an executive session, due to discussion of legal strategy.

## 5) Next Meeting

Moving the rate of meetings forward seemed like a need based on a discussion of the committee, and a biweekly structure was quickly discussed, with the next meeting targeted for April 23rd, including Bill in an executive session. Steven noted he’d look for Tuesdays at 5PM should that date not work.

Kristi moved that we allow Steven to reach out for August for legal services in the ascertainment process and Jason seconded. All remaining members in attendance voted in the affirmative. Ascertainment and community outreach strategy will be discussed in the next meeting.

Steven asked Walter to follow-up regarding ascertainment with Eileen at Comcast to help inform the discussion, and that she should be invited to attend the next meeting.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:19, following a unanimous vote to do so.