



Vernon Area Cable Advisory Council

VERNON AREA CABLE ADVISORY COUNCIL
Minutes of Meeting dated December 2, 2015

Community Voice Channel Conference Room
105 Notch Road
Bolton, Connecticut

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VERNON AREA COUNCIL CLERK

Attending Members: Paul Batterson, Tolland Representative; Justin Waine, Ellington; Larry Perosino, Tolland; Elaine Buchardt, Andover; Ed Meincke, Hebron

Attending Guests: John Bairos, Comcast; Nick Lavigne, CVC Executive Director

1. **Call to Order. Review of last minutes.** Paul Batterson called the meeting to order at 7:25 p.m. in the Community Voice Channel Meeting Room. Council members reviewed the minutes of the September, 2015 meeting. Paul Batterson/Justin Waine motion to approve the minutes of the September, 2015 meeting. Motion was unanimously approved.
2. **Comcast Report** – John Bairos updated the Council on Comcast’s community investments this year, which include creating enhanced opportunities for people with disabilities. These include providing voice-controlled TV remotes so that people can change channels, find shows, and do other cable-related functions via a voice-activated system. Comcast also now provides a talking-guide or video which assists people with visual disabilities in the use of the voice-controlled remote.

John Bairos provided a handout on the C-Span StudentCam competition, a national program, which was opened this year to both students and teachers. Cash prizes totaling \$100,000 were awarded this year. Justin Waine noted that they had a few Ellington High School students participating in the program.

John said Comcast has also continued this year with their Internet Essentials program which provides affordable, at-home, high-speed internet to families whose child or children are eligible for the National School Lunch Program. Families can obtain the service for just \$9.95 a month, plus tax, and this includes a WiFi router. The service now has been updated to offer increased internet speed. He provided a handout on the continuing program.

3. **PURA Review of CVC** – John Bairos discussed the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA) final decision which was issued about two weeks ago, on the investigation of the programming and operations at the Community Voice Channel in the Comcast Vernon service area. PURA’s findings were that the CVC is adequately providing community access programming and managing its overall operations, and that Comcast and the CVC have a positive relationship. The final decision provided some recommendations

John Bairos said two orders were issued by PURA requiring the filing of reports—which he shared from Page 10 to Nick Lavigne. They are:

1. No later than February 15, 2016, and annually for the next two years, CVC shall file a status report on any legal, insurance or tax issue that is outstanding regarding the Ms. Hilton situation.
2. No later than January 30, 2016, and annually for the next two years, the Council shall report on the status of communications and transparency in the Comcast/Vernon service area.

Paul Batterson noted that he has still not received the financial reports from the CVC. Nick Lavigne said he will be submitting his annual budget in two weeks and will provide Paul with both a copy of the new budget and the previous one. Ed Meincke asked if the CVC had gotten any money back from the funds that had been stolen by the former CVC Executive Director. Nick Lavigne said Ms. Hilton was found guilty in civil court and one insurance policy, the smaller one, did get paid out, but they are still waiting on the other. They are in a predicament because as the former Executive Director was stealing from the CVC, she was also not paying the insurance premiums that would have protected them. To further complicate matters, both Marie Burbank, the former chair of the CVC Board, and Hal Cummings, the lawyer representing the CVC both died recently.

John Bairos noted that on Page 5 of the PURA final decision, they call for the Board of Directors and the VACAC to strive for greater transparency. Paul Batterson said he feels they are working well toward that end as Nick Lavigne attends their meetings and provides them with details and updates.

4. **CVC Report** – Nick Lavigne discussed the CVC budget. He said the budget is designed to about break even with a small buffer, and that they have never operated at a loss during his time here. Paul Batterson asked Nick if he budgeted for new equipment. Nick Lavigne said he has an equipment line item in the budget, and he has a few wish list type items he'd like to get, including such items as boom poles and go-pros. He said he generally prefers to make larger purchases toward the end of the year when he has a better idea how the budget is looking. He said he wants to look into grant opportunities for an HD studio setup, as the costs for that would far exceed their regular budget.

Paul Batterson asked Nick Lavigne if their financial statements are audited by an outside person. Nick said they have a third party bookkeeper, but that person does not do any posting. He said anyone can look at their financial statements on the PURA website, which he is required to file each year. These statements are published yearly in February.

Paul Batterson asked Nick Lavigne if any of the towns in the Vernon catchment area are broadcasting their town meetings. Nick said Vernon, Tolland, and Hebron air their meetings live. He said Bolton provides the CVC with a copy, and Marlborough provides a copy to the CVC for their Board of Finance meetings. He said Ellington does not provide a copy or air their meetings live. Andover has the equipment, but has not hooked up. Nick said he believes

all seven towns have the return line equipment, and that Comcast supplied the lines into the buildings along with radiant boxes; however, towns have to make some investment themselves, such as purchasing mixers. There was a brief discussion as to whether the new Tolland High School actually has a return line. Larry Perosino said he believed they did. Justin Wayne said it is very difficult to get high school students these days to volunteer to do filming of meetings and other related work. Occasionally they will do this as part of their community service requirement for graduation.

Larry Perosino said he thought it would still be good for one of the VACAC members to attend the CVC meetings. Nick Lavigne said they are held on the third Thursdays of the month, usually at 5:00 p.m. Ed Meincke expressed interest in attending the December 17 meeting.

In other CVC updates, Nick Lavigne said he started a short film contest in January of this year, ending submissions on October 31. The contest was open to anyone who lives in one of the seven towns the Vernon Comcast area covers. Submission requirements were for a ten to twenty-minute thriller and he received four submissions. These will be posted on You-Tube and On-Demand soon. The goal was to try to entice new people to become volunteers as they would need to come in to learn how to use the various equipment.

Nick Lavigne said the CVC also plans to do another Christmas-themed event like last year, where children can have their pictures taken with Santa and Mrs. Claus, and receive their pictures on a digital file. Nick said Melanie continues doing a lot of outreach working with Tolland High School, Tolland Middle School, and with the recently restarted Bolton Video Club at the Bolton Center School.

Nick Lavigne reported that the CVC has completed paying its financial obligations in full to the IRS last month.

Nick Lavigne said the CVC got a new playback server. Whatever programming that is on CVC channels can also be seen online.

John Bairos reported that he and Nick Lavigne were summoned to the Vernon Town Hall. Town Hall went live with its meetings last week and they experienced an intermittent interruption in the broadcast for the Town Council meeting. Nick said they have narrowed down the problem to either a wire or a converter box. He will continue to try to resolve the problem.

5. **Comcast Sports Coverage – dropping the YES Network** – John Bairos said that in the past month and this month, Comcast will have some programming changes and channel lineup changes. He said that as part of the negotiating process with owners they created a direct link website and toll free number so that Comcast customers can get an update on contracts currently being negotiated. John said that based on their recent negotiations, there will be changes to Spike TV, CMT, and OWN (the Oprah Winfrey Network). Comcast will also be offering a new channel called “Inspiration” on Limited Basic, which will provide family programming.

John Bairos said Comcast has been negotiating with the YES Network, but as of yet they have not been able to come to an agreement. As a result, Comcast does not have the rights to send out their signal. He said Comcast will continue to try negotiating with them.

John said that last year Comcast instituted a regional sports fee. He said they have added more opportunities to view sports programming. He said they have added some apps and enhanced products.

Paul Batterson noted that there are two Fox sports channels---FS1 and FS2. John Bairos said Comcast has added FS1 but not FS2 to their offerings. Larry Perosino described these channels as Fox's version of ESPN. Larry Perosino inquired about when HD might be launched on these channels. John Bairos said he would look into it. John also provided a handout on the new channel lineups and pricing. Elaine Buchardt noted that triple play—a bundling of internet, cable, and phone services by Comcast costs less than double-play, which she subscribes to because she does not have a land line. She said she hoped the double-play option might in time offer a better bargain.

6. **Treasurer's Report** – Paul Batterson provided an updated Treasurer's Report, which the Council reviewed. All was in order, but it appears they will have to wait a while before they can offer any scholarships again.
7. **Other Matters** – The Council set their next meeting for Wednesday, March 23 at 7:00 p.m. in the Community Voice Channel Conference Room. Annie Gentile, Recording Secretary will send a press release to the Reminder/Courant Community looking for representation from Vernon, Bolton, and Marlborough on the VACAC. Larry Perosino made a motion, seconded by Elaine Buchardt to adjourn the meeting at 8:25 p.m. Motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Annie Gentile
Recording Secretary