

# Cable TV Advisory Committee

Meeting minutes - March 10, 2010

**Present:**           **Committee Members:** Richard Potts, Mark Boyajian, Phil Durno, David Pease, Jeff Sauer, Debra Spratt, and Mark Walsh  
**Members Absent:** none  
**Others present:** Chris DeSimone

Mr. Potts called the meeting to order at 7:06pm.

**Approval of Meeting Minutes:** On a motion from Mr. Boyajian, seconded by Mr. Walsh, the minutes from the February 17, 2010 were approved unanimously as amended.

**Town Hall DVD Recorder:** Mr. Potts reported that the DVD recorder in Town Hall had gone missing. It was apparently there Thursday evening when the Board of Public Works broadcast their meeting. A brief discussion followed about replacing the DVD recorder, as well as future security measures the Town should take.

**Live Broadcast Locations:** Mr. Durno inquired about live broadcasts from the high school. Mr. Potts reported that discussions with Charter were moving very slowly and suggested it may be more practicable to get a direct feed from Townsend's Educational Channel to be re-broadcast on one of Pepperell's three PEG channels (two of which are not currently in use). Mr. Potts also discussed broadcasting live from the Senior Center. He had spoken with Tom Cohan of Charter and received a negative response, but it was not clear whether Mr. Cohan realized that a cable might already exist there and would not require new installation. Ms. Spratt will contact Dean Johnson, who would probably know what cables existed at the Senior Center.

**Discussion with Chris DeSimone:** Mr. DeSimone attended the meeting to discuss his past involvement in the Town of Billerica's PEG infrastructure and license agreement negotiations. He began by saying that Billerica had hired a cable attorney and strongly recommended Pepperell do the same, noting that Charter has experienced lawyers and Pepperell needs similar expertise on its side. He admitted that towns don't have much leverage and that cable companies will set the terms if they are not challenged. He cited the Cable Act of 1984 as being heavily slanted toward cable companies, including barring rate negotiations from license agreements. Competition between cable companies is very rare, particularly in small towns. However, a town can renew for less time, thereby putting a greater burden on the cable company, particularly since the cable company is required to hold public hearings prior to renewals. Billerica's strategy, he said, was to threaten renewal for only three years at a time. Mr. DeSimone said that Billerica was able to negotiate \$250,000/yr for replacement equipment, as well as \$500,000/yr for new equipment. Mr. Potts noted that it was common for older license agreements to have moneys (for equipment, etc.) written into them, but that his sense was that newer license agreements typically don't. Mr. DeSimone said that things may have changed, but he believed that they still could.

Ms. Spratt asked if Mr. DeSimone, a Pepperell Finance Committee member, had any suggestions as to how the town might pay for an attorney given the current fiscal crisis. He suggested asking the Selectmen. He also suggested that in lieu of a warrant article, the committee could ask the Town Moderator for a non-binding "sense of the meeting" at the May Town Meeting to gauge support for improving local cable programming.

Mr. DeSimone discussed how local programming, and getting people involved, is the key to success. Billerica established a "Members of the Cable Access" group that collected membership fees and encouraged students to get involved producing programming. Mr. Walsh noted that Pepperell has probably lost the non-profit status set up by the former CTAC, but that it could likely be resurrected by discussion with the Secretary of State. Mr.

Potts said that previous Pepperell committee members have also said that programming is what generates interest. Mr. Boyajian said he'd spoken with the NRWA and that they would love the opportunity to air some of their content. He also suggested that land trusts might have local content.

Mr. Potts asked about subscriber fees. Mr. DeSimone said that he thought the town would support it. Mr. Durno did not feel the town would. Mr. Boyajian said that fewer people are watching television today than 10 years ago in favor of internet video. Mr. Sauer noted that now is a different era than the 1990s when cable access offered a new opportunity for creative people. Today, personal technology enables more creative outlets.

Mr. DeSimone offered to set up a visit to the Billerica Cable Access Studio.

**Quality Issues:** Mr. Sauer noted that he had noticed particularly bad signal drop-outs over the past week; on Monday, March 1 and especially on Thursday, March 4 between 10:20-10:40am.

Mr. Pease said he had ceased using the Digital Recall software because it is not working solidly. Instead, he had written a custom application to drive the video, audio, and the PowerPoint from one system. He said that he would need \$100 for a PowerPoint viewer. Mr. Sauer asked about whether Mr. Pease might be able to incorporate other formats. Mr. Pease said that PowerPoint is easier because it handles the timing.

**Programming:** Mr. Pease and Mr. Sauer videotaped a recent high school jazz band concert, which Mr. Pease plans to edit.

**Email correspondence:** Mr. Sauer reported that he has received the following emails from the [cabcom@town.pepperell.ma.us](mailto:cabcom@town.pepperell.ma.us) address:

- ❖ Email from Bill Moore of the Route 9 Veterans Forum:
  1. apologizing for the delay getting the January show out. Leicester Cable Access provided \$500 to enable continued mailing
- ❖ One email promoting the Midweek Politics with Dave Pakman and Thom Hartman's "Big Picture."
- ❖ Emails from the Central Massachusetts Agency on Aging
  1. National Resource Center to be Created for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Elders
  2. AARP Wants Independent Elder Affairs Secreteriat
  3. HUD 202 Projects: AAAs and the Services Coordination Role
  4. A Conversation with Deval Patrick, March 16, 2010
- ❖ Email from MASS MoCA:
  1. Group Exhibition "Material World" Opens April 24, 2010

**Action Items:**

**Item #1 – Billerica Cable Access Tour:** Mr. DeSimone will set up a visit to the Billerica Studio

**Item #2 – Live Feed from Senior Center:** Ms. Spratt will ask Dean Johnson about whether a cable exists.

**Next Meeting:** April 7, 2010, 7:00pm at Lawrence Library

**Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 8:40pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeff Sauer  
Clerk

Cable TV Advisory Committee