

Cable Committee  
Minutes of the Meeting of  
February 15, 2018

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TOWN OF LUDLOW

Present: Michael Hill, Ellie Villano, Michael Assaf, Thomas Ghazil, Garmina Fernandes, Attorney Bill August.

Also in attendance: Anna Lucey, Charter Communications, Kathy Picard, Linda Drewniak and Christopher Drewniak, LCTV volunteers, Lisa Nemeth, LHS Principal.

Meeting called to order at 7 p.m. in Hearing Rooms 1 and 2.

Ms. Fernandes welcomed everyone to the public hearing to further ascertain and address the cable related needs and interests of the Town of Ludlow.

Ms. Lucey, Director of Government Affairs for Charter Communications, introduced herself to the committee.

Ms. Fernandes asked for questions or comments from the public.

Kathy Picard of 238 Kendall Street told the committee she is the host of "Can Be Heroes: Conversations" which is produced at LCTV. She thanked the staff for being helpful and professional so she can inform the public about sexual abuse and bullying. Kathy would like to see more audio production capabilities available to the public.

Linda Drewniak of 309 Westerly Circle introduced her son Christopher who utilizes the LCTV studio to record a weekly sports update. Chris has Down syndrome and his weekly show has given him confidence and has help improve his speech.

Lisa Nemeth of 124 Jared Drive and the Principal of Ludlow High School said the school would not be able to run without LCTV. Mr. Hill created two classes offered to high school students that have become very popular amongst. The students produce a show highlighting the school and the entire student population is involved and can watch the show every Friday morning. There is also a sports broadcasting course which covers high school sporting events that can be broadcast to the town. LCTV covers events at the high school, such as senior activities and graduation, which can be viewed by the public.

Atty. August asked Mr. Hill what meetings are filmed by LCTV. Mr. Hill replied that a number of meetings are filmed regularly: Board of Selectmen, School Committee, Board of Public Works, Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Finance Committee, Zoning Board of Appeals, Annual Town Meeting, and Special Town Meeting.

Atty. August asked if the meetings are broadcast live. Mr. Hill explained the ones at the town hall and the school department are live. LCTV can also go live from their studio and the high school auditorium. Mr. Hill told Atty. August the school department may be relocated to a different location and they may need a new origination point.

Ms. Villano asked about going live from Exit 7 Theater. Mr. Hill said he has not gone live from that location in years and he is not sure if it still works.

Ms. Fernandes also told Atty. August about "Meet the Candidates" forums held at LCTV every year as well as other special events that occur throughout town.

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Atty. August asked about the signal quality. Mr. Hill said the only problems he's had were replacing the modulators on numerous occasions because they are kept in the boiler room at town hall. Mr. Hill said Charter has always been great at helping him with the modulators when needed. The modulators are all analog. Atty. August asked Ms. Lucey if she has encountered Charter implementing HD PEG access. She said she has not seen it in New England states but it is a topic of conversation.

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Mr. Hill said high definition is something LCTV has thought about and everything in the studio is high definition.

Ms. Fernandes asked Mr. Hill about his wish list. Mr. Hill explained LCTV is a department of the town. He said HD is on his wish list. There are various equipment needs that will come up over the next few years. The studio was renovated 8 years ago and equipment will begin to break down. In the next 10 years he envisions replacing the broadcast server and cameras.

Mr. Hill asked Ms. Lucey about the electronic program guide on Charter. He said he has heard a lot of other communities who would also like to see this implemented. He said it currently says "local access" and would like to see more specific information. Ms. Lucey said the guide is on a system wide basis and it is difficult to do on a town by town basis. She says she has looked into this and there are various technical difficulties and costs that make this prohibitive at this time.

Ms. Fernandes asked if any committee members had any complaints or accolades to share about Charter. Mr. Ghazil said he has personally tried to call Charter about signal quality and has never received an adequate response. He explained there is a difference between the audio levels of the ABC HD channel and the regular digital ABC channel. He has checked with the broadcaster and they told him the problem is not on their end.

Mr. Ghazil said he heard Charter was doing beta testing on a streaming service and wanted to know why Ludlow was not involved. Ms. Lucey said they usually do their testing in larger markets.

Atty. August asked Ms. Lucey if she knew of any new products or services that were in the works for Charter. Ms. Lucey said she is aware of some things but she cannot share them at this time. She said Spectrum has hotspots available and there is a map on their website. They have also done a speed lift, so all Spectrum customers have increased internet speeds at the same price point. On the cable side they are launching a "Spectrum World Box" that is still in a testing phase. This will be more of an interactive cable box.



Atty. August asked Ms. Lucey if she is aware of any complaints from Ludlow residents. She said the only complaint she has heard is about a line extension on West Street. Ms. Lucey said she knows the Board of Selectmen has some concerns about channel changes. She is meeting with them in March to discuss it.

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Mr. Hill said the West Street issue is one of the biggest problems the committee has faced and it has been going on for years. Mr. Hill said there is also a problem on Maria's way. All the lines were run and they were having trouble getting Charter to hook up a landline. Ms. Villano said Ms. Lucey is coming in to talk with the Selectmen about all these issues as well as specific complaints they have received.

Ms. Villano said, during the last contract, Charter committed to keeping their Ludlow office open for a minimum of five years. She would like a commitment from Charter that they will continue with that office.

Mr. Ghazil asked why the Ludlow Charter office is closed from 12 to 1 every day. Ms. Lucey said they need to have a lunch hour. Mr. Ghazil said it is a problem because a lot of people can only go there during that time. Mr. Hill asked if they could stagger their lunches. Ms. Lucey did not know if this was possible.

Mr. Assaf asked if the internet speeds were lifted for everyone or if it was only available to new customers. Ms. Lucey said she believed most customers with current packages received the increase.

Mr. Assaf asked if there is a possibility of providing a supplemental or backup data link at the high school where the tv studio is. Ms. Lucey said not at this time, unless it is brought up later on during the negotiation process.

Ms. Villano told Ms. Lucey she finds it problematic that long term customers cannot receive any sort of deals but if they turn off their service for 60 days they will be eligible for a discounted package. She thinks Charter needs to be aware of the possible loss of long term customers because there are other options. She would like to see periodic bundle deals offered to long-time customers.

Mr. Assaf said if the new elementary school is built, there will be a community area for events to take place and he would like to be able to broadcast from that building. This building would be on the same grounds as the new school administration office but they would be two separate buildings. Mr. Hill said this is similar to the way the current school department building and Exit 7 Theater are set up.

Ms. Fernandes asked Ms. Lucey about a popular Portuguese channel and wants to know if Charter will continue providing the channel. Ms. Lucey said she does not hear about channels until they are taking it away. Atty. August said they cannot negotiate for specific channels due to the Cable Act.

Ms. Fernandes asked Ms. Lucey about public hotspots and if they offer them in any community. Ms. Lucey said she does not know but she can ask.

Mr. Hill reiterated a few things about LCTV. LCTV works closely with the high school and the waiting list grows for the classes offered. He envisions LCTV growing in the next 10 years and he may need to increase staff and equipment to accommodate these needs. LCTV also works with Chapin Street Elementary school on a weekly basis to film a morning show. Mr. Hill also works with an English teacher at the middle school to film a class project every year. He would like to see a way to increase LCTV's presence in other schools.

Ms. Villano told Ms. Lucey that LCTV used to be located inside the town hall and the move to the high school was ideal. It opened a lot of doors for student involvement.

Mr. Hill asked Ms. Lucey if she could provide subscriber numbers. Atty. August said those numbers are on the state website.

Ms. Fernandes thanked everyone for coming.

Michael Hill  
Sharon Thayer  
C. Villano