

PEG ACCESS ADVISORY COMMITTEE (PAAC)



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This report by the PEG Access Advisory Committee (PAAC) includes an overview of the PAAC's work as well as an assessment of the community's access to Public, Education and Government (PEG)-related services and offerings by the Town's Minuteman Media Network (MMN) on cable TV channels 8, 9, and 99. This report covers the PAAC's efforts from March 5, 2018 (PAAC formation) to the date of this report and encompasses a significant event – the Town of Concord's assumption of the duties to provide PEG services formerly provided by CCTV, which filed for dissolution with the Attorney General's office on September 11, 2018.

Purpose of the PAAC

The charge of the PAAC is to:

- 1) Monitor the effectiveness of Concord's PEG access services, now provided by MMN;
- 2) Help the Select Board ensure that PEG access services conform to requirements of the Comcast / Concord franchise agreement;
- 3) Safeguard the public's interest in community television through policies promoting fairness, equal access, and non-discrimination;
- 4) Promote quality telecommunication services that reflect the interests and concerns of Concord residents; and
- 5) Assist the Select Board in adapting to new technologies – from traditional local cable TV to current telecommunication services.

Issues and Questions for the PAAC

For each goal, the PAAC asks several questions:

- 1) Monitor effectiveness: Are viewers satisfied with MMN's services and programming? Is the MMN website adequate? Is MMN providing adequate public access programming and training opportunities for the community? Is MMN staying within budget?

- 2) PEG services conformity: Is MMN complying with its contractual obligations to the Towns of Concord, Carlisle, and the Regional School District? Is Comcast complying with its contractual obligations to the Town of Concord?
- 3) Promote fairness, equal access: Is MMN offering reasonable programming and training opportunities to community members? Is MMN broadcasting appropriate content through program review plans? How does MMN handle programming requests and complaints?
- 4) Promote quality telecommunications: Are on-line viewers of MMN able to receive quality streaming over their internet connection, including the Town's broadband service? What is the status of the Town's broadband service? How does the Town's broadband service address service outage and repair issues? Does the Town have cybersecurity insurance?
- 5) Assist Select Board: How will MMN archive existing and future video programs? What is the process MMN uses to retrieve archived videos? Are there other ways to maintain or improve the PEG and cable TV service?

PAAC Efforts and Research

The PAAC sought to answer the above questions through its monthly meetings, by analyzing data and regulatory dockets, attending conferences, interviewing subscribers, reviewing content, meeting with PEG and cable TV providers, as well as additional research.

To gauge effectiveness of Concord's PEG access services, the PAAC:

- Conducted monthly meetings;
- Began drafting PEG/cable TV-specific survey questions;
- Received monthly reports from the MMN staff supervisor;
- Toured MMN Town House facilities;
- Reviewed the MMN website and suggested improvements;
- Met with cable advisory committee chairs from Acton and Bedford;
- Proposed two PEG-related questions for the 2018 Town Government Survey;

- Received a report from the Town on MMN’s budget and its budget drivers;
- Analyzed data regarding Concord’s annual cable TV subscribership, revenue changes, consumer complaints and service interruptions from 2013 to 2017; and
- Conducted research on technical solutions for data storage and archiving.



To help the Select Board ensure that PEG access services conform to the Comcast/Concord franchise agreement, the agreements with the Town of Carlisle and the Concord-Carlisle Regional School District (CCRSD), the PAAC:

- Met with the Town Manager’s office, Council on Aging, League of Women Voters, Concord-Carlisle Regional School District, Concord Finance Department, Town of Carlisle, and other PEG stakeholders;
- Reviewed the Concord/Comcast franchise agreement;
- Reviewed the CCRSD/Concord Studio Use Agreement
- Met with a Comcast representative and reviewed subscribership and revenue data;
- Met with representatives of the Massachusetts Department of Telecommunications and Cable (DTC) regarding cable TV regulations, rates oversight, franchise renewal process, and the consumer complaint process; and
- Reviewed the 2013-2017 Comcast Form 500s, relevant DTC dockets, and Comcast’s 2019 Forms 1240 and 1205.

To safeguard the public’s interest in community television through policies that promote fairness, equal access and non-discrimination, the PAAC:

- Proposed a dispute resolution / consumer complaint process for PEG and cable TV-related complaints or concerns, with links to be posted on the PAAC website;

- Inquired about MMN’s policies and efforts to promote fairness, equal access, and non-discrimination; and
- Participated in PEG and cable TV industry conferences that included sessions on fairness, equal access, non-discrimination, diversity, emerging technology, programming, and regulation.

The PAAC had questions about how to fulfill the final two purposes – promote telecommunications services that reflect Concord residents’ concerns and interests, and help the Select Board adopt new technologies. In response, the PAAC, concerned about viewers’ ability to watch PEG channels over the Internet, met with the Town’s broadband department head and reviewed Concord’s municipal broadband deployment forecasts. In addition, the PAAC discussed archive protocols and anticipates assisting the Town Manager in reviewing requests for proposals and bids to modify how the Town archives its video transmissions.



Observations

The Town took responsibility for providing PEG services as of October 1, 2018. The PAAC observes that, so far, the transition from CCTV to MMN has caused minimal disruption to the community. MMN has hired staff, reconfigured a satellite studio in the Town House, and established an enterprise fund for its PEG accounts.

MMN is developing its website and has linked to YouTube for posting the most recent videos. MMN has created over 23 playlists, or groupings, of videos of Concord and Carlisle programs. Videos are generally posted within two days of recording; however, some videos postings have been delayed,

creating uncertainty for those looking for particular videos. MMN announced intentions to review its current data and archive storage systems, with the PAAC's help.

While the MMN web page itself is fairly clear, several Town officials have reported citizen confusion about how to locate the MMN website and, more importantly, how to locate the "on" button for viewing government live stream and on-line videos. Currently, the logo and link to MMN are located on a second tier web page.

PEG channels are just 3 of the 140+ channels that Comcast offers to Concord subscribers, and monthly PEG fees constitute roughly \$6 out of a typical \$100 Comcast bill for Concord cable TV subscribers. The PAAC has begun to establish a working relationship with the Town's Comcast representatives, and will continue to maintain open communications with our cable TV provider for the betterment of subscribers and viewers.

The Select Board expressed some concern about the financial viability of PEG services. Our analysis of Comcast's data shows that, while subscriber numbers have dropped slightly over the past three years, the Town's PEG revenues have more than offset that loss. The number of cable TV subscribers in Concord dropped from 5930 to 5620 between 2015 and 2017. Comcast's annual revenues from Concord cable TV subscribers for the same time period, however, rose from \$7,976,613 to \$8,249,009 and Concord's annual PEG revenues rose from \$382,876 to \$395,953. This might be explained rising costs of cable TV. The PEG Access and Cable-Related Fund held \$1,119,597 as of March 12, 2018. The PAAC will continue to monitor PEG financial stability, PEG revenues and expenses, cable TV rates, and other cable TV-related issues.

The Concord Town Manager, the Carlisle Town Administrator, and the Regional High School District are working out agreement terms for shared PEG services and the use of the PEG studio space in the Concord-Carlisle Regional High School. The MMN has a satellite office, editing station, and equipment storage in the Concord Town House and the Carlisle Town Hall.

A survey of Concord households on preferences, questions, and concerns about PEG services and Comcast cable TV service has not been conducted for at least several years. The PAAC did submit two questions for the Town's biennial Citizen Survey about PEG services.

The Town's broadband service had 1,126 customers as of June 8, 2018 and can provide service to % of the Town.

MMN has established a contact email: MMNetwork@concordma.gov, for questions, video requests, and concerns.



Recommendations

A critical part of the PAAC's charge is to make recommendations to the Select Board regarding PEG access and other cable TV services. Consequently, the PAAC recommends that:

1. MMN continues to improve its website, service offerings, programming, and education efforts.
2. The Select Board, with input from the PAAC, reviews the PAAC's charge to determine if changes are needed to reflect a town-managed PEG service operation.
3. The Select Board consults with the Town Manager to determine if sufficient fiscal and operational checks and balances are in place for MMN, and whether the PEG fund should be kept in a special revenue fund or an enterprise fund.
4. MMN post videos and update playlists within four business days, when possible.
5. MMN inserts its logo on the Town home page with a direct link to the MMN web page.
6. A 10-12 question survey on PEG and cable TV to all Concord households be funded from the next budget and conducted as soon as possible.
7. The Select Board and the PAAC conduct site visits of the PEG studio, shared head-end at the

high school, and satellite offices to better understand their current assets, layouts, and capabilities.

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8. MMN continues to develop metrics and track statistics of its viewership in order to provide better service to its viewers.

9. MMN and the Town engage in a trade study of cloud storage versus local redundant storage alternatives, including their relative costs.

Respectfully submitted,
Karlen Reed, PAAC Chair

Links to key resources

PAAC web page:

<http://www.concordma.gov/2012/PEG-Access-Advisory-Committee>

PAAC Charge (adopted March 5, 2018):

<http://www.concordma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/13125/PEG-Access-Advisory-Committee---Charge>

Comcast/Concord Franchise agreement, April 2014 – April 2024:

<http://www.concordma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/13940/Concord-Comcast-2014-Franchise-Agreement>

Comcast/Carlisle Franchise Agreement, October 2011 – October 2021:

<http://www.carlislema.gov/DocumentCenter/View/39/2011-Comcast-Cable-License-PDF?bidId=>

Minuteman Media Network web page:

<http://www.concordma.gov/2258/Minuteman-Media-Network-MMN>

MMN YouTube web page:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUk6r-j8hFwin1lwht-RViA/featured>

PAAC Members: Karlen Reed, Peggy Wargelin, Court Booth, Frank Breen, Jil Colpak, Scott Hopkinson, Ruth Lauer, and Christine Lear; Erin Stevens, committee staff; Jane Hotchkiss, Select Board Liaison
