

MINUTES OF COMCAST PUBLIC HEARING
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 2020

Chairman Sullivan advised that, per Governor Baker's Order suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, M.G.L. Chapter 30A, Section 20, this meeting is held via Zoom. It is televised live and recorded and also on Facebook live.

Board of Selectmen in attendance: Justin Sullivan, Chris Zorra, David Andrade.

Town Administrator Shawn E. Cadime was in attendance.

Also in attendance: Town Counsel William Hewig, III and David Saad and Michael Dressler representing Cable TV.

Asst. Town Administrator/Director of Human Services Carol Ann Days monitored Zoom.

A motion was made by Mr. Zorra, seconded by Mr. Andrade, and it was unanimously

VOTED: To open the public hearing at 7:05 p.m.

The vote: Mr. Zorra – Aye; Mr. Andrade – Aye; Chairman Sullivan – Aye.

Chairman Sullivan stated this is the second public hearing. The first was held on Saturday, November 21, 2020.

Items to be discussed in negotiations are: funding grants to support public education and Cable TV, construction of lines and upgrade to studio, limited tech upgrades, local customer service office, senior citizens discounts, license compliance and enforcement, and length of contract.

Chairman Sullivan noted this is not an exclusive contract; any provided can come into Seekonk. Verizon was contacted last year. It is cost prohibitive for them to come into Seekonk. The rates are regulated by the State. If there were more than one provided, there would be competition.

He explained the Town is eligible to receive 5% or \$280,000 of gross annual revenue of Comcast. An additional \$17,500 goes toward TV9 and schools for their own public access TV. The senior citizens discount is \$2 per month.

Mr. Michael G sent in a question about the purpose of the contract.

Chairman Sullivan said the main purpose is funding for TV9.

Mr. Cadime advised the contract includes FCC standards that must be met.

Atty. Hewig explained there are two levels of customer service FCC requirements.

The cable company has to answer 90% of telephone calls within 30 seconds under normal operating conditions and meet state business standards. Atty. Hewig said he will include wording in the new contract that they will have to pay a fine if they don't comply.

The other level of service standards that exist is technical or signal quality.

Chairman Sullivan asked how to hold them accountable. Is it customer complaints?

Atty. Hewig said it is customer complaints. The customer would have to make a complaint at town hall. The Board of Selectmen would consider whether to hold a public hearing to investigate. If there is a finding and Comcast does not correct it, the Board can assess damages.

Mr. Jeff Cabral asked if there is any way to offset infrastructure costs for cable with Verizon.

Chairman Sullivan said it seems Verizon wants to get out of the cable business. There are 4,600 to 4,700 cable subscribers in town.

Mr. Andrade noted it was mentioned at the previous hearing on Saturday that companies have to capture 50% to 60% of the market in order to break even and make a profit.

Mr. Cadime said there was discussion about a tax incentive for purchasing property.

Atty. Hewig said he doesn't know of any community that has done that. It would have to be offered to other providers.

He said there were towns in Western Massachusetts that didn't have cable services. The DOR decided that was an essential service and could be funded with public funds.

Mr. Mike T wrote that Comcast will impose data usage limits next year. He asked if the town could negotiate to be exempt.

Atty. Hewig said the license is for cable only even if telephone and internet are on the same wires.

No further questions or comments.

A motion was made by Mr. Zorra, seconded by Mr. Andrade, and it was unanimously

VOTED: To close the public hearing at 7:24 p.m.

The vote: Mr. Zorra – Aye; Mr. Andrade – Aye; Chairman Sullivan – Aye.

A motion was made by Mr. Andrade, seconded by Mr. Zorra, and it was unanimously

VOTED: To adjourn at 7:25 p.m.

The vote: Mr. Andrade – Aye; Mr. Zorra – Aye; Chairman Sullivan – Aye.

Respectfully submitted,

David Viera, Clerk

Prepared by:

Patricia Gamer, Secretary