

Protecting Fairhaven's Community Television: Retain the Cable Advisory Committee

1 message

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To: selectboard@fairhaven-ma.gov

Cc: khickey@fairhaven-ma.gov, Barbara Acksen <backsens@comcast.net>, "Frates, Derrek" <dfrates@fairhaven-ma.gov>

Dear Members of the Select Board,

As Fairhaven prepares for its next Comcast agreement, I urge you to recognize the importance of keeping our Cable Advisory Committee active and involved.

I have served on this committee for more than 15 years and participated in every Comcast negotiation during my tenure. Our subscriber base has fallen by roughly half since negotiations 10 years ago, while the community's expectations for dependable meeting coverage have only grown.

Our Cable Access team has done an outstanding job delivering that coverage. Residents now watch through cable, websites, social media and streaming platforms. You do not have to be a Comcast subscriber to benefit, but cable subscribers fund the production of that content for everyone.

As residents explore wireless alternatives, Fairhaven's strong 5G availability could accelerate the shift away from traditional cable. We must understand what that means for the funding supporting our Public, Educational and Government access programming.

At our last meeting with our attorney, I asked why customers who "cut the cord" but continue receiving television through Xfinity Stream are not counted in subscriber figures and funding calculations. We agreed to explore this further with counsel. We should not assume the answer or promise additional revenue, but this is one example of how we are examining the impact of changing services and viewing habits on the town's agreement. This is precisely the kind of detailed work an active advisory committee can contribute.

Our committee is exploring attorneys with specialized cable licensing experience and negotiating approaches that we hope will preserve funding despite declining subscriptions. In my view, this could be our last opportunity to secure an agreement comparable to those that have sustained these services.

The committee's contributions also extend beyond negotiations. Fiber connections between town offices, equipment investments and the Town Hall studio grew from collaboration among the committee, vendors and our cable television coordinators. These resources required planning, technical discussion and sustained attention.

Our role is to advise the Town Administrator and Select Board, explore options and represent ratepayers' concerns. We also intend to seek public input, as we have in the past, to help inform negotiations.

If disbanding the committee is under consideration, who would assume this advisory work? Who would examine the technical and funding questions, gather subscriber concerns and provide sustained attention throughout the process?

Without adequate funding, our PEG channels and the production of programming distributed online could face serious reductions or ultimately go dark. It is important to note that two teaching positions are also supported by these funds. Our goal is to help prevent that outcome and ensure our team can continue delivering the service residents expect.

We are also working to recruit new members. Expertise in television or telecommunications should not be a prerequisite. Residents who appreciate this service and are willing to contribute bring valuable perspectives.

Fairhaven residents have come to expect dependable televised and online coverage of town meetings. Limiting that coverage or diminishing this service is not an acceptable outcome. Shifting any production costs to the town's budget would also face significant obstacles given our current fiscal situation. At this critical time, I urge the Select Board to retain and support the Cable Advisory Committee as we work to protect the funding and programming our residents rely on.

Respectfully,

John Methia
Member, Fairhaven Cable Advisory Committee

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Executive Producer

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