

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

Meeting convened 7/9/2023 at 5PM.

Members present: Jason Burbank, Rick Kuklewicz, Kristi Bodin, Ryne Hager.

Also present: Town Administrator Walter Ramsey, Assistant town manager Chris Nolan-Zeller, and MCTV's Dean Garvin and Dana Faldasz.

Meeting was called to order 5:04 PM

1. Review and Approve Minutes

Following a short discussion of the level of detail in past minutes, minutes for June 11, 2024 and the meeting that occurred concurrently with the Selectboard during the public comment on 6/11 were also approved.

2. Debrief on Ascertainment Hearing

Jason asked for impressions following the meeting, and the group discussed how well the hearing seemed to go, as well as how strong the community support during the hearing was. Ryne noted that the Comcast representative seemed relieved that the discussion wasn't adversarial. A lack of local support offices for Comcast was noted as a complaint following the meeting, though that's outside the scope of the contract under negotiation.

An aspirational memo requesting some means of enhanced customer support could be attached to the contract, even so.

Separately from any contract discussion, providing members of the town with a guide on how to cut down costs for things like modem rental feed by purchasing their own was discussed, and content related to that could be put together for the town fairly easily.

a. Consider next steps in Ascertainment Process

Discussing gathering data from town members, the distance for connections for those customers not currently served was presented as an unknown, and reaching out to the handful of residents who do not have the option of service. A discussion followed regarding the sorts of questions that would be best to ask those residents, including: Do they want to be connected? How far are they from the closest connection?

Walter said he would pull together the data and reach out to those people not currently served by Comcast.

Jason expressed an interest in hearing town counsel's opinion regarding other ascertainment requirements or shortcomings, but the meeting members felt that ascertainment was a success and future decisions have been well informed.

3. Update on Draft License Agreement

Kristi expressed a concern regarding property damage limits in the contract, and possibly increasing those numbers. Walter said he would run these numbers past other town contracts as well as the town's insurance requirements. Numbers expressed in the "failure to perform" provisions were also points of contention, with Kristi expressing an interest in seeing larger numbers or a faster payout of the full contract.

Additional information is also required on the part of the town regarding technical details, which Dean or Dana may need to provide.

Restrictions on what the contract allows us to negotiate limit the responsibility of the committee greatly, though Dean said that additional funds to circumvent a lack of drops could be useful. Dean also mentioned a lack of origination sites, where the current/prior contract states that we should have more origination locations than we actually have, and two of those Comcast agreed to are missing, which could be points of negotiation — resources for remote transmission to existing origination sites could be more useful for MCTV than the missing origination sites might be, and perhaps Comcast would be willing to provide resources for that rather than addressing the long-unmet terms of the prior contract and dealing with potential complications of that.

The number of channels needed by MCTV were discussed, as the license can provide up to three, and Dean expressed an interest in having two SD channels together with the HD channel for more programming options. Rich also pointed out how useful the channels could be as streaming of town committee meetings increases.

Simulcast of GCTV content on one of the Montague channels was also discussed, and how that might impact requests for additional channel(s).

The increase in the requested payments by Comcast was raised by Walter, noting that the increase to \$165K or \$175 was based on inflation adjustment, but that we could possibly ask for more based on MCTV's proposed budget for equipment procurement over the next ten years.

Consensus indicated that there hadn't yet been enough time for a close review of the contract, and both members of the committee and the town need more time to examine the details.

Dean and Dana both left the meeting before the next agenda item.

a. Consider next steps in Comcast engagement

Walter plans to do outreach, double checking contract terms against our bonding and insurance requirements as well as communicating with those not currently served to gather data on how the license agreement might be modified to provide them with the opportunity of a cable connection.

Kristi expressed an interest in increasing efficiency of time use for town counsel. Moving forward counsel attendance in meetings will likely be reduced.

All members also need to fully review the draft contract in detail with a complete discussion outline as part of the next meeting's agenda.

4. Set next meeting date

Both July 23rd and August 13th were mentioned as options, with the committee settling for August 13th at 5PM.

5. Unanticipated Business

None.

Jason Burbank moved to end the meeting at 6:18 PM, and the meeting was adjourned, with the next meeting set for August 13th at 5PM.