

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

Absent: Camp and Correa – Birmingham  
Pinkos – Beverly Hills

Also Present: Hagaman - Executive Director  
Currier – Attorney for Cable Board  
Helwig – Bloomfield Community Television representative  
Martinico - Director of Technology, Birmingham Schools  
Beller, Parker, Parr - Comcast representatives

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 Ettenson, that the minutes of a regular meeting of the Birmingham Area Cable Board held on August 20, 2003 be approved as submitted.

Motion carried.

### **ACCESS SERVICES**

Hollinshead reported that the PEG Committee met on September 5 with representatives of the two companies that submitted proposals to provide cable access management service to the Birmingham Area Cable Board - Bloomfield Community Television and Create-Tech. Committee members heard presentations from both suppliers and asked detailed questions. The PEG Committee is conducting a thorough review of the proposals and will keep the Board informed of its deliberations.

### **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

#### **Peg Committee**

Hollinshead reported that production of a compelling program series on the Rouge River Watershed is forthcoming due to the efforts of Arne Anderson and Leslie Helwig and staff at BCTV. Anderson and BCTV have prepared a draft treatment for the program.

Anderson stated that, because the Rouge River basin covers a large area, he anticipates that the series will be a collaboration of Bloomfield, Birmingham, and possibly Southfield public access cable television personnel. It will be a constructive, cooperative effort covering the Rouge River in detail in our area with an overview of the Rouge in the metropolitan area. Filming may start as early as this Saturday with a tour going through the Rouge area. Anderson hopes that this will be an interesting and informative series.

Helwig referred to a draft outline of the program indicating that BCTV will identify the separate programs in the series and what content goes into each show.

**Cable Review and Liaison Committee**

Hirsch reported that there are five topics to be reviewed in an effort to maintain focus on issues that arise at monthly Board meetings. These items require a response from Comcast representatives.

The first subject is the Board request for a written recap of each subscriber rate increase in the last two years and the reason for each. Hirsch noted that a report distributed to the Board at this meeting indicates the date and amount of cable prices from April 1, 2000 to April 1, 2003. Included with this information is a two-page report entitled, “2003 Price Adjustments Key Facts”.

John Parr from Comcast stated that price adjustments reflect the overall value of a product over that period of time. He reviewed material from the handout emphasizing that the average price adjustment from 2000 to 2003 is 7%, which is below the national average of 8.2% in the cable industry. Parr affirmed that programming is the major factor driving price adjustments. Comcast sees an annual increase of programming costs of 15%-20%. Parr also cited improvements to the infrastructure and the latest technology products as factors adding value to the system in a competitive market.

Delaney asked if it is Comcast’s goal to charge a uniform price for services in the metro Detroit area. Parr responded that Comcast is working towards that. Comcast has taken over other cable operations, which resulted in different prices and channel offerings in various communities. It would be more efficient for Comcast in terms of providing service and handling phone calls to have a uniform channel line up and pricing.

Greenslade asked if there is a way to identify visible benefits to the customer in the future when price changes occur so that this information could be passed on to the subscriber.

Parr commented that Comcast strives to enhance the value of the overall product in an effort to compete for the entertainment dollar. Improvements in the overall product include increased and new programming on various networks, channel additions, advanced products, and infrastructure improvements. Comcast needs to maintain its plant more effectively to provide these services.

Ettenson remarked that the Board has requested the reason for each of the Comcast price increases. Parr answered that he hopes that the reasons provided in the handout address some of the Board’s questions.

Ettenson stated that the 7% average price adjustment quoted by Comcast may be below the national industry average of 8.2%, but it is substantially higher than the consumer price index for the last two years. He asked if Comcast can provide a future outlook in terms of price increases.

Michael Parker from Comcast stated that he cannot comment on what will happen two years from now in terms of rate increases. It is impossible to predict future market dynamics, competition, and programming contracts.

Hirsch stated that Comcast has been asked to provide a timeframe for passing on savings to subscribers based on the company's publicized efforts to cut programming costs by 10 percent.

Louise Beller commented that, while Comcast is working to negotiate a reduction in programming rates, it does not have an exact plan to apply a specific cost reduction across the board.

Hirsch asked Comcast representatives for an update on plans and timeline for lowering rates for seniors.

Parker responded that there is no plan or timeline in place at this time to offer a senior citizen discount. He is aware that the issue has been raised by this Board. Parker suggested that it would be appropriate for Comcast representatives to talk to the new leadership for the Michigan region and learn their intention in this regard.

Hirsch stated that the Board will continue to raise this point because it is a sensitive area for many people on fixed incomes.

Borgon suggested that the new leadership be invited to a Board meeting. Parker answered that it might be appropriate to set up a smaller meeting with the Board chair and other members.

Parr introduced Louise Beller, Director of Corporate Affairs, as the newest member of Comcast's Detroit West Team. Beller highlighted her background and experience and indicated that she is looking forward to working with the Cable Board.

Hirsch questioned the status of sports tier pricing. It was understood that this topic was under study at the corporate level.

Beller stated that there is a lot of discussion in the trade media on tiered pricing for sports programming. Comcast is looking closely at this at a corporate level.

The Board has requested that Comcast modify the format of customer bills so that the Comcast phone number is highly visible. Beller referred to a copy of a subscriber bill that has been marked to indicate proposed changes that will make the Comcast phone number more visible. It was suggested to indicate 'Comcast Customer Service' and the telephone number in boldface. Beller agreed to review the changes with Hagaman before they are implemented.

Comcast has been asked how it will credit customers who were without cable or phone service during the August power outage.

Parr stated that Comcast service was out as a result of a widespread power outage. The general policy is that Comcast does not offer credit on power issues.

Currier stated that the question arises that there is language in the franchise agreement that addresses the issue of interruptions indicating that there is no credit due for interruptions that are not caused by Comcast.

## **COMCAST RELATED TOPICS**

### **Subscriber Complaints**

Hagaman reported that there were two complaints received over the last month. Beller has indicated that both service related complaints have been resolved to the customers' satisfaction.

### **Birmingham Link**

Parker stated that there were issues in terms of securing the materials necessary to finish the underground link to Birmingham City Hall. All materials were received yesterday, and there have been representations from the contractor that the work should be completed within three to four weeks. It is hoped that the link will be complete by the next meeting and cease to be an agenda item.

Parker added that once the construction is complete Comcast will be able to provide the necessary band width to BCTV to view the signal as it goes out to subscribers.

### **Monthly Subscriber Statistics**

The August 2003 system statistics includes a column that compares the current month's statistics with last month and with a year ago. At the Board's request, Internet statistics will be reinstated on the report next month.

### **Other Issues**

John Parr announced that "Comcast Cares Day" is scheduled for October 4 this year. This is an annual event where Comcast employees are encouraged to volunteer their time on projects in various communities. Board members and dignitaries will be mailed information on projects and locations and invited to attend to work or witness some of the things Comcast does in the community to be good corporate citizens.

Parr stated that Comcast regularly invites different cable boards or city council members to come into its facilities, call centers or head ends to view Comcast technology, services, and ability to offer advanced programming. He extended the invitation to the Birmingham Area Cable Board.

Borgon responded that BACB members are interested in remaining current with Comcast facilities and offerings and would be interested in any of these opportunities and functions. He asked Parr to offer alternate dates for these events.

Beller invited everyone to the second annual Comcast Film Festival on October 17-18 at the Fox Theater in downtown Detroit. Invitations will be mailed.

At Borgon's request, Parr will provide Board members with a Comcast organizational chart for the next meeting.

Hagaman related a recent complaint concerning a change in content on the College Channel. Parr or Beller will look into this and report back to Hagaman.

Hagaman questioned whether it was possible for Comcast to post its cable service price schedule for the Birmingham area on its web site. A number of people are interested in comparing

Comcast pricing with Wide Open West (WOW) cable service. In answer to an inquiry, Currier commented that he believes that WOW is not looking to expand its franchise areas at this time.

### **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

Hagaman attended the annual National Association of Telecommunications Officers and Advisors (NATOA) Conference in Denver, Colorado earlier this month. She will have a full report on the sessions she attended for next month's meeting. Hagaman remarked that a highlight of the conference was a keynote address by Michael Copps from the FCC, in which he provided municipalities with the slight hope that the FCC would start looking more at local issues.

Hagaman is meeting with staff from auditing firm Plante & Moran today regarding the Board's operating audit, which includes the Franklin money market account and the revenue and expenditures managed by the Village of Beverly Hills finance staff. The audit should be completed by the end of this month with a draft report forthcoming.

### **MLTV15/PA 18 REPORT**

Helwig reported on last month's production of regular municipal meetings and Cable Board meeting. The BCTV crew was not able to safely deploy cameras for the Franklin Labor Day Parade due to the rain. There were 21 programs produced for Channel 18.

Helwig stated that an impromptu Program Development Committee meeting was called to review the Rouge River Watershed program proposal as well as another recent program proposal.

BCTV will be holding two volunteer workshops next week. The invitation is open to Board members.

Helwig attended the NATOA conference and agrees with Hagaman that it was a good conference with pertinent work sessions dealing with programming, regulatory, and technical issues.

Hollinshead would like Helwig and Hagaman to share some of what they learned at those workshops from similar communities in terms of municipal and library public access programming. Helwig responded that she and Hagaman attended different workshops to gain more information, which they would be happy to share with the PEG Committee.

Woodard had a question about the background music on channel 15. There have been some problems with this service, which will be addressed by Helwig.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

Delaney understands that the Board will have an answer in the near future on the Comcast franchise fee audit conducted by Plante & Moran. This will be added to the action notes of the Cable Review and Liaison Committee.

Currier related that Michael Parker indicated that he has prepared a memorandum to the Cable Board with a recommendation on how to resolve the franchise fee audit issues. This document has been forwarded to Comcast management for approval prior to submission to the Board.

Delaney commented that the Board had asked Currier to provide updates on ongoing litigation. Currier is not aware of any major developments in the cable industry, but he will keep the Board advised.

### **BOARD COMMENTS**

Borgon welcomed Louise Beller as Comcast representative to this Board. He commented that it will be important for her to stay in touch with Hagaman in terms of resolving customer complaints.

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Beverly Hills resident Hildreth Buterbaugh related Comcast efforts to address a long-standing problem with not being able to receive channel 95. He mentioned that one of his calls to Comcast was answered by a customer service representative in Texas. Buterbaugh indicated that the problem was eventually resolved because Comcast employee LaShundra Wiley followed up on his service calls. It was determined that the repair was not made previously because contractors employed by Comcast did not have the correct equipment to complete the connection if they have to go out to the pole.

Buterbaugh offered these comments. Some calls to Comcast are getting routed to Texas. Outside contractors are causing problems with the initial hookups. Buterbaugh offered kudos to Comcast customer service people for being professional and pleasant. He commended the Cable Board on doing a good job.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:53 a.m.