

Minutes
Cable and Telecommunications Advisory Committee
January 26, 2010 Meeting

Attendees: Abe Abramovich (chairperson), Ron Comer, Bryan Smith, Jim Williams,
John Gladwell, Tom Irvin (LTPS), Kathy Farinaccio (Comcast), Gwen Cogan (Verizon),
Richard Krawczun (Lawrence Township Manager)

1. The meeting was called to order by the chairperson Abe Abramovich. The resignation of Stanley Rose from the committee was announced. The appointment of Bryan Smith to the committee was announced.
2. The agenda for the meeting was approved.
3. Ron Comer was appointed secretary for the meeting.
4. The minutes of the November 10, 2009 meeting were approved as distributed.
5. **Government Access Channel initiative**
 - a. **Status of policy/ordinance draft document revision:** Abe Abramovich announced that the revision of the latest draft of the ordinance is under way and will be circulated to the committee within the next month. Rich Krawczun reminded committee members that the goal of the ordinance will be to set parameters and criteria for programming decisions, not to establish actual programming decisions.
6. **Communications**
 - a. The committee was informed of the following communications regarding Comcast:
 1. Notice of 11-23-2009 re: Movement of NJN channel 23 from analog to digital domain
 2. Notice of 12-3-2009 re: Announcement of Comcast's acquisition of a controlling interest of NBC from GE.
 3. Notice of 12-4-2009 re: Addition of Retirement Living Channel 175 and Ovation Channel 155
 4. Notice of 1-8-2010 re: Replacement of four HD triple play packages with new HD triple play packages
 - b. The committee was informed of the following communications regarding Verizon
 1. Notice of 11-12-2009: Price increase of FiOS service to new customers
 2. Notice of 11-12-2009: Price increase notice of HBO, Cinemax, etc.
 3. Notice of 12-15-2009: Price increase notice for HD packages
 4. Notice of 12-15-2009: New HD packages for businesses
 5. Notice of 1-10-2010: Disclosure of consumer complaint handling procedure
 6. Notice of 1-10-2010: Annual consumer notification
 7. ION Worship Network has ceased operation and has been removed from the FIOS lineup.

8. Verizon franchise fee has been sent to township.

7. **Public Comments:** The committee was informed of the following events:

- a. Email from Mr. Warren Hyer to Kathy Farinaccio regarding the Comcast shift of channel 23 from analog to digital domain and the effect on his subscription.
- b. Ms. Farinaccio's response to Mr. Hyer and resolution to his issue.
- c. Mr. Hyer's email to Ms. Farinaccio acknowledging the resolution to his complaint.
- d. Mayor Mount's observation that damaged telephone poles along Route 206 (Main Street) in Lawrenceville have not been replaced for an extended period of time. Verizon's poles (which are the northbound poles) are the ones in most need of repair. Gwen Cogan said that Verizon will look into the matter.
- e. Email correspondence from Mr. Stan Rose to Kathy Farinaccio questioning the effect of a recent Comcast CableCard announcement on subscribers utilizing CableCards in their TiVO devices.
- f. Ms. Farinaccio's response to Mr. Rose's CableCard question.

8. **Extended Discussion:** The reports of communications (above) and public comments (above) led to an extended discussion in which the following concerns and points were made by attendees:

- a. **Channel packages** are often undesirable to cable consumers. It would be preferable to allow consumers to make ala carte choices of their desired stations. Also, particular channel packages often have service implications which are not typically apparent to consumers and which are not always desirable to consumers (e.g., implications for internet speed). Cable company representatives indicated that sometimes channel packages are driven by contractual obligations between the company and programmers, sometimes by technology limitations, and sometimes by business decisions.
- b. **Breakdown of charges on cable bills** is typically complex and impossible to decipher. Although, granted, specific information about cable services and charges is available in various cable locations online, it is not easily accessible or user friendly.
- c. Similarly, **consumer access to proper cable information** which would help guide them to make better decisions about their cable services and purchases is limited at best. Again, although specific information about cable services and charges is available in various cable locations online, it is not easily accessible or user friendly. In effect, most consumers rely on cable salespersons for needed information, which may vary in content, accuracy, and care from salesperson to salesperson.
- d. Cable company representatives clarified that cable salespersons are trained to explain cable charges and cable bills clearly to consumers. At the same time, it was acknowledged that cable salespersons are encouraged to "upsell."
- e. The cable company representatives pointed out that the cable companies must address a range of factors that affect how they disseminate information to consumers and how they conduct business, including government regulations, business factors, and other factors. They also pointed out that consumers must also take a share of responsibility in acquiring needed information.

9. **Old Business:** The committee's request to Comcast for information and/or action regarding New York HDTV Channels has been communicated to Comcast. Still no answer.
10. **New Business:** 800 numbers that customers can use to notify the company of an installation problem are 1-800-VERIZON and 1-800-COMCAST
11. Date and time of next meeting: March 30 at 7:30 P.M.
12. The meeting was adjourned.