

Cable TV Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, June 24, 2020

1. A meeting of the Cable TV Advisory Committee ("Committee") of the Town of Hingham was duly called to order by Chairman David Jones on Wednesday June 24, 2020 at 7:01 PM. The meeting was held via a Zoom audio-visual conference call.
2. Members in attendance were Chairman David Jones, Vice Chairman John Rice, Recording Secretary pro tem Michael Leary, Jeffrey Cutler and Christopher Baron. Harbor Media Executive Director Michelle Balconi from Harbor Media and Paul Austin Superintendent of the Hingham Public Schools were also present. Cable TV Advisory Committee members present constituted a quorum. This quorum remained present throughout the meeting. There were no other individuals present.
3. The first order of business was a review of minutes from the April 22nd and May 20th 2020 meetings. Chairman Jones requested comments from Committee members. Mr. Baron noted a minor typographical adjustment on the April 22nd minutes. There were no other comments noted. During the discussion, Mr. Baron reminded the Committee about proper procedure surrounding votes. The Committee acknowledged Mr. Baron's comments and agreed to utilize his suggestions in the future.

A motion was made to approve the April 22nd and May 20th 2020 minutes and appoint Michael Leary as Recording Secretary pro tem by Chairman David Jones and seconded by Vice Chairman John Rice. All voting members present approved the motion.

4. The second order of business was continuing discussion related to the Board of Directors of Harbor media proposed changes to their By-Laws. Chairman Jones reminded members that the Committee voted to reject these changes in the May 20, 2020 meeting. Chairman Jones noted that a memorandum had been distributed for review outlining the Committee's position regarding these changes and asked for comments. Mr. Leary inquired whether a meeting was held with Selectman Joe Fisher in relation to the matter. Chairman Jones and Vice Chairman Rice stated that they attempted to set up a meeting, but were unsuccessful in contacting the Selectman.

A general discussion ensued and no comments were noted regarding the draft. The Committee agreed that submitting the memorandum to the Selectmen would be appropriate. Members felt that receipt of the document by the Board of Selectmen would facilitate the scheduling of a meeting to review the matter. Executive Director Balconi requested that Chairman Jones share the memorandum with Harbor Media's President Laura Burns before the matter is taken up by the Selectmen. Chairman Jones agreed to the request.

A motion was made to approve the draft memorandum, and send the document to the Board of Selectmen with a copy to appropriate representatives from Harbor Media by Mr. Baron and seconded by Mr. Cutler. All voting members present approved the motion.

5. The next order of business was to review and approve a draft memorandum regarding various financial observations regarding Harbor Media's finances. This memorandum was created by Mr. Leary to inform the Board of Selectmen of the large reserve balances held by Harbor Media (approximately two years of revenue). Chairman Jones opened the matter for discussion. Mr. Leary began the discussion by informing the Committee about a meeting with Chairman Jones, and Harbor Media personnel: Executive Director Michelle Balconi, President Laura Burns, and Treasurer Betty Foley. During this meeting, Mr. Leary discussed his analysis surrounding reserve balances. Executive Director Balconi stated that President Burns agreed with the observations and subsequently communicated the matter with the Board of Directors of Harbor Media. Mr. Baron gave some background information surrounding the past reasons for high reserve balances including a purchase of a building and continuity of operations if cable revenues were drastically reduced or eliminated. The Committee agreed that both reasons do not exist in the current environment.

Mr. Leary then discussed with the Committee a question regarding the appropriate levels of reserves for Harbor Media. Mr. Leary stated that based upon research, non-profits typically hold approximately 6 months of revenues as a safety net. Based upon the infrequency of revenue receipts (quarterly), Mr. Leary suggested that a nine to twelve month reserve maybe appropriate. Vice Chairman Rice added that based upon his research of other similar cable related companies that six to nine months would be adequate. He also noted that the majority of expenses of Harbor Media are human resource related; hence large equipment expenditures are not that common. Vice Chairman Rice suggested that reserves should be devoted towards improving programming.

Mr. Leary inquired to Executive Director Balconi whether Harbor Media has created a plan to spend down the reserves. Ms. Balconi explained that since she is currently working on a five year strategic plan, no proposal had been created yet. Since the completion of this plan will address this issue, she does not want to allocate funds until finished in August of 2020. Vice Chairman Rice continued the discussion with Ms. Balconi. Mr. Rice recommended that reserves could be used to hire various experts to create programming (independent contractors, school system, and business organizations). He further suggested that these funds could also be allocated towards advertising for the HD channel(s) roll out.

A motion was made to approve the draft memorandum, and send the document to the Board of Selectmen by Mr. Cutler and seconded by Mr. Baron. All voting members present approved the motion.

6. Chairman Jones next requested Superintendent Paul Austin of the Hingham Public Schools for an update. Superintendent Austin stated that over the past several months that Harbor Media has been a great partner with the school system. This partnership included the creation of various shows, public service announcements, and filming of various school committee and sub-committee meetings. He also informed the Committee that Harbor Media will be filming a school update message on Friday at one of the Hingham school locations.

Superintendent Austin continued the update. Last week, the school year ended. Mr. Austin noted that the next school year's format is still open. It is currently planned to be a hybrid approach between in person and online learning. However, if there is a resurgence in Covid-19, this plan may need to be adjusted. In preparation, the school system has purchased 325 new laptops for teachers. In addition, they are in process of potentially acquiring over 1,700 chrome books for students.

Executive Director Balconi suggested that Harbor Media could purchase certain merchandise such as tripods to assist the schools in programming efforts. Vice Chairman Rice recommended that Harbor Media could also assist in remote learning by purchasing certain animation software to utilize for their own programming and the school's remote initiatives. Mr. Rice also suggested that Harbor Media could assist in certain training initiatives. Both Superintendent Austin and Executive Director Balconi were supportive of the recommendations. Mr. Austin agreed to create a "punch" list of technology needs from Harbor Media. Mr. Austin also requested Ms. Balconi's participation in the school's Recovery Response Advisory Committee ("RRAC"). Ms. Balconi responded positively to the request.

7. Chairman Jones next requested an update from Mr. Leary regarding various finance matters. Mr. Leary stated that he recently received updated trial balances from the Town Accountant. He will review activity and report to the Committee at the next scheduled meeting. In addition, Mr. Leary reached out several times to the Town Manager, Tom Mayo, to facilitate a meeting regarding a number of items including permission to receive certain reports from Comcast and discussion points on certain trial balance items on the Town's general ledger. No responses from the Town have been received to date. Mr. Leary stated that he will continue to reach out to facilitate this meeting.
8. The next order of business was an update on the HD rollout and the Town Hall's infrastructure. Executive Director Balconi informed the Committee that Comcast will go digital in the near future. Once this is accomplished, the HD conversion will be the next step in the process. Vice Chairman Rice suggested reaching out to the company to expedite the transition. Next, Ms. Balconi updated the Committee on technology upgrades in the closet(s) at the Town Hall. Recently representatives from Harbor Media assisted in organizing wires and installing a four rack platform for new equipment. Mr. Cutler offered his assistance in the process. Ms. Balconi reported to the Committee that an uninterrupted power source ("UPS") system is also being installed.
9. For the next order of business, Chairman Jones requested Vice Chairman Rice to discuss various initiatives on Harbor Media programming. Mr. Rice informed the Committee that he has been taping numerous hours of programming for review. Mr. Rice communicated a number of observations including continuing technical issues with Comcast. Further, programming continues to be too repetitive and tends to utilize only one particular employee. Graphics should also be improved. Mr. Rice stated that Covid-19 should be considered as part of the reason for delays in improvement. In summary, leadership will be required to successfully implement change. Finally, Mr. Rice recommended that efforts should be devoted towards creating two great HD "best of" channels.

Executive Director Balconi agreed with the observations. Ms. Balconi expressed her opinion that operating three channels dilute the overall quality of programming. Discussion ensued including an outline of various options regarding channels. Certain thoughts included reducing/eliminating the Educational channel content and limiting Government channel programming to meetings and occasional government related interviews/documentaries. Ms. Balconi agreed that the “best of” HD channels are the priority.

10. Chairman Jones introduced the next agenda item relating to the migration of the Committee’s materials and communications to the Town’s infrastructure. Mr. Jones suggested to the Committee that it utilize the Town’s website and Facebook page. This would entail migrating from the Dropbox online storage system. The Committee was in agreement with the proposal. Mr. Cutler volunteered to become the liaison with the Town and facilitate the process. Executive Director Balconi also suggested that the Town add links and various other information regarding Harbor Media to their website. The Committee agreed with her suggestion.

In relation to the discussion, Superintendent Austin informed the Committee that the Hingham Public Schools website will be updated in the near future. Mr. Austin stated that Harbor Media could be part of this process by creating programming such as the history of the school system for inclusion on the new website. Executive Director Balconi agreed to work with Mr. Austin on the initiative.

11. Chairman Jones requested any additional matters for discussion. Mr. Cutler asked if the draft of a recent proposed survey was going to be discussed. Chairman Jones stated that this matter will be moved to the next meeting for discussion purposes. No additional items were noted. Mr. Jones proposed that the next meeting of the Committee be held on Wednesday September 16, 2020 at 7 PM. All members were in agreement with the proposed date. Chairman Jones stated that he will send the room/virtual room request via Zoom to the Town of Hingham and will distribute an agenda in advance.
12. There being no further business to discuss, a motion to adjourn the meeting was proposed.

A motion was made to adjourn by Christopher Baron and seconded by Jeff Cutler. All voting members present were in agreement with the motion.

The meeting adjourned at 8:19 PM.

Submitted for review to the Cable TV Advisory Committee on June 26, 2020 by Michael Leary Secretary *pro tem*

Approved by the Cable TV Advisory Committee on September 16, 2020