

Cable Access Advisory Committee: June 10, 2026

Meeting Minutes / Summary

Quick recap

The Cable Advisory Committee meeting focused on reviewing the cable access channel contract negotiations and current funding challenges. Station director Derek presented his director's report showing successful programming coverage including town elections, candidate forums, and community events, but noted declining revenue due to subscribers cutting cable in favor of streaming services. Jeff Blake and Nicole from KP Law explained the cable licensing process and discussed negotiating a new 10-year contract with Comcast, which would likely involve transitioning from percentage-based to per-subscriber capital grants. The committee discussed concerns about the current arrangement where the school department receives 44% of the access fee budget while producing limited content, and explored the possibility of addressing streaming service subscribers through future negotiations. The conversation ended with plans to interview additional attorneys and schedule follow-up discussions to develop a comprehensive 10-year plan and budget for the cable access program.

Next steps

Derek

- Contact and schedule interviews with Bill August and Bill Solomon for the committee to evaluate legal representation options for cable license negotiation.
- Ask all candidate attorneys (including Jeff Blake, Bill August, and Bill Solomon) if there are any precedents or options for including Comcast wireless/Internet subscribers in the PEG access funding model, and report findings to the committee.
- Gather and provide detailed current and projected budget needs for the next 10 years to support cable access operations, including equipment and staffing requirements.
- Reach out to Framingham or similar communities to learn about their model for educational access funding and programming, particularly regarding shared equipment and content delivery.
- Document and report on known Comcast service issues (e.g., outages, customer service complaints) in specific town areas (e.g., Neck, West Island) for potential use in negotiations.
- Investigate the feasibility and cost of consolidating playback/server equipment for all channels (government, education, public) and gather bids from relevant vendors.
- As the committee interviews attorneys and gathers information, summarize findings and make a recommendation to the committee regarding legal representation for the Comcast license negotiation.

Cable Access Committee Chair Barbara Acksen

- Set up next meeting(s) to include interviews with additional legal candidates and begin ascertainment process, considering summer schedules.
- Discuss the Town /educational Tv relationship with TA with possibility of Inviting relevant School Committee members, business manager, and/or school administration to a future meeting to discuss the educational access budget, curriculum, and current media teacher/program status.
- Plan and announce at least one (preferably two) public ascertainment hearings to collect community input on cable-related needs and Comcast customer service issues.
- Continue discussion to clarify questions for school administration regarding the educational access budget, curriculum, teacher evaluation, and content delivered to channels.
- Follow up with school administration to identify the correct liaison/contact for educational access and clarify the status of the middle school media position and curriculum.

Summary

Cable Access Committee Update

The Cable Access Committee meeting began with administrative updates, including a discussion about using AI for meeting minutes and the need to improve minute-taking processes. Derek presented a comprehensive report on the television station's activities, highlighting their coverage of the recent town election, production of 167 meetings totaling 255 hours of programming, and successful social media engagement with 185,946 internet views and growing followers on Facebook and Instagram. The meeting also addressed recent channel relocations due to Comcast changes, with the current channels now being 95 (community access), 96 (educational access), and 97 (government access). Town Administrator Keith Hickey was mentioned as being involved in discussions about equipment needs and budget concerns, though the transcript ended before these topics were fully discussed.

Cable Contract Negotiation Planning

The town discussed preparations for negotiating a new cable contract expected in two years, with Town reaching out to attorneys including Jeff Blake of KP Law who was identified as the top candidate. The discussion revealed concerns about the current funding arrangement where the school department receives 44% of the cable access budget while the town only gets 56%, despite the town running two channels with more extensive operations. Town emphasized the need to meet with school administration to understand what services are being provided in exchange for the \$133,740 annual funding received by the school department, noting that recent productions were limited and some positions remained unfilled. Discussion would require prior discussion with the Town Administrator.

Cable Licensing Negotiation Challenges

Atty. Blake and Nicole explained their experience with cable licensing negotiations, noting that this year's renewals are more challenging due to significant subscriber drops and new funding methods from cable companies like Comcast. They described the three types of monies involved in

licenses: a 50-cent per subscriber fee (fixed by law), a gross annual revenue share up to 5% (GAR), and capital grants. Jeffrey mentioned that they have developed a standardized license agreement that focuses mainly on negotiating capital and GAR terms rather than boilerplate language, and they currently have 35-40 licenses in negotiation.

Cable License Negotiation Process

Jeffrey explained the process of negotiating cable-related licenses, emphasizing the importance of understanding current service compliance and future needs during the ascertainment phase. He noted that while minor issues like outages or customer service problems occur occasionally, significant or widespread service disruptions would provide leverage in license negotiations. Jeffrey also mentioned that cable companies are losing subscribers but noted that monies for broadband services have not yet been obtained. Public Hearings and surveys would be needed, provided by the CAC, to obtain information from consumers.

PEG Access Funding Challenges

Jeffrey discussed the challenges with PEG access funding, explaining that large cable companies like Comcast and Verizon are no longer providing substantial funding as intended, leading to potential legislation changes. He clarified that only cable television subscriptions generate revenue for PEG access, not streaming services like Xfinity Stream, which is affecting funding as more people cut their cable cords. Jeffrey noted that younger, more tech-savvy individuals are primarily responsible for cutting cords, while older, potentially fixed-income subscribers remain as cable subscribers, creating a funding gap that may require passing additional costs to subscribers.

Comcast Cable Agreement Negotiations

The discussion focused on Comcast cable agreements, with Town inquiring about the possibility of securing a 10-year deal similar to what other communities have achieved. Jeffrey and Nicole confirmed that 10-year deals are possible and have been successfully negotiated with similar-sized communities, though they noted that Comcast's new corporate process requires final approval from headquarters. The conversation revealed that while 10-year agreements are possible, they typically involve per-subscriber capital fees which may result in lower overall payments compared to current arrangements, though the exact amounts depend on the town's subscriber numbers and cable needs.

Cable TV License Pricing Discussion

Jeffrey discussed pricing for negotiating a cable TV license, proposing a range of \$5,000 to \$15,000 depending on the level of hands-on involvement required. Cable Access Committee members inquired about HD channel availability, and Jeffrey confirmed that almost all communities request one, with Comcast typically allowing the conversion at no additional cost. They also discussed how to handle an existing educational channel within the budget, with Jeffrey clarifying that while they

negotiate the overall budget, the local allocation between PEG and educational channels remains a local decision.

Cable TV License Negotiation

The meeting focused on discussing a cable TV license negotiation with Comcast, where Attorney Jeffrey Blake confirmed they would proceed with the 10-year contract terms. The group discussed concerns about how streaming services through Comcast should be treated similarly to cable subscribers for funding purposes, as they still use the same cable infrastructure. They agreed to schedule monthly meetings for the next two months to interview additional attorneys including Bill August and Bill Solomon, and to explore potential solutions for getting a portion of wireless streaming service revenue. The discussion also covered questions about the school's media program, including concerns about teacher evaluation and curriculum requirements, with plans to follow up with school administration about these issues.