

Cable TV Advisory Committee

Meeting minutes - December 2, 2009

Present: **Committee Members:** Richard Potts, Mark Boyajian, David Pease, Jeff Sauer, and Mark Walsh
Member absent: Phil Durno and Debra Spratt

Mr. Potts called the meeting to order at 7:35pm. Mr. Sauer joined the meeting at 7:37pm

Videotaping School Committee Meetings: There was a discussion about the difficulties of videotaping NMRSD School Committee meetings given that those meetings are generally held in a room at the high school that presently does not have a cable drop. Videotaping would thus require volunteer personnel, or someone from Charter like Frank Schmidt, to set up the portable studio each time. Mr. Potts said that he felt there was some resistance on the part of the School Committee to having its meetings taped and that, at the risk of getting into an antagonistic relationship with the School Committee, we should, as an advisory committee to the Board of Selectmen, let the Selectmen decide as to whether videotaping the meetings would be worth pursuing.. Mr. Sauer said that School Committee meetings are open to the public and that it would be quite remarkable if the School Committee would not allow meetings to be videotaped. Mr. Potts agreed, but suggested that it is up to the Selectmen.

Correspondence: Mr. Potts presented a letter from the Pepperell Housing Authority to Tom Cohan of Charter Communications thanking Charter for work done at Babbitassit Village to provide cable service to the common area at the facility.

Cable Modem at Lomar Park: Mr. Potts reported that the cable modem hook-up to Bulletin Board announcement computer still does not work, but that Dean Johnson is working on it. Dave Pease already has a program that would allow remote access and the updating of bulletin board announcement files.

501c(3) non-profit: Mr. Potts said that he and Diane Reichert had discussed the status of the previous cable advisory committee's 501c(3), set up to accept funds collected by a potential subscriber cable bill surcharge. He reported that paperwork has not, as suggested at the previous Cable TV Advisory Committee meeting, been updated. Ms. Reichert, he said, is currently preparing to move to Florida and is cleaning out her paperwork. He asked Mr. Walsh what might be involved in trying to get the paperwork current. Mr. Walsh suggested that a straightforward call to the Office of the Secretary of State would probably get it back in good standing if back fees were paid. Mr. Potts said that doing so could be helpful, but that right now the Committee has no money. Mr. Potts asked Mr. Walsh to work with Ms. Reichert to retrieve her paperwork and learn more about its current status and what has to be done.

Status of Charter Contract: Mr. Potts said he talked to Tom Cohan of Charter about the possible extension to the contract. He reported that Mr. Cohan said that there were basically three options: first, we could draft a simple 6-month extension to the existing contract; second, we could draft a new one-year contract; or third, we could do nothing and let the existing contract run out since Charter will still be serving the Town anyway. Mr. Walsh recommended a one-page extension. Mr. Potts noted that Mr. Cohen was unclear as to whether a contract extension would conflict with the federal regulation stating that a cable services contract term cannot exceed 10 year. Mr. Walsh, in reading from the current contract, suggested that the contract can be amended, but that extending it is not specifically addressed. He said that, alternatively, we could create a new single-page contract that set a new term and incorporated the existing document and all the conditions by reference. Mr. Potts noted that the contract is signed by the Selectmen and that we would need to get on their agenda. Mr. Walsh will talk to Mr. Cohan about how to move forward.

December 7th Selectmen's meeting: Mr. Potts asked if anyone had seen the live broadcast of the November 30 Selectmen's meeting and, if so, what they thought about the image quality. Mr. Walsh said he thought it was worse than before. Mr. Potts and Mr. Pease both agreed, suggesting that there is still something wrong with the equipment at Town Hall. Mr. Potts said that he believed the recorded version of the meeting looked much better than the live broadcast and wondered whether there might be a problem with the modulator or some other equipment that moves the signal out of the room and Town Hall to the head end. Mr. Potts said that the portable studio will be at the Library's tree lighting ceremony on Friday evening in order to broadcast live from the library and that we should have people at home looking at the quality of that. If it's better than that of the Selectmen's meeting, we should encourage Frank Schmidt to use that equipment next Monday for the December 7 Selectmen's meeting that will involve all Town departments and the NMRSD School Committee. Mr. Sauer said any issues with the equipment at Town Hall should be troubleshot prior to Friday evening since this is such an important Selectmen's meeting and that Charter really needs to participate with that troubleshooting process if at all possible. Mr. Potts agreed to talk to Frank Schmidt about troubleshooting the equipment.

Royalty Free Audio for the Bulletin Board: Mr. Boyajian reported that he had found 4-5 companies that offer royalty free audio. However, he noted that one of the companies, RoyaltyFreeMusic.com, specifically states on its website that the royalty free aspect of its audio is NOT applicable to broadcast and cable. He read a paragraph from the company's website. Mr. Walsh suggested that the paragraph sounded like it was there to cover the company against unauthorized usage. A discussion followed about who – Charter, Pepperell, or individuals in Pepperell – would be responsible to pay any royalties for broadcasting audio. Mr. Potts noted that Groton uses "Digital Juice" and does pay a fee to ensure compliance. Discussion followed about other sources of music. Mr. Sauer said that older works, like those of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms, are now in the public domain and that we should be able to use performances of such works with the permission of the performers. He said he knows that the Orchestra of Indian Hill, based in Littleton MA, records concerts and would ask whether Indian Hill would be willing to allow us to use its performances of public domain works. Mr. Boyajian cautioned that the publisher of the sheet music might have some claim on use of performances from its published content. Mr. Sauer said he would ask Indian Hill about that as well.

Equipment at Lomar Park: Mr. Potts said that there is currently just one DVD player playing content at Lomar Park and that Charter is willing to purchase a second one. It will be a professional model that can interface with the Leitronix scheduled. Mr. Potts suggested that two players is still not enough, but that at this time Charter would not be willing to purchase more. There was a brief discussion about using less professional players that could interface with the scheduler via IR control, but that even those would cost money that the Committee does not have. Mr. Pease said that he has continued to work with the Digital Recall software solution and believes that it will solve all the problems because it can be used as a scheduler for recorded content. Mr. Pease said that he has a surplus PC from Town Hall that could be used at Lomar Park. Mr. Potts said that he now believes that we should try this solution. Mr. Sauer advised against trying this on Channel 15 before it was given at least two-week, always on, standalone test. He further advised that the requirement of converting all incoming tapes and DVDs to Windows Media files is not an insignificant amount of work and that it is potentially not sustainable. Mr. Potts agreed that this might not be a long term solution, but could be used on a trial basis to show Pepperell what might be possible if Channel 15 were to have a budget funded by a cable bill surcharge. Mr. Pease said that, as an employee of HP, he would be able to purchase a much more powerful computer very inexpensively. Mr. Sauer said that he would feel a lot better about using a computer that was powerful enough to be an always-on videosever and not a typical desktop PC.

Action Items:

Item #1 – Contract: Mr. Walsh will speak with Tom Cohan of Charter about the contract and whether an extension or new contract makes the most sense.

Item #2 – Town Hall Equipment: Mr. Potts will talk to Charter about troubleshooting continuing image quality issues at Town Hall prior to next Monday's Selectmen's meeting.

Item #3 – Audio: Mr. Sauer will talk to Indian Hill about using Orchestra of Indian Hill recordings.

Next Meeting: Early January 2010, specific date TBD.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 9:04pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeff Sauer

Clerk

Cable TV Advisory Committee