

CABLECASTING BOARD MEETING MINUTES - MARCH 15, 2000 - PAGE 1

Present: Hall, Kuhne and Spivak - Birmingham
Borgon and Lowmaster - Beverly Hills
Leckie - Bingham Farms

Absent: Abbott, Devereaux, Doctoroff and Fleischer - Birmingham
Janks - Beverly Hills
DiSessa - Franklin

Also present: Hagaman - Cablecasting Board Administrator
Gillis - Attorney for Cablecasting Board
Martinico - Director of Technology, Birmingham Schools
Colgan - Municipal/Library Access Channel
DiMaria - MediaOne representative
Buterbaugh - Beverly Hills Council representative
Currier - Birmingham City Attorney's office

Chairperson Hall called the meeting to order at 7:56 a.m. in the Rotary Room of the Baldwin Public Library at 300 W. Merrill Street.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION by Spivak, supported by Borgon, that the minutes of a regular Cablecasting Board meeting held on February 16, 2000 be approved as submitted.

Motion passes unanimously.

FRANCHISE RENEWAL

Hall reported on a recent meeting between Don Gillis and Jon Kreucher, head negotiator for MediaOne, at which time the language of the side letters associated with the franchise agreement was finalized. The documents were to have been written on the appropriate stationary, signed, and delivered to Gillis. Gillis informed the board that he has not received the signed letters as yet. He called Kreucher and left a message advising him that it is important that the side letters be received as quickly as possible.

The Birmingham commission will consider adoption of the franchise agreement and cable ordinance at its Monday, March 20 meeting. Bingham Farms will discuss the proposed franchise agreement at its March 27 meeting. The Beverly Hills and Franklin councils will address the franchise renewal documents at upcoming meetings.

It is Gillis' advice that the communities either withhold approval of the franchise renewal in absence of the side letters or approve the franchise agreement subject to receipt and approval of the side letters.

PEG ACCESS COMMITTEE REPORT

It is anticipated that documents will be available for review by the PEG Access Committee next month providing information that will assist them in selecting the optimum course for managing the public and government access issue. Hagaman indicated that Janks has been talking to representatives from Bloomfield Community Television in an attempt to explore the options available to this consortium.

Lowmaster thinks it is important that interested individuals have the opportunity to produce public access programming. She has serious questions about partnering with the schools to provide PEG access. Lowmaster is concerned about the availability of a studio and equipment for public access, considering the intense use of equipment by the schools. She suggested combining the public access and library channel.

Hall explained that there is no plan to combine public access with educational access. The educational access channel is operated by the Birmingham Public Schools. There are separate cable channels designated for public access and government/library access for the consortium communities. The continuation of those channels has been negotiated in the renewal document. Public access and governmental/library access will be managed by this board if the franchise agreements are approved by the communities. An agreement to partner with the schools would only mean that the parties would share facilities and equipment. It would not affect broadcast facilities or the school district's program schedule.

Lowmaster thanked MediaOne for providing the personnel and equipment to produce the Beverly Hills Meet the Candidates Night sponsored by the League of Women Voters. She questioned the status of an event sponsored by the Franklin Historical Society. Colgan responded that the board has determined that the Franklin program is a public access and not a government program. People involved in producing this program were referred to MediaOne for coverage of the event.

Kuhne commented that Lowmaster's concerns have been expressed by members of this board for several years. He recalled the marketing that was done in conjunction with the entire re-franchising process. In the last five years there have been marketing surveys of people in the community and questionnaires to analyze how public access is being used. It has been concluded that public access is a very important topic for a small number of people in the four communities. The board's mandate is to facilitate the accessibility of public access for those people. The board attempted to address this issue in the franchise renewal process. It is understood that most franchise operators have indicated that they are getting out of the public access business.

Borgon remarked that the board will discuss many of these concerns after a recommendation is made by the PEG Access Committee.

Board members have received copies of the proposed Cablecasting Board budget and Cable Administrator budget for 2000-2001. The proposed Cablecasting Board budget is based on forecasted revenues of \$110,300 and expenditures of \$102,100.

Hall stated that the Cablecasting Board budget excludes the proposed PEG grant and other revenue that may be generated under the new franchise agreement. Revenue may increase due to use of Digital TV and highspeed Internet connection. It could decrease due to competition from satellite companies and from DSL lines. A revised budget will be prepared after the franchise agreement is adopted by the consortium communities.

Hall indicated that there is little change from last year's Cablecasting Board budget. A minor increase in revenues is anticipated with the same amount for expenses. The single largest expense is the Create Tech contract. The budget for the Cable Administrator is essentially unchanged except for a slight increase in payroll. In an effort to reduce the fund balance for the administrator position, there will be a small reduction in the cost to the communities.

Buterbaugh questioned the percentage increase in expenditures. Hall responded that expenses will decrease by 0.5% in the proposed budget. This is attributable to the conclusion of the franchise agreement negotiations. Buterbaugh suggested that the budget document include a brief explanation of significant increases or decreases in line items.

MOTION by Spivak, supported by Leckie, to approve the Cablecasting Board budget and the Cable Administrator Budget for Fiscal Year 2000-2001.

Motion passes unanimously.

MEDIA ONE RELATED TOPICS

Price Increase

A letter from MediaOne to the municipalities dated February 23, 2000 outlines the company's new pricing for cable services. The new prices for cable services will constitute an increase for the majority of subscribers in the communities.

Hall commented that the cable company's communication to its subscribers in the Los Angeles area relative to Digital TV packages and pricing is much better than the material distributed in the Birmingham area consortium. DiMaria stated that MediaOne will be sending out a new mailing in April, which will be more concise than the previous mailing describing cable offerings.

Subscriber Complaints

DiMaria commented on the disposition of each customer complaints received in the last month. He noted that subscribers are now able to reach the call center. However, there have been problems with the information provided by customer service representatives. MediaOne will continue to address this matter.

A complaint was received from Mike O'Shea (#22) of Beverly Hills regarding programming changes. Mark Sayres (#23) of Birmingham complained of periodic reception problems after

MediaOne was out to fix his cable TV problems. DiMaria indicated that MediaOne is following up to make sure everything is working properly. These complaints will be discussed at the April board meeting.

Bob Francis (#24) of Franklin received a service call from MediaOne and a follow-up courtesy call. Donald Tucker (#25) of Birmingham was contacted three times by a MediaOne advocate after a service call was made to correct his reception problems. He was too busy to talk to the advocate at those times. Mr. Tucker indicated that he will call MediaOne back when he has the opportunity. The complaint will be held over until the next meeting. At the board's request, DiMaria will prepare a report showing the history of this account.

Complaints from Joe McDermott (#26), Jack Shea (#27) and Paul Barrett (#28) of Birmingham involve the channel line up. DiMaria stated that these individuals were incorrectly informed that a channel will be made available if enough subscribers request that channels. MediaOne advocates placed calls to these individuals to explain the company's process for selecting channels. The follow up reports from those calls are not available. These complaints will be held over until next month.

DiMaria explained that MediaOne does keep track of the amount of requests for a channel, which are sent to the marketing department and considered when channels are added. National deals with respect to channels are mandated from the corporate headquarters. With respect to local information, MediaOne keep tallies on marketing surveys and customers requests from each market.

DiMaria commented that the complaint from Mr. Shea illustrates a problem MediaOne experienced over the summer. A CSR informed a customer that a supervisor was not available but will return the call to that subscriber. No one ever calls the subscriber. DiMaria explained that the procedure in place at the call center is for an advocate to talk to customers if a supervisor is not available. DiMaria will obtain follow up reports on these complaints and forward them to Hagaman.

Hagaman related a complaint she received yesterday from a Franklin resident who is not able to receive the WTVS signal on the stereo channel. MediaOne has been informed of this problem. DiMaria will follow up on this complaint.

Lowmaster related complaints received from her neighbors regarding problems experienced last summer during the rebuild. The individuals called MediaOne with their problems and were not satisfied with the company's response. It has been acknowledged that there was poor customer service last summer.

Update on Rebuild

DiMaria stated that the Internet certification process is 85% complete with nine nodes left to certify in the four communities. As of February, there are 542 subscribers to the high speed data system and about 234 digital subscribers. He understands that there are people who want these services and that MediaOne is losing business.

Monthly Subscriber Statistics

DiMaria explained a change in the format of the system statistics. In answer to an inquiry about the 1999 date on the MLAC-15 bulletin board, DiMaria stated that MediaOne has ordered a new character generator to replace the existing equipment.

Monthly Access Report

There were no comments on the local origination reports for January and February.

DiMaria mentioned that copies of a press release were distributed to the board indicating that 14 schools, including Pierce Elementary in Birmingham, are winners of MediaOne's COOL Awards for Outstanding Educators. MediaOne provided Pierce Elementary with a \$10,000 cash grant as well as new computer systems.

DiMaria distributed a sheet showing MediaOne call center statistics for the first quarter. The chart indicates that the percentage of calls answered in 30 seconds has increased to 96.92% in March.

ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

Hagaman described a situation that developed last week when the visual transmission from the head end to the subscriber base was severely distorted. She discussed the problem with DiMaria as well as the cable company's poor communication. Bob Colgan from Create Tech now has a direct number to MediaOne's network operation center, which will facilitate the resolution of these types of problems in the future.

Hagaman advised the board of a change in the public access studio on Eton Street. MediaOne has reduced its space at the Eton Street office with the customer service entrance now at the side of the building. There appears to be no MediaOne personnel staffing the public access studio, which is not in compliance with the existing franchise agreement. Hagaman assumes that people interested in public access programming can use the MediaOne studio in Southfield. DiMaria will look into this and report back to the board.

Hall noted that MediaOne has reimbursed the consortium for expenses related to the transfer of the franchise from MediaOne to AT&T.

MLAC-15 REPORT

Colgan presented highlights of the March production report.

OLD BUSINESS

Hagaman referred to a Free Press article copied and distributed to the board entitled, AComcast to dominate state. The article says that it is a foregone conclusion that, should the transfer from MediaOne to AT&T be approved, the next transfer will be to Comcast. Hall remarked that the communities have not been formally advised of another request for transfer.

DiMaria stated that MediaOne has received authorization to begin discussions with Comcast regarding organization and structure. There are documents being passed back and forth by both parties.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Buterbaugh informed the board that, since he was not re-elected to the Beverly Hills Council, this is his last meeting as council liaison to the Cablecasting Board. He thinks that this is a very professional group. The meetings have been informative, and he has enjoyed listening to people from a variety of backgrounds make their points in a rational way.

Buterbaugh urged the members to be responsive to the public. The ultimate goal is to have good service for cable television. He thanked the board for allowing him to sit in on the meetings and wished them the best.

Hall expressed the board's appreciation to Buterbaugh for his contributions and input during the last four years.

Stuart Laidlaw of 704 Tottenham in Birmingham concurred that Mr. Buterbaugh will be missed on the Cablecasting Board. Laidlaw asked if a request was made to videotape a Birmingham Parks and Recreation public hearing in this room. He was informed that Create Tech has not been contacted about that meeting.

Laidlaw mentioned that the Eton Road office has many informative pamphlets on MediaOne services. Laidlaw expressed the view that MediaOne people have not been forthcoming in the changes that were made at the Eton Road office and public access studio.

Laidlaw informed those present that he was recently appointed to the Cablecasting Board by the Birmingham commission. He looks forward to working with everybody starting next month.

Hall stated that the Cablecasting Board and the negotiating team recognize that there are problems with public access. The board had hoped that the franchise renewal would be completed a year or two ago so that a public access studio could be operational sooner. Hopefully, the communities will approve the franchise documents within the next month or two, and the board will initiate a plan to provide PEG access programming.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:03 a.m.