

Montague Cable Advisory Committee
Meeting was remote by Zoom
Meeting Minutes for June 17, 2025.

Meeting convened at 5 PM.

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

Also present: Town Administrator Walter Ramsey, MCTV's Dean Garvin, MCTV's Dana Faldasz, and counsel Bill August.

Meeting was called to order at 5:03 PM.

1. Review and approve minutes 9/17/2024

Draft minutes were approved without any changes.

2. Updates from Counsel and review of Draft Cable Franchise License Agreement terms from Comcast. Votes may be taken

August dived in following a request of the committee to discuss the changes in Section 6 of the new licenses, including capital funding for the first five years which is provided at a set schedule. Following that, capital funding is proportional to and based upon subscriber count to a set per-subscriber fee. This was based on a compromise achieved during negotiations, and subscriber counts are expected to fall over time. Counsel recommended that the fixed sum be "banked" if possible.

August stressed this is also a non-exclusive license, and someone else could apply if another company enters our market.

Our new HD channel will cost us 10K, though another estimate may be coming, and our other SD channel will also see an upgrade with this change.

A definition of "revenue" for collected fees was also discussed, and August indicated that our definition was comprehensive and more generous than what some other towns receive.

Garvin noted that following the five years of fixed payments, payments based on subscriber counts occur quarterly rather than yearly.

Burbank asked if Comcast has agreed to all these figures, and August indicated that these terms are agreed upon. Burbank asked how we managed to get $\frac{1}{3}$ higher on the capital payments, and August indicated that he preferred fixed payments and this compromise was part of what was negotiated.

Declines in future subscriber counts were discussed, but August stressed that Comcast continues to raise rates, and that action could offset this. August shared an anecdote of another market that saw subscriber declines but otherwise flat rates due to this effect.

Faldasz asked about the current subscriber count, and August stated it as 1,550

Hager asked if the new HD channel was actually a benefit, given we had HD service in some capacity before, and Garvin indicated that this would be an improvement and something MCTV wanted.

Garvin asked if Comcast was still responsible for equipment, and August indicated that Comcast will be responsible for that equipment at the hub site so long as MCTV can provide the signal. Garvin asked about the point of origin, and August said that MCTV is responsible for providing the signal at the point of origin, and Comcast's responsibility only begins at the hub. Comcast will transport the signal from the remote site but end-user equipment required to generate an HD signal during production was the responsibility of MCTV. Garvin expressed concern about section 6.10.A, following which, August, Garvin, and Faldasz entered into a discussion of the technical requirements of transmission, including internet streaming origination, modulation and demodulation, IP encoders, HD production, and other details, ultimately agreeing everything was acceptable.

Faldasz did some math during the meeting to indicate we should at least meet the last contract's capital numbers given a reasonable number of subscribers — though he admits it was “fast math.”

August explained the process of general approval to us, including a recommendation to the selectboard from our committee once we're close to finalizing the license and the public hearing process that would follow. The selectboard can't delegate the final hearing, but they can have a shared or concurrent hearing with our committee. August also explained that congressional deregulation also poses a possible headache that could encourage us to move quickly.

Ramsay asked for counsel's advice on the latest regulations for the hearing and notice process, and August provided these.

Burbank indicated that the list of town locations to be provided with cable service in the contract does not include all public libraries in town in Montague Center and Millers Falls. Ramsay indicated that this was reviewed and not noted as an issue by the library provider. At Burbank's questioning, August said he'd ask about the possibility of providing internet to those facilities, as Comcast has some other promotions to that effect.

Bodin asked about the omission of the tech school and if it was intentional, and Kukelwicz indicated it was on a prior version of the document and may have been an omission.

August stressed that Comcast could start charging for cable access to schools in the future.

Before a natural segue to the senior citizens discussion, the committee had a vote, as there were no substantial changes to be made to the contract.

A roll-call vote was taken and the contract was unanimously approved for recommendation to the selectboard.

3. Comcast announcement to offer discount for Eligible Senior Citizens in Montague

The offer was reviewed, which is income based and provides up to a 10% discount.

4. Outline Next steps

Ramsey indicated that a public hearing with the selectboard could happen for July 14th or 28th during one of the bi-weekly selectboard meetings, which usually start at 6 or 6:30 PM.

Committee members indicated that they could attend for public input, and the 14th was selected as the most likely date, with the 28th as a backup.

August departed at 5:51 PM.

5. Set next meeting date

The committee noted it needed to review the yearly report from MCTV. Burbank proposed July 8th at 5PM over zoom for the next meeting. Walter will set the agenda and send out invites and will ensure we get the most recent copy of the report.

6. Unanticipated Business

Nada.

Meeting adjourned at 5:56