Minutes - PEG Access Advisory Committee Concord, MA

Meeting - Date, Time, Location. Thursday, September 9, Virtual Meeting, 1:00 PM
Video Link: Concord PEG Access Advisory Committee - September 9, 2021

1. Roll Call: Pro tempore Chair Karlen Reed called the meeting to order at 1:00 PM, and announced that it was being recorded. Present were Ms. Reed, Court Booth (School Rep.) and Vince Carlson. KR declared that a quorum was present. Absent members were Scott Hopkinson and Cory Atkins (new member), expected to join the meeting later. Also present were Mark Pauley (MMN), Kate Hodges (Deputy Town Mgr.), David Allen, Carole Cushing

2. Minutes. The Minutes from June 3, 2021 were approved: Karlen Reed, aye, Court Booth, aye, Vince Carlson, aye

3. Election for Chair and Clerk. Karlen Reed volunteered as Chair, Vince Carlson volunteered as Clerk. Court Booth moved to approve the slate as described: Karlen Reed, aye, Court Booth, aye, Vince Carlson, aye.

4. Welcome new member - Cory Atkins described her BG as state representative for Concord 1999-2019. She did programs at MMN (CCTV) during that period. She also has an ongoing interest in doing programming which supports kids at risk - economically disadvantaged and even in prison.

5. Future Meeting Schedule: The committee agreed to virtual zoom meetings on the 2nd Thursdays of the month: Oct 7, Nov 4, Dec 2, Jan 6, Feb 3, Mar 3, Apr 7 1-2:30 PM by Zoom. One of these meeting will be hybrid, when possible, to permit face-time with new committee members, MMN staff, the PAAC liaisons, and public attendees.

6. MMN update (Mark Pauley - interim Station Manager) Mark reported that there are currently both full-time and part-time staff openings. Part time videographers work up to 20 hrs./week. They cover Government meetings - PE(G) and other Public and Educational programming (PE)G. Full-time staff hiring was on hold during a significant portion of 2020 due to Town-wide budget uncertainties. It has now resumed. On the topic of "reopening", Mark said that has 2 parts: outside in the community and inside at the MMN studio facility at CCHS. MMN is happy to do outside production where it best suits Town residents - at home or other community locations. Much of the equipment has changed. Smart phone cameras are now almost as good as $20K ENG professional gear. MMN can thus advise residents about a much broader range of production options. Projects at the CCHS studio will probably resume soon. Both Mark and Kate Hodges have had recent discussion with faculty members and the CCHS Superintendent (Dr. Hunter) about relaxing Covid-19 restrictions as soon as feasible. This would permit student access to the studio and for classroom programming. Cory Atkins asked about meeting with Mark in the studio. Mark said that he welcomes all those who have programming ideas and questions. Hours and entry access currently have some restrictions. Karlen Reed asked about echo in the School Committee room during meetings. There had been complaints. Mark described issues with the old equipment in the room, and the poor acoustics of the room itself. As a temporary workaround Mark was using a full portable rig of MMN equipment including cameras, mixer, mics and stands. This rig was moved on a regular basis between Keyes Road Select Board meetings and several School Committee and subcommittee meetings.

7. Comcast Franchise Renewal. Karlen Reed presented the timeline for renewal which extends
from approximately now (Fall 2021) to the expiration of the current agreement (April 21, 2024) highlights include:

- Proforma notice received from Comcast of the expiration date of the contract. (PEG agreements are opt-in.)
- Talk to other towns about their experience.
- Compliance review with Comcast - customer complaints, etc.
- Interview cable renewal consultants
- Perform Town-survey, preliminary hearing (?)
- Final public hearing.
- Finalize negotiations (April 21, 2024)

Questions and comments on the Contract from Committee members and the Deputy Town Mgr.
- Is this a 10-year contract, if so it will require TM approval (over 3-yrs)
- How is it possible to commit to a 10-year contract considering the industry and technology volatility?
- Kate Hodges notes that the existing Comcast has an opt-out provision for non-performance. It could possibly be invoked in case of threatening technology change.
- Karlen Reed notes that reps from the Mass Dept of Telecommunications and Cable recently informed PAAC that Comcast prefers 10-year agreements due to the nation-wide need for uniformity based on the number of agreements they sign. Verizon may be 5-yrs.
- Karlen Reed notes that all these issues should be documented and fitted to the timeline review process.

8. **Fiber Broadband Update.** Scott Hopkinson, PAAC's appointee to the Fiber Broadband Completion Taskforce is not present, but noted that their first meeting is September 15, 2021. He will provide a briefing at the next PAAC meeting

9. **PEG Access Program Awards.** Karlen asked for committee input on continuing the awards for the coming year. The 2 comments were yes along the same lines and possible addition of CCHS student awards for the best student video. Karlen and Mark Pauley mentioned one video posted to MMN YouTube on Covid-19. There was general agreement that student videos deserved recognition.

10. **Comments on Goals for 2021-2022.** Karlen Reed displayed her chart mapping the goals, and asked for comments before the next meeting. Court Booth mentioned that the number of entries was appropriately small, and that each deserved serious consideration. Vince Carlson mentioned that the Lexington Long Range Planning Committee recently issued a report on "Best Practices for Municipal Communication" (30 town survey) Aug 2020". Lexington subsequently renamed it's Cable Advisory Committee to Communications Advisory Committee, with many of the mission changes recommended in the report. These also correspond to many of the entries in Karlen's chart. Thus the documents are not that different. The Lexington Report specifically bemoans the decline of local print news coverage. In Lexington's case this is the Lexington Minuteman, now owned by Gannett (formerly Gate House Media), a national chain. This is the same ownership as the Concord Journal. In general, the recommendations cover the transition from printed media to digital media including the town website, messaging alerts, and the use of social media. Court Booth mentioned a new non-profit news "paper" the Concord Patriot, which will probably be announced more widely in the next few weeks. Dan Kennedy of Northeastern, and David Ropeik are two of the panelists at 2 adult ed sessions at the end of October. The teaser for the second session led by Elizabeth Ballentine, a Concord Academy alum, is that a new Concord online news "paper" (quotes in the blurb) will be announced. There was a question as to whether this fit into the PEG charter. Cory Atkins mentioned the importance of local news to an informed electorate.
11. **Liaison reports.** Court Booth (school rep) Noted that high school students seemed to prefer radio, while middle school students seemed to prefer video. As such it is important to do the Internet cabling while still in the early construction phase. Carole Cushing (COA observer) reported that the COA was gradually reopening. The Gift Shop has opened which means that money is coming in. More classes and events with Zoom are resuming.

12. **Public Comments:**
   David Allen: A second to Cory’s comments on local journalism. Very important. On Comcast contract length. Trying to cut down has good and bad points. May be worth a try. Cancellation clause: have your ducks lined up. Comcast will obviously challenge and scrutinize closely.

Karlen Reed adjourned the meeting at 2:25 PM
Submitted by Vincent Carlson, Clerk
Approved on __________________ (Date)