

Present: Camp, Correa, Greenslade, Hirsch, Hollinshead, Wilson - Birmingham
Borgon, Delaney, Lacroix, Woodard – Beverly Hills
Ettenson – Bingham Farms
Anderson – Franklin

Absent: Bello - Birmingham

Also Present: Hagaman - Executive Director
Currier – Attorney for Cable Board
Martinico - Director of Technology, Birmingham Schools
Helwig – Bloomfield Community Television representative
Pfeifer – Beverly Hills Council liaison
Eaton - Comcast representative

Borgon called the meeting to order at 7:45 a.m. in the Village of Beverly Hills municipal building at 18500 W. Thirteen Mile Road.

APPROVE MINUTES

Motion by Woodard, seconded by Hirsch, that the minutes of a regular Birmingham Area Cable Board meeting held on Wednesday, January 15, 2003 be approved as submitted.

Motion passed unanimously.

RESOLUTION OF APPRECIATION

Borgon read a Birmingham Area Cable Board Resolution recognizing the distinguished and unselfish service of Stuart Laidlaw while serving as City of Birmingham representative on the Cable Board from February of 2000 through December of 2002.

Motion by Hollinshead, seconded by Delaney, that the Birmingham Area Cable Board adopt the Resolution of Appreciation for the dedicated service of Stuart Laidlaw as a City of Birmingham representative on the Cable Board.

Roll Call Vote:

Motion passed unanimously.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

PEG Committee – Electronic Bulletin Board

Hollinshead reported that the PEG Committee has met twice since the last Board meeting. Several matters were addressed, the most pressing item being replacement of the electronic bulletin board for Channels 15 and 18. Board members are in receipt of data comparing two electronic bulletin board systems being considered by the PEG committee. The Committee has looked at both systems and spoken with representatives of the companies offering the equipment and installation. Specifications and costs have been evaluated. The integration of each system into the existing structure has been reviewed with the staff of BCTV.

The Board discussed the capability and cost of the two systems being considered. Quotes have been received from TargetVision in the amount of \$10,315 and from Tel Systems at \$15,560. It was noted that the replacement of the existing system is a matter of urgency due to the tentative condition of the current electronic bulletin board.

It is the recommendation of the PEG Committee to purchase the Scala Display System presented by Tel Systems as supported by the comparison chart. A significant consideration is that the software for the Scala system is based on Microsoft Word and will facilitate training and integration with BCTV operations, providing a higher level of service to BACB constituents. A computer is included in the cost, and local support is available with the Scala system.

Board members discussed the quotes. There was agreement that the Scala system is preferable. There was some interest in the ability of the TargetVision bulletin board to incorporate several sources of programming on the screen (stocks, weather, health, etc.). It was suggested that this feature is incidental and is provided elsewhere on the range of channels offered through Comcast.

There was a question on the cost of technical support for the Scala system following the one-year on-site service included in the quote. The cost of support for the TargetVision system is \$1,020/year. Hagaman will contact Tel Systems and inquire about the cost for additional annual support.

Bloomfield Community TV's interest in sharing the cost of the Scala system was questioned. Helwig remarked that BCTV is interested in the Scala system for its Channel 18. If BCTV pursues a Scala system, it will discuss cost sharing with the Board.

Questions on the recommended purchase were addressed by Hagaman. She noted that funds are available in the PEG programming budget for this expenditure.

Motion by Hollinshead, seconded by Wilson, that the Birmingham Area Cable Board authorize the purchase and installation of the Scala electronic bulletin board system by Tel Systems for use on Birmingham Area Cable Board channels for a cost not to exceed \$16,000.

It was agreed that the purchase will be subject to the cost of ongoing service after the first year.

Motion passed unanimously.

COMCAST RELATED TOPICS

Subscriber Complaints

Complaint #03-04: Mrs. Chris Carlson of Birmingham had a problem canceling the automatic payment of her Comcast bill. Hagaman reported that the complaint has been resolved to the satisfaction of the subscriber.

Complaint #03-05: Mr. Daniel Lincoln of Beverly Hills maintains that the cable modem he received as a MediaOne customer is his, and he objects to paying the \$5/month charge for the

modem. When he stopped paying this charge, his service was disconnected without a phone call or letter. Hagaman reported that the subscriber's problems were resolved and Comcast credited his bill and reconnected his service. Eaton stated that he understands that Comcast has agreed that Mr. Lincoln owns the modem.

Complaint #03-06: Ms. Debra Jalaba of Beverly Hills reported being treated rudely by a Comcast customer service representative when she called about Pay-Per-View charges on her bill. There was some confusion about placing a security code on her service. Hagaman stated that this issue has been resolved with the subscriber. Eaton reported that the rude treatment of the customer by the CSR has been addressed by Comcast.

Complaint #03-07: Mrs. Angela Caronis of Birmingham submitted a complaint related to installation of high speed Internet service. Eaton reported that Comcast's technical manager has been working with this subscriber, and an agreeable solution has been reached. The customer's vinyl siding will be repaired and paid for by Comcast with credit off her bill.

Complaint #03-08: Ms. Cindy Moffat of Beverly Hills was without cable for several days. Hagaman related that the customer's service was restored. Eaton will verify whether a credit was given to this subscriber. He noted that Comcast's ordinary response time for loss of service is less than 24 hours.

Complaint #03-09: A complaint from Ms. Jackie Kennedy of Birmingham involved problems with Comcast billing and with her cable box. Hagaman commended LaShundra Wiley from Comcast on her handling of this complaint. The subscriber received one month of credit to her account and an apology for the inconvenience with her cable box.

Birmingham Link

Eaton reported that Comcast is waiting for notice from the City of Birmingham to begin work on the underground fiber link to City Hall.

Monthly Subscriber Statistics

Eaton stated that he was not able to compile a system statistics report for January, but noted that there has been no dramatic departure in the subscriber numbers. Eaton will prepare the report and fax it to Hagaman. The Board will receive reports from January and February next month.

Other Issues

At last month's meeting, Eaton agreed to provide the Board with detail that is not personally identifiable with respect to complimentary cable subscriptions offered by Comcast. Eaton did not have this report prepared but informed the Board that there are three categories of complimentary service. One of them is municipal buildings which includes city hall, schools, and libraries. Comcast employees also receive courtesy service. Another category is apartment or condominium managers who assist Comcast by collecting cable boxes and with marketing.

Eaton related that Comcast recently completed an internal audit to confirm that people are not receiving free service in error. He will prepare the report requested by the Board and forward it to Hagaman.

It was questioned whether all municipalities entitled to complimentary service are receiving it. Martinico thought that free cable for schools was negotiated through the franchise agreement. Eaton responded that it is Comcast policy to offer free service to schools, libraries, and municipalities whether or not it is part of the franchise agreement.

Delaney stated that his television still has distortion on channels 2 and 4. Eaton explained that the reason for poor picture quality on those two channels is ingress due to the proximity of the tall transmitting towers that send signals for channels 2 and 4. If a subscriber has a loose or bad connection in his house or at a neighbor's house, the electro-magnetic waves can enter the cable. It is particularly difficult to resolve problems with distortion on channel 2 because the communities are so close to the tower. He urged people with this problem to call Comcast and request a service call in an attempt to clean up ingress problems and improve their reception.

Greenslade questioned whether the Comcast web site contains channel line up information. Eaton responded that a customer cannot access their channel line up through the web site at the present time. There are different channel line-ups in various communities. He suggested accessing www.tvguide.com for a channel guide customized to your zip code. Comcast is working on upgrading its web site to provide more information to customers.

Borgon questioned the status of the franchise fee audit. Eaton related that Comcast people are in conversation with the auditor from Plante & Moran and anticipate having matters resolved satisfactorily for all parties. Hagaman will contact Beth Bialy from Plante & Moran for an update on the audit report.

Currier stated that it has been brought to his attention that Comcast may have been late with its franchise fee payment. The Cable Ordinance states that the franchise fees are to be paid within 20 days of the end of the quarter whereas the Cable Franchise Agreement states that it is to be paid within 30 days of the end of the quarter.

Currier discussed this with Eaton, whose opinion it is that the Franchise Agreement is negotiated and therefore controls. Currier does not necessarily agree with this view because both the Franchise Agreement and the Ordinance were negotiated together. There are numerous places in the Franchise Agreement that say it is subject to local ordinances. There is nothing in the Franchise Agreement that says which document controls in the event that there is a direct conflict between the Agreement and the Ordinance. Currier noted that the BACB committee members who negotiated the Franchise Agreement no longer sit on the Board. However, Comcast's Jon Kreucher is available, and Currier will have a discussion with him to see if this issue can be resolved.

Arne Anderson commented that he received an e-mail from Comcast about a week ago asking him to answer a brief survey online regarding his recent Comcast customer service experience. Anderson could not access the site to respond to the survey and received an error message. He contacted Comcast and the telephone operator indicated that there was a problem that has not yet been resolved. Anderson went to the Comcast Internet site and used its customer feedback service only to receive a message back saying that the service has been disconnected.

Eaton is disappointed that Anderson had that experience and will attempt to determine the problem. He commented that Comcast is establishing a customer feedback web site and testing it in several markets. It is not presently available in this area.

Eaton referred to an article by Mike Wendland, Free Press columnist, regarding Comcast's recovery from a difficult situation last year when it switched 180,000 high-speed Internet subscribers from the bankrupt @Home system to its own system. Another article from Forbes.com indicates that Comcast is pressing cable networks for lower programming fees. Board members received a brochure showing Comcast employee recruitment efforts.

Eaton reported that the customer service level at the Plymouth call center has been consistently above 90% since the first of the year. Comcast is making arrangements to initiate a 24-hour escalation desk. If a customer is not satisfied with the answers or treatment received from a customer account executive, the call can be transferred to a supervisor who will be there to answer the phone.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Hagaman commented that the subscribers in this area are charged \$5/month per modem. There was an article in Multichannel News about west coast charges of \$3/month for the modem. She asked if this is a variable rate Comcast charges for the modem depending on the area.

Eaton responded that, when Comcast acquired AT&T Broadband, it found that AT&T had different billing practices than Comcast in some areas. Comcast is in the process of reviewing and reconciling those differences so that there will be consistent billing practices across the country.

Last month Board member Anderson suggested that the Spam filters used by Comcast's high speed Internet system are inadequate. Eaton responded that he relayed these concerns to the cable company. He learned that the Internet Spam filter used by Comcast is called Bright Mail, which is the industry standard for many companies.

Hagaman asked if Comcast is making strides in improving the format of monthly subscriber bills so that the company's phone number is more visible to subscribers. The BACB office continues to receive many phone calls from subscribers who think they are contacting Comcast. Eaton indicated that the law has changed, and the Board could remove its phone number from the bill. Hagaman emphasized that her intent is to increase the visibility of Comcast's phone number and not to reduce the visibility of the Cable Board's number.

Eaton responded that Comcast went through the process of introducing a new bill format two years ago. This issue should have been addressed at that time. He has forwarded the Board's suggestion to the company, noting that the concern cannot be resolved at the Plymouth office because of the uniformity issue with Comcast billing. Eaton stated that the Comcast number is 1-888-COMCAST. He will continue to suggest that the size of the number be increased to be more visible on the bill.

Hagaman reported that she has prepared a draft of the Cable Board budget for fiscal year 2003/04 and will review the document with the Treasurer before it is distributed to the Board for consideration. She informed the Board that revenue for the next fiscal year will be substantially lower than projected due to the exclusion of franchise fees from Internet service.

MLTV 15/PA 18 REPORT

Helwig reported that ten municipal meetings were produced during the last month. Other programs produced by Bloomfield Community TV for MLTV were Birmingham Youth Assistance's "Barking At Berkshire, the Birmingham Historical Society's "Gettysburg Address", and the League of Women Voters "Beverly Hills Candidates Night".

Thirty-six programs were produced for PA 18. They include a program from the Birmingham Republican Women's Club, Birmingham Task Force on Race Relations, the Birmingham Community Coalition's Summit, and "Talk of the Town".

Helwig reported that the new digital playback decks are installed and working well. BCTV will be pleased to have the new bulletin board installed. Helwig commented on how the recent cold weather has interfered with the operation of the camera lenses in the production van.

The Bloomfield Township Board of Trustees approved the policies and procedures document reviewed by this Board. Final copies will be printed and distributed to BACB members. The Bloomfield Township Board of Trustees has also approved plans to proceed with the renovation and expansion of the MLTV offices and studio. Construction will begin as soon as possible.

Hollinshead referred to a program featuring a speaker attending a meeting of the Birmingham Republican Women's Club. He asked if any outreach has been made to Democrat clubs or committees in the area. Helwig responded that BCTV's program development committee has addressed this issue and would welcome a program request from a Democrat club. She is not aware of a Democrat club in this area. Helwig commented that BCTV views the taping of the speakers featured at meetings of the Birmingham Republican Women's Club as a community event versus a partisan event.

Motion by Wilson, seconded by Hirsch, to adjourn the meeting at 8:57 a.m.

Motion passed unanimously.