

BOARD OF SELECTMEN
REGULAR MEETING
MONDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2020

Members Present: Justin Sullivan, Chris Zorra, David Viera,
David Andrade, Adam Petronio

Town Administrator: Shawn E. Cadime

Chairman Sullivan opened the meeting at 7 p.m. followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and moment of silence.

He announced that, per Governor Baker's Order suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, M.G.L. Chapter 30A, Section 20, it is necessary to limit the number of attendees physically allowed to ten. Pre-registration is encouraged to attend a Board of Selectmen meeting. Public comments and questions could have been submitted to the Board in advance by completing the Google form by 12 noon on Monday, October 26, 2020. The meeting is broadcast live via TV9 Seekonk.

In accordance with M.G.L. Chapter 30A, Section 29(f), anyone recording the meeting must notify the Chairman.

BOARD AND COMMITTEE OPENINGS UPDATE

Mr. Andrade announced that volunteers are needed on the Capital Improvement Committee (2 Board of Selectmen appointments), Commission on Disability (5-13 BOS), Conservation Commission (1 BOS), Economic Development Committee (5 BOS), Energy Committee (1 BOS) Historical Commission (3 BOS), Parks & Recreation (1 BOS), Recycling Committee (3 BOS), Zoning Board of Appeals (2 Alternates).

COMMUNITY SPEAKS – None.

GENERAL BUSINESS

Comcast Negotiation Discussions

Mr. Cadime advised that Atty. Bill Hewigg of KP Law was on the telephone to respond to any questions.

Mr. Cadime had made a presentation at the previous meeting and also distributed a draft business plan identifying the needs of TV9 and the School Department. There was a question whether the Board wanted to do a survey regarding the additional money. There's a 5% franchise cap. It is currently \$175,000 for capital items. Representatives from TV9 and the high school were in attendance. Two public hearings are scheduled for November.

Chairman Sullivan noted the \$175,000 is \$17,500 per year for a ten-year contract.

Mr. David Saad represented TV9. He said there is very little to negotiate as far as rates or programming. Most subscribers are asking about lowering the rates, competition and programming. Fees cannot be negotiated. No other cable company is interested in bidding. There will probably never be an a la carte menu because the cable company buys packages of programming.

Chairman Sullivan pointed out TV9 had purchased and renovated a building and purchased a vehicle during the past ten years.

Mr. Viera added that the high school was retrofitted with a new studio and the senior center and town hall got new equipment. He said every time an increase is requested they raise the premium to subscribers. That's hurting residents. He suggested a five-year contract rather than ten years. He doesn't want to put a burden on residents.

Mr. Cadime noted the 5% franchise fee generates \$280,000 depending on subscribers plus the \$17,500.

Mr. Saad said the salaries, utilities, and maintenance of the building comes out of the 5%. He noted the assets are from at least twenty years.

In looking at revenue of \$322,888, Chairman Sullivan questioned the difference between that and \$280,000 plus \$17,500. That is also carried over to the business plan.

Chairman Sullivan felt that number will decrease as cable customers cut the cord. That would have an impact on revenue.

He noted the \$142,150 donations in scholarships in 2018 and \$44,879 in 2019 (mostly senior center). He asked if there is a policy in place to contribute a certain amount toward donations.

Mr. Saad explained the scholarship is for high school students. Other donations are on an as-need basis.

Mr. Michael Dressler, treasurer, said they donate charitably and bring equipment to the high school. The studio is available to those who want to have a program.

Mr. Andrade talked about a possible plan to eliminate the yearly fee.

Mr. Tony Gugliotta, TV Production Teacher, said the main priority is the system upgrade and output quality.

Mr. Viera suggested those items should be part of the school budget.

Mr. Saad said \$142,150 was spent at the high school over the years.

Mr. Cadime noted that the \$175,000 for high school cable might not be a priority at town meeting.

Mr. Petronio said it has to be clear that the money allocated to schools for cable goes to cable.

All members agreed to maintain the \$17,500.

In response to Mr. Cadime's question, Atty. Hewigg said he always recommends the longest term possible in order to lock into place financial terms which would be harder to negotiate in another two to three years. The Town would not benefit from a short term license in terms of technology changes. Technology changes occur independently of the license itself. The bottom line is, when you have an organization like TV9, extend and lock in for that organization a revenue stream for the longest possible time so that they can predict what their finances will look like over time.

Mr. Andrade said it is locking in the money.

Chairman Sullivan said the big number is equipment replacement at the schools.

Mr. Viera said they have to work closely with TV9 to identify which projects use capital monies and which TV9 assistance.

Chairman Sullivan inquired about update to the website. It is outdated.

Mr. Saad said the website will be upgraded at an estimated \$2,000. (He later corrected himself to say \$5,000.)

Chairman Sullivan said live screening does not work properly. He felt the \$2,000 is underestimated.

Mr. Petronio said he is concerned about hardware. It might need a server update.

Chairman Sullivan suggested a survey of residents.

Mr. Cadime will ask TV9 to go back and find out what their main priorities would be for capital items. The attorney has sent sample copies of a survey. He suggested they should wait until after the public hearings. If capital items are close to \$180,000, they could talk about going higher.

Chairman Sullivan said there have been requests to open a consumer service office in Seekonk. The closest one is in Fall River.

They will reconvene discussion once there are updated numbers. They need to work with Cody at TV9.

Mr. Cadime advised that Public Hearings are scheduled for Tuesday, November 10, at 7 p.m. and Saturday, November 14, at 11 a.m. both at the high school.

Mr. Zorra talked about output at the schools.

Mr. Petronio commented that, if it is another ten-year contract and technology is changing, perhaps cable may be around or evolve and change. It is important to make sure the money is spent on technology up front as opposed to another format.

COMMUNITY SPEAKS – None.

OTHER BUSINESS – None.

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT – None.

BOARD OF SELECTMEN LIAISON REPORTS AND COMMENTS

Veterans' Council

Mr. Viera said a vehicle parade will be held on Veterans Day, November 11. It will start at Briarwood Plaza at 9 a.m. to Oakland Avenue and then the Veterans Memorial Park for a ceremony.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Mr. Viera, seconded by Mr. Zorra and it was unanimously

VOTED: To adjourn at 8:12 pm.

The vote: Mr. Petronio – Aye; Mr. Viera – Aye; Mr. Zorra – Aye; Mr. Andrade – Aye; Chairman Sullivan –Aye.

Respectfully submitted,

Prepared by:

David Viera, Clerk

Patricia Gamer, Secretary

A draft business plan for Comcast was distributed to Board members.