



# Vernon Area Cable Advisory Council

## VERNON AREA CABLE ADVISORY COUNCIL Minutes of Meeting dated September 4, 2019

Community Voice Channel Conference Room  
105 Notch Road  
Bolton, Connecticut

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

Attending Guests: Nick Lavigne, CVC Executive Director; Matt Skane, Manager Government and Regulatory Affairs for Comcast

1. **Call to Order and Review of Minutes from Previous Meeting** - Paul Batterson, Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m. Larry Perosino made a motion, seconded by Paul Batterson, to approve the minutes of the April 10, 2019 meeting. Motion was unanimously approved.
2. **Comcast Report** – Matt Skane – Matt provided and reviewed his written report dated September 4, 2019. Beginning September 4, 2019 X1 customers will be able to use their Voice Remote to vote for the E! People’s Choice Awards. He reported a significant expansion of the Internet Essentials program. It has been expanded to all low-income households and he reviewed the eligibility requirements. Matt also reported on the new Xfinity X1 Eye Control Product which will allow customers with physical disabilities that impact their limbs to use their eye tracking device to navigate the remote layout and control their X1 TV box after the app has been paired with the TV they want to control.
3. **Role of the Advisory Council** – Paul Batterson noted that on Comcast bills, customers are directed to contact Comcast if they have a complaint about the Community Voice Channel. He said it would seem that customers should be calling the Community Voice Channel directly or contacting the VACAC. He said he thought the purpose of the VACAC was to deal with consumer complaints and so they should be the facilitator for those issues. Matt Skane said PURA requires certain language by state statute, but he will look into it. Larry Perosino said the bills used to direct customers to contact the VACAC for programming issues; however, he said it’s possible that community access television is not the same as public access television, and probably refers to Cable TV in general which could be confusing to subscribers.  
  
Paul said it might be helpful if a representative from PURA could come to an upcoming meeting and clarify the VACAC’s role for them. Nick Lavigne suggested contacting Tom Sholtes at: [thomas.sholtes@ct.gov](mailto:thomas.sholtes@ct.gov).
4. **Statewide Advisory Board** – Elaine Buchardt said she attended the Board meeting last week and they appear to have the same problems as the regional board. They are a consumer advocacy group and they have attorneys that provide them with legal advice. As an advisory committee, they work very hard for people who have complaints, but they also want to discuss public access television.
5. **FCC Ruling concerning PEGPETIA Franchise Fee** - Elaine said the FCC came down with a recent ruling which says cable companies could discount franchise fees for cable-related-in-kind contributions like public access channel space, but this particular subject is still under consideration by the FCC.

She noted that the PEGPETIA Fund is now re-established and there is now over \$7 million in the fund. They are trying to come up with a grant system for getting money from the fund. Nick Lavigne explained that in Connecticut, community voice channels get paid by subscriber fees from customers, whereas in other states they get paid by franchise fees.

Matt Skane said Comcast and other cable companies are currently in a holding pattern and waiting for guidance from the FCC. He said municipalities were requiring certain things that led to benefits exceeding the scope of federal requirements. He said that the big picture goal of cable providers is to get clarity on the scope of federal regulations and to minimize certain abusive practices of some franchising authorities. It was explained that franchise fees are capped at 5 percent of their cable-related revenues by federal regulations and paid to legal franchise authorities (towns or in some cases states) as compensation to use the space for cable in public right of way.

Justin Waine asked if a consumer can go directly to the state level with a concern or complaint or if they have to start with the local board—the VACAC. Matt Skane said Comcast honors the original format for its constituents expecting consumers to seek help at the local level. It was noted that the statewide board is more for Frontier customers who do not have the same format as Comcast; however, Comcast does have a representative that attends the Statewide Advisory Board.

6. **Comcast Robocalls** – Larry Perosino said he signed up for NoMoRoBo, the third party robocall blocking system recommended by Comcast through its website, but he read an article about there being concerns that some blocking systems may be blocking things that should not be blocked. He said the article noted that Comcast is one of the largest makers of robocalls. Recently he received a robocall regarding network reliability issues suggesting he set up an appointment and he questioned whether that was a fake call. Matt Skane said they send such messages if there may be a need to swap out some equipment to prevent a bad connection.
7. **Programming – ACC Network** – Larry Perosino said Comcast had been promoting the launch of this network for months, but then it was dropped without notice. Matt Skane said Comcast constantly negotiates contracts, but this is one where they could not come to terms and so they are currently not offering it at this time.
8. **Website** – Paul Batterson reported that their website has been inactive for some time. He said he recently received an email from Carl Slicer because Computer Rescue sent him the VACAC's unpaid bill. He said Carl noted their meeting minutes are not posted on the site. Larry Perosino noted they used to post articles of interest related to cable service, but have not done so in some time. Paul said the fee is \$150 a year and asked if it is worth it to continue paying for a website. Justin said the \$150 price probably covers the domain name and hosting and would be a good price, if they used the site. It was noted the website is not printed on Comcast bills.

The recording secretary noted that the minutes are sent to each of the various town halls in their catchment area with a request to post them. The VACAC discussed dropping the website and providing a contact email address instead. After further consideration, Elaine Buchardt made a motion, seconded by Justin Waine to direct Paul Batterson to contact Computer Rescue and cancel the website. The motion was unanimously approved.

9. **CVC Report** – Nick Lavigne – Nick reported that the CVC switched their public access channel to HD and that will go through on October 9, 2019. The new channel will be #1070. He said he went to the State in support of a bill from the State Energy and Technology Committee which was also co-sponsored by Senator Cathy Osten. The bill sought to mandate that cable access providers deliver community access programming in HD for those studios that have purchased the equipment capable of broadcasting and filming in HD. Nick said there was some back and forth at the state level, but the end result is that while the bill died, the CVC will have its public access channel coming out in HD and its other two channels in SDI (Serial Digital Interface). Nick said SDI is a true, one-to-one reliable signal, so the picture will be noticeably better. Justin Waine noted that the CVC will be the only public access station in Connecticut that will be HD.

Nick Lavigne said the CVC will be holding its annual Santa event in December, with visitors only having to bring a canned item for the food pantry. He said work is also coming along on the crumbling foundations documentary and he will be interviewing people from Trinity College and a lawyer for the film. He said Melanie Merkel has started work on a short documentary, a 30-minute expose, on the life of an ambulance driver in Connecticut.

10. **Financial Report** – Paul Batterson distributed the latest report showing \$5,000 in scholarships have been paid out along with regular expenses. There is \$570.18 remaining in the account.
11. **Thoughts About Awards Presentation** – There was consensus that the presentation went well and that recipients of the scholarships were appreciative.
12. **Scheduling the Next Meeting** – Paul Batterson was advised to contact Tom Sholtes and determine if he would want to come to a meeting in January or if he would prefer to come sooner. Once that is determined, Paul will reach out to the VACAC to set up the next meeting date.

Respectfully submitted

Annie Gentile  
Recording Secretary