

RESPONSE TO THE TOWN GOVERNMENT STUDY COMMITTEE  
from the  
CABLE TV ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
December 7, 2010

1. The charge of this Committee is to advise the Board of Selectmen on all matters concerning cable television in the Town of Hingham.
2. The Committee is accountable to the Board of Selectmen.
3. The three things that contribute most to the successful functioning of the Committee are:
  - a. The diverse skills of the committee members. The Committee includes residents with financial skills, legal skills, technical IT skills, and residents with a depth of experience in operating PEG<sup>1</sup> access cable channels. Each member makes a substantial and essential contribution to the work of the Committee, each respects and values the contributions of the other members, and the committee members work together as one to achieve the Committee's goals.
  - b. The support of the staff of the Town IT Department.
  - c. The funding mechanism whereby the funding for the equipment the Committee needs to carry out its role and for the operation of the PEG cable channels is provided by the cable franchisees in the Town, Comcast and Verizon.
4. Three things that would bring about more effective functioning of the Committee are:
  - a. Completion of the establishment by the Board of Selectmen of a non-profit corporation to operate the public access cable television channel.
  - b. More participation by the public in the operation of the PEG access cable channels. We expect that the non-profit corporation will encourage and achieve this added public participation.
  - c. Elimination of oversight of the Cable TV Advisory Committee by the Advisory Committee.
5. The expiration of the existing cable franchise contracts in 2018 and 2019 will substantially impact the work of the Committee unless new contracts can be negotiated that will continue funding for PEG access. We expect that the Committee will be asked by the Selectmen to negotiate such new contracts, which is a time-consuming process.

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<sup>1</sup> "PEG" stands for "public, educational, and government."

6. Since 2007, the Committee has carried out a wide variety of roles. From 2007 through Spring of 2009, the Committee negotiated separate complex franchise agreements with Verizon and with Comcast.

During the next year the Committee oversaw the upgrading of facilities for the operation of the Government channel in Town Hall, including a completely new system for televising Selectmen's meetings, which enabled live broadcast of these meetings for the first time, wiring other Town Hall meeting rooms to enable live broadcast from those rooms, and made recommendations for needed equipment to film other meetings and events for broadcast, to be purchased with cable funds. The Committee also made recommendations for upgrading aging equipment at the Educational channel with cable funds. This process was significantly slowed by the oversight of the Advisory and Capital Outlay Committees, delaying the process by nearly a year.

The Committee also made recommendations to the Selectmen for the staffing of the Government channel, which were implemented by the assignment of 10 hours per week of a Town IT employee for this purpose. Members of the Committee with expertise in PEG operations worked with the Town employee to get her up to speed in the operation of the Government channel. The Committee has been overseeing the operation of the Government channel, including providing assistance in finding qualified people to film meetings.

In late 2009, the Committee advised the Selectmen to request a third channel from Comcast, which both the Comcast and Verizon contracts provided for, so that government and public programming could be separated. (Previously, when Comcast was providing access services, government and public programming were combined. If this were to continue with the Selectmen in charge, it could cause liability risks for the Town). This was done, and in 2010, the third channel began operations. Without a non-profit corporation to provide programming for the third channel, the Committee has been arranging for the programming, by obtaining programming from Linden Ponds and other sources.

In 2010, with the assistance of an outside cable attorney, the Committee prepared Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws for a non-profit corporation to run the public access channel, and recruited qualified Town residents to serve on the Board of Directors. The Selectmen have approved the Articles and Bylaws and are currently interviewing for the Board of Directors. The Committee has also prepared a draft agreement between the non-profit corporation and the Board of Selectmen for the Selectmen's review.

Once the Selectmen complete the establishment of the non-profit corporation to operate the public channel and provide personnel to film Town committee meetings, the Committee's role will again change. It will include oversight of the payments made to the Town by Comcast and Verizon under their contracts,

recommendations to the Board of Selectmen for equipment and resources needed by the Educational and Government channels, acting in an advisory capacity to the Government Channel operator as needed, and other tasks assigned by the Board of Selectmen. It is not possible at this time to anticipate the full scope of the Committee's duties after this transition.