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Cable Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes 03-30-04

SELECTMEN'S CABLE TELEVISION ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Minutes of meeting of March 30, 2004

Meeting began @ 7:14pm in the Selectmen's Chambers, Town Hall

Members present – Phil McCarthy, Bob Chebator and Paul Berg

Also in attendance – Charles Norton, Dan O'Connol and Glenn Koenig, John Maher

The draft minutes of the meeting of March 22, 2004 were VOTED (3-0) approved on motion of Mr. Chebator, seconded by Mr. Berg

The committee interviewed and questioned representatives from CPG, Rick Borton and Tom Cohan followed by the representative from TDI, Chuck Sherwood. Mr. Borton cited as strengths his former positions in government and representation of all sides in cable related issues. He stated that they are not ideological and that it is his position that PEG access works best when under independent management. Mr. Cohan stated that due to their years in government they keep the consumer foremost. As to perceived weaknesses Mr. Cohan stated that they are realists. Mr. Borton said they had created a vision statement and shown communities how to utilize the I-Net although Mr. Cohan said he was not a big pusher of the I-Net when approaching operators. They stated that they could gather all information within the 6-month time frame called for in their proposal. They stated that their engineer has contacts with operator engineers and do not expect a cooperation problem. They expounded on their proposed method of conducting a community survey through the auspices of the U Conn. and that it would utilize a cold call telephone survey but that they would if the committee wished use other methods such as focus groups and workshops. Mr. Barton stated that they were prepared to formulate recommendations for a non-profit access corporation. He stated that as of December 2002 Comcast had recorded 10,523 subscribers and RCN 3,540 subscribers in Arlington. If contracted to be involved in the franchise negotiations Mr. Barton stated they would be able to draft an RFP and franchise agreement and would consider the judicious use of liquidated damages.

Mr. Sherwood cited his long experience consulting for access organizations and communities on cable related issues including his work for ACMI. He highlighted his real understanding of the value of PEG access to communities and that interest groups, non-profits and communities are his clients. He has not represented the industry. He highlights his experience in conducting needs assessments and their value. He is prepared through focus groups, workshops and follow-up surveys to educate the community on information technology, website development, school uses etc. He feels it is a mantra to increase income streams for public access groups and is prepared to develop a strategy for Arlington to accomplish that task. He expects no problems with operator cooperation due to the process itself and his contacts. He has strong feelings regarding the state requirement of operators paying only 50c per subscriber per year to towns and said that it was not to be messed with as it in combination with the federal allowance of 5% of gross has resulted in fostering more public access outlets in Massachusetts. He sees no problem in gathering all information and completing all assignments within the 6-month time frame outlined in his proposal. He does not propose to actively participate in franchise negotiations but stated he will arm Town Counsel and the committee with the tools they would need for successful negotiations.

Following the interviews the committee took public input and further discussed the two proposals. Mr. Maher stated that he found both to be less than impressive. He expected more. The committee then agreed to continue further action to it's next meeting on April 6th at which time Mr. Berg would report back on reference checks.

The meeting adjourned @ 10:03 p.m.