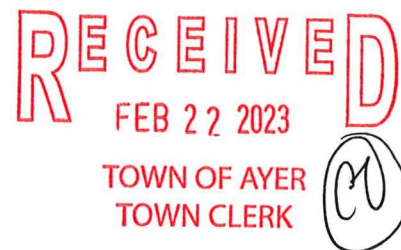


Town of Ayer
Cable Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes for February 6, 2023



Attendance: Jannice Livingston; Janet Providakes; Chief Brian Gill; Julie Murray

Also in Attendance: Robert Pontbriand, Town Manager; Attorney William Hewig, Town Counsel

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order at 8:35am on Zoom by J. Livingston.

J. Livingston read the following statement into the record:

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic, in accordance with Chapter 22 of the Acts of 2022, suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law {OML}, public bodies otherwise governed by the OML are temporarily relieved from the requirement that meetings be held in public places, open and physically accessible to the public, so long as measures are taken to ensure public access to the bodies' deliberations "through adequate, alternative means." This meeting will be live on Zoom. The public may participate remotely by joining Zoom {Meeting ID# 813 1850 5727} or by calling (646- 931-3860). For additional information about remote participation, please contact Carly Antonellis, Assistant Town Manager at atm@aver.ma.us or 978-772-8220 ext. 100 prior to the meeting.

Review and Approval of the meeting minutes from January 24, 2023:

The Committee reviewed the minutes and there was one amendment to page 2, fourth line changing it to read \$150,000.

Motion: A motion was made by J. Providakes and seconded by B. Gill to approve the January 24, 2023 meeting minutes as amended. **Motion passed (3-0) by Roll Call Vote:** J. Livingston, Y; J. Providakes, Y; B. Gill, Y; J. Murray, Abstained

Committee Review and Discussion of the Town's License Proposals:

J. Providakes shared the spreadsheet she prepared of APAC's budget and the Town's proposal. The operating budget for APAC is \$140,043 less a few of the items highlighted in blue it is \$135,768. The second tab of the Spreadsheet shows the 10-year Capital Budget for APAC which comes to \$246,000.

Attorney Hewig stated that the Committee should provide both budgets to Comcast.

R. Pontbriand stated that the issue of I-net connectivity and I-net origination points were brought up by Comcast last time. Upon review of the Town's I-net origination points, the one at Page Hilltop is of the least value to the Town. The Town should maintain the origination points at Town Hall, the Fire Station, Police Station, and High School Auditorium.

Chief Gill stated that though currently Page Hilltop is the least important of the origination points; with increased growth and development in the Town, we may want to keep the Page Hilltop site for increased access capabilities.

Attorney Hewig stated that the removal of one could be a bargaining chip with Comcast.

J. Providakes asked about the issue of cable conversion boxes for high definition. Will those subscribers who need a cable conversion box have to pay?

Attorney Hewig stated that we will need to clarify.

License Negotiations with Comcast:

Gregory Franks from Comcast joined the Zoom meeting at 9:04am.

Greg reviewed the Town's spreadsheets and budgets with the Committee.

Attorney Hewig stated that the first spreadsheet demonstrates how the 5% would be spent during year one of operating costs.

Greg had no questions.

Attorney Hewig presented the Town's proposal for \$246,000 up from \$150,000 over the next ten years for capital.

Greg had no questions and appreciated both budgets and overviews.

R. Pontbriand stated that upon review of the Town's I-Net and origination points, the Town has origination points at the Town Hall, Fire Station, Police Station, High School, and Page Hilltop Elementary. The Town values these and the accessibility. Out of all of them, the Page Hilltop Elementary School origination point is the least used and perhaps one that the Town could do without.

J. Livingston asked how much of a savings to Comcast would the deactivation of the Page Hilltop Elementary School origination point be?

G. Franks stated that it is difficult to fully quantify. The Town has an 18 mile I-net so any reduction is a savings and of interest to Comcast. If the Page Hilltop site could be removed that would be of interest and value to Comcast. He further stated that currently Ayer Subscribers pay .21 cents a month for the I-net, and I am trying to figure out ways to reduce that cost.

Chief Gill asked if there was any benefit to Comcast to remove their equipment from the Police Station.

G. Franks stated no, and he would like to keep it there.

Attorney Hewig asked G. Franks to explain to the Committee the issue of high-definition channels and conversion boxes.

G. Franks stated that at this time he has been told by Comcast that the high-definition channel could be seen and would be free. The Town would have a choice to either have a high definition channel or it could have its specific programming of choice displayed in high definition. Subscribers requiring a high definition conversion box would not need to pay for them.

Attorney Hewig stated that most Town's want their Government Channel to be the high-definition channel.

G. Franks stated that you could do that.

Attorney Hewig stated that the Town could have one high definition channel or have programming offering in high definition. It used to be 24 to 36 months to get high definition. Could we get it sooner?

G. Franks stated that he cannot promise sooner due to supply issues but he can offer it in at least 24 month and he will ask for 18 months.

Attorney Hewig confirmed that the Town would retain its three channels.

G. Franks stated yes.

Attorney Hewig stated that the Town would like language in the license that if Comcast goes to four channels it will be offered to Ayer.

G. Franks stated that he could probably agree to that and that Comcast and the Town would meet and discuss.

Attorney Hewig stated that the Town is very interested in a Senior Discount as well as a Veterans Discount. Would Comcast agree to this in a contract side letter?

G. Franks stated that Comcast offers a 10% discount to any subscriber that receives public assistance and that Comcast would agree to a side letter to this effect.

J. Providakes asked if the 10% discount is only for basic cable?

G. Franks stated that the discount is only for basic cable.

Attorney Hewig stated that the Committee and Comcast should meet in two weeks to further the discussion and negotiations. Attorney Hewig proposed Tuesday, February 21, 2023 at 8:30am on Zoom and the Committee would invite G. Franks for 9am.

G. Franks agreed.

G. Franks left the meeting at 9:32am.

The Committee debriefed.

Attorney Hewig stated that Comcast is probably concerned about the \$240,000 for Capital and he will probably ask for the Page Hilltop origination site. We will get close to what we want.

J. Providakes stated that it would be beneficial to get more on the 10% discount.

Attorney Hewig stated that it would but Comcast is not going to concede beyond their standard 10% discount for subscribers that receive public assistance and it will be only off of basic cable. They won't put it in the contract but it will be a contract side letter and they have always honored it.

J. Livingston stated that when we conclude the license we need to make the discount clear in our information and press release to the public.

Scheduling of Next Meeting:

Tuesday, February 21, 2023, at 8:30am on Zoom.

Motion: A motion was made by J. Providakes and seconded by J. Murray to adjourn the meeting at 9:40am. **Motion passed 4-0 by Roll Call Vote:** J. Livingston, Y; J. Providakes, Y; B. Gill, Y.; J. Murray, Y.

The meeting adjourned at 9:40am.

Minutes recorded and submitted by R. Pontbriand

Minutes reviewed and approved by the Cable Advisory Committee on February 21, 2023.

Signed: 
Robert A. Pontbriand, Town Manager