

CABLE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MINUTES

January 25, 2022

Affiliations	Name	Present
Cable Director	Derek Frates	Yes
Committee Members	Barbara Acksen, Chairwoman	Yes
	Ronnie Medina	Yes
	Maria Carvalho	No
	Thomas McAfee	No
	John Methia	Yes
Select Board Representative	Stasia Powers	Yes
Recording Secretary	Stephanie Fidalgo	Yes

Minutes:

Ms. Acksen opened the meeting at 5:00 PM and held a moment of silence in memory of Thomas McAfee’s son before continuing the meeting. Afterward, Ms. Acksen forwarded the minutes of the previous meeting to be voted on.

Mr. Methia made the motion to approve the minutes of the November 16th meeting, seconded by Mr. Medina. The motion passed unanimously via roll call vote.

Cable Director’s Report: Update on the Public, Educational, and Governmental (PEG) Access (Channels 18 & 95):

Review of Holiday Programming/Annual Report:

Mr. Frates covered the Fairhaven Home for the Holidays show. He noted that while the attendance was down from last year, with 20 families present on the Zoom call, the show was fairly successful. Viewers also enjoyed the creative advertisements for the event.

Also, after Fairhaven won the Mass Access Awards Remote Event Award for Halloween 2020, the 2021 Hometown Haunts series was nominated for Best Production Value and Todd Migliacci was nominated for Best Host. The awards ceremony was planned for January, 26th but had to be postponed to Match 3rd due to COVID concerns.

Mr. Frates also forward the Fairhaven Cable Access Television 2021 Annual Report to the committee, noting that it is publicly available on the homepage of Fairhaven TV [<https://www.fairhaventv.com/>]

Channel 18 Annual Report:

The channel broadcasted 301 Government meetings in 2021, which equates to roughly one meeting per day. 31 Events/PSA’s were also produced for 527 hours of original programming. Over the course of the year, there were 28,667 meeting views with an average watch time of 00:21:22 and the channel has garnered 1,744 Facebook followers.

Channel 95 Annual Report:

In 2021, there were 50 Events/Shows produced and 43 shows imported. The channel now has 111 Affiliated Access Stations. Over the course of the year, there were 8,704 Community Views and 1,744 Facebook Followers.

Special note was given to The Drift, the boating television show created by board member John Methia, and its the recent feature of Fairhaven Harbormaster, Timothy Cox, for their season 1 episode on people working in the Marine Trades. Mr. Frates welcomed Mr. Methia to share future episodes to be broadcast on Channel 95.

On newer pieces being produced, Mr. Frates noted the COVID canines and dog licensing programs. There are also plans for explaining the changes to the Select Board ballot and making plans for Candidates Night in March. Another Live Bingo night is also being planned. There are also plans to cover the Town Administrator Meeting and Interviews which will allow citizens to attend live via Zoom, with delayed broadcast on government access channel 18 the next day.

Broadband Study Committee Update:

A member of this committee is needed to be present on the Broadband Study Committee. Thomas McAfee had expressed interest in this position.

As such, Ms. Acksen put forth a motion to have Thomas McAfee be the Cable Advisory Committee representative on the Broadband Study Committee, seconded by John Methia. The motion passed unanimously via roll call vote.

When prompted for an update on the Broadband Study Committee, Mr. Frates suggested watching back the most recent meeting videos or to review the Connect Fairhaven website [<https://www.connectfairhaven.com/>], which posts the most recent updates.

When asked by Mr. Methia if the Broadband Study was funded out of the Cable budget, Mr. Frates explained that the fund for consultants had been approved at the last Town Meeting and funding for the upcoming pilot program would also be voted on at the upcoming Town Meeting.

Mr. Methia expressed his concerns on the cable budget and that the contract the town currently has with Comcast will be the last one.

In reaction, Ms. Powers brought up consideration from the Select Board special meeting on January 22nd on reorganizing the cable program into a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with the education media program being covered by the school department. Mr. Methia and Ms. Acksen noted that there had been previous discussions about different models, having heard from representatives from Lakeville, Middletown, Plymouth, Rochester, and Dartmouth.

The following discussion covered some of the benefits and challenges of utilizing a 501(c)(3) model. Ms. Acksen pointed specifically to the programs used in Plymouth, which feature a great deal of community investment in regional programming and coordination. Given his concerns with how difficult fundraising can be for a 501(c)(3) organization, Mr. Methia expressed his preference for the program to remain town-funded.

Mr. Frates made note that the current Comcast contract is in effect until 2028. However, as payments to the town are dependent on the number of subscribers, more residents choosing to drop their cable subscriptions has led to a recent \$11,000 reduction in access fees. Ms. Powers noted that while streaming content is also available, in the Memorandum of Understanding between the Town and the School Department, the channel could be taken away but that might not result in cutting the funding.

Mr. Methia recounted his concerns about both the possible move to broadband in light of trends involving the wider adoption of 5G internet, based on his career in television production. He supported Ms. Acksen's request to have a meeting with members of other cable committees in the surrounding municipalities.

Ms. Acksen would also like to arrange a meeting with Cable Attorney Bill Solomon on this issue, as he could provide advice and expertise on how the town could move forward.

Ms. Powers asked if it was possible to anticipate how long the retained earnings would last given the current trends. The cable department currently has approximately \$600,000 on hand and averages \$60,000 a year in expenditures. This would cover funding until the end of the contract, but the education funding would run out before then.

Discussions covered the possibility of a split model – having the public access channel be covered under a 501(c)(3) organization, with the town running the government channel, and the school department running the education program. There were also some concerns that having the access channel be split off from the town would mean losing studio space at town hall, and thus create the expense of renting and maintaining studio space. Ms. Powers also noted that there could be a transition over a few years to help fund one of the positions currently covered by the retained earnings to instead be paid by the town. The committee also noted that even with an increase in streaming, the town's dedication to a combination of government access, Zoom meetings, and streaming access helps to maintain an engaged public.

Action: Ms. Powers will speak to either Ms. Wendy Graves or Mr. Mark Reese on arranging a meeting with Attorney Bill Solomon.

Update on Inquiry into Subscription Programming and Ed. Programming:

Ms. Powers explained that due to COVID, the school signed up to work with Nfhsnetwork.com to broadcast sporting events. The school had also been struggling to find students to film events even under normal conditions. The use of this service will not affect the funding, but it could result in losing the educational channel, Channel 9. While Ms. Acksen asserted that she wanted to see the channel remain in place, Ms. Powers explained that the education's media class currently only has one instructor who may not have time to also program the channel.

Mr. Methia stated that he would like to see a push for more of the content produced by the students broadcast on the channels. Though, he also noted that New Bedford Vocational Tech has similar problems with finding students to record games. In the following discussion, he asked if the educational coordinator, Drew Furtado, could work alongside the media instructors to help program the channel. Ms. Acksen also wished to see the channel being better utilized by all the schools in town.

Ms. Powers expressed her hesitance in dictating the curriculum or funding decisions of the educational program, especially as they run on a much tighter budget. She would like to have a discussion with Superintendent Kohler about the long-term plans of the media program and any hurdles they might have with getting content on the channel.

Mr. Methia would like to see if the educational program could put together an annual report to inform the committee about their curriculum.

After Ms. Acksen noted that she would like to see the channel return to filming a wide variety of school events, Ms. Powers noted the logistical concerns including not only finding students or staff to film the events but also that a number of parents have signed forms requesting that their children not be filmed.

Ms. Powers and Mr. Methia agreed that the most likely occurrence will be the school department taking over funding the media instructors after the contract with Comcast ends, rather than having it be under the Cable Advisory. Mr. Methia said that the committee could offer to help cover equipment or automation costs to ensure more programming for Channel 9. Ms. Powers suggested that Mr. Frates arrange a call or meeting with Mr. Drew Furtado and instructor Mr. Michael Fernades on the matter and that she would speak with Superintendent Ms. Tara Kohler.

Mr. Methia asked if it would be possible to team up with New Bedford Vocational Tech to show some of their content on Channel 9. Currently, Mr. Frates does help with broadcasting the Voc Tech School Committee meetings on Channel 18. While Channel 9 is primarily for Fairhaven High School content, accepting content from Voc Tech could be beneficial to both parties.

Other Business:

No other business was covered at this meeting.

While no exact meeting date was set for February, but Mr. Frates is looking to either the 3rd or 4th Tuesday at 5 PM.

Ms. Powers made a motion to adjourn at 6:11 PM and was seconded by Mr. Methia. The motion passed unanimously via roll call vote.