

**Town of Winchendon  
Communications Committee Meeting Minutes  
June 9, 2021  
Via Zoom  
109 Front Street, Winchendon, MA 01475**

Present:

Ray Coe, Chairman

Barbara Anderson, Secretary

Patrick Moon

Bill Clinton

Linda Daigle

Missing:

Greg Vine

Guy Corboserio, Vice Chairman

The Chair called the meeting to order at 4:02 p.m. Linda Daigle reminded the committee that minutes must be signed after approval. Ray responded by reminding members that we are supposed to meet on the first Wednesday of every month. Patrick emphasized the importance of committee meetings in a timely fashion due to the impending Comcast contract renewal. Linda confirmed that there is money allocated for technology as communications. She confirmed that there are two separate line items. One is for hardware and the other is for technicians and personnel. It was changed last year, as it had previously been one line item and it is now separated.

Barbara commented that there seems to be increased interest in the towns in the state to keep the Zoom capabilities. Bill asked if there was funding available for it, Barbara responded by stating that she learned there is proposed legislation to continue Zoom indefinitely. Bill stated that he hoped it was not another unfunded mandate, and that he prefers the option, over mandatory. We would hate to have to fund the feature and not have the public take advantage of it.

Patrick stated that he took the time to read through the Westminster contract. He was able to pick up on some of the details that they were able to accomplish but feels that Comcast seems to be requiring towns to fund hook ups and other services that used to be provided by Comcast. He said that we won't really know until we start negotiations, but that is his opinion. He and Bill have discussed possibilities. He emphasized that we need to keep having consistent meetings. We need to develop a backwards calendar for negotiations. There needs to be a public hearing if the town seems to want to look beyond Comcast. Barbara asked that anyone who had any additions or suggestions to an agenda, to request those by the 25<sup>th</sup> of the month, so there is ample time to create an agenda and post it.

Bill stated that a lot of other towns and school districts have fiber optics between studios, Winchendon currently owns our own equipment, but that is something that must be negotiated.

Barbara stated that we need to create a list of needs, wants and “nice to have’s”, as the Board of Selectmen appointed the Communication Committee as the negotiating committee with the Town Manager. Patrick stated that was verified by the previous Town Manager, Keith Hickey. The reason for that is because in 2012, there wasn’t a whole lot of knowledge when negotiating the last contract and the Town eventually had to accept what Comcast offered. Bill and Patrick both have experience with contract negotiations and technology. He believes there is a bit of leverage to possibly get a better deal than last negotiation. Patrick stated that almost have to keep Comcast, because any other company would have to rent Comcast equipment, which would be highly unlikely.

There was some discussion as to whether the line between the high school and town hall was still available. The committee was unsure if it had been physically cut and disabled, or if it was just disabled. Ray stated that Templeton broadcasts from Town Hall, but the equipment set up is actually in Baldwinville. He said that years ago, we had the opportunity to purchase their surplus equipment, but there wasn’t any interest from Town Hall at the time. Patrick stated that it is probably to our advantage that we didn’t purchase anything, as technology is constantly being updated. Barbara stated that she thought Mr. King would be enthusiastic to bring cable access back to the schools. Bill stated that it was his opinion that Mr. King is very enthusiastic about the prospect. Patrick said that at some point we need to have funding allocated from the town to properly upgrade the cable capabilities.

Barbara stated that she gave the new Town Manager her priorities and she stated that one of her priorities was to upgrade the technology at both the schools and the Town Hall. She expects that the Town Manager will be focused more on these upgrades as it will be to his advantage to do so. Patrick stated that we need to research what we want and cost it. Barbara said that we should be making a 5-year plan to present to the Town Manager. Our ultimate goal would be to be able to live stream a football game or graduation, or any town activity. Bill said that we need to look at what kind of things we want to broadcast, and what we need to do that. There is a lot of work involved in getting those things completed. Linda stated that Comcast originally gave us two channels, but if we show we have enough programming, we should be able to get the second channel back. The cable is underground between the high school and the Town Hall. Currently, we have to have anything in the right format in order to upload it for Channel 8. It would be great to have school events available for the population to view on television.

Barbara stated that sometimes School Committee meetings have been held and not broadcast, which tends to upset residents. Unfortunately, due to personal reasons, we don’t always have the personnel to do it. Barbara asked if there was some way the schools could control when their events are broadcast. Linda stated that it might be possible to add an access point. As it stands, someone has to be at Town Hall to broadcast anything over Channel 8. Bill stated that we could probably do something along those lines.

Linda stated that there must be changes to the studio downstairs in order to keep the Zoom capabilities. The cost is only \$3,877 and we have the money in the budget to do this. She said that a switch needs to be replaced before that can happen. There is also the problem of needing a moderator for the Zoom screen would be necessary. There are Covid funds available now to assist with this, but she isn't sure if we would be able to maintain it long term. Patrick asked why we keep the group from New Hampshire, since it is difficult to get them into Town Hall. Linda stated that this company knows our system and our limitations. She isn't sure they are the best company for the job, but we have used them for several years. Patrick suggested that maybe we should research other companies.

Barbara stated that Austin Cyganiewicz was supposed to send some information to Don O'Neil. She had been discussing our situation with Austin and was informed that the town he works in is keeping their Zoom feature. He was knowledgeable about some of the issues we were facing and might be able to help. Ray stated that the studio he is currently working in needs to be enlarged. It is just too small to work at this point. We are discussing lots of additions and changes and the studio itself is physically too small to accommodate any more equipment. Patrick feels that it is imperative that we check out other technology companies and we should be able to get something better. He stated that this company set up the current studio and made it unnecessarily difficult to get behind there. Ray also stated that we need music on our local access station. He has brought this topic up several times. We used to have music when ads were playing, and we haven't had it for years. Linda said the only radio station she could get was a religious station, and even that one went. Bill said that there are probably a whole lot of alternatives like My Heart radio, or others.

Ray stated that he received a letter from a resident complaining that Comcast will not go to her house. She is very frustrated and would like to have access to cable. There are several places in town that do not have cable capabilities. There isn't much we can do about it. The Town Manager is aware of the situation. Barbara stated that we have complaints on Foristall Road as well. Patrick stated that he believes we are required to keep a map of what Comcast covers in this town. He said that the Westminster contract makes reference to it and they wrote it into their contract so that they could look and see what areas in town are physically covered. He said that if we don't have something like that, he would recommend that we add it. The revenues are very interesting. He said there were only about 2800 subscribers in town and if we start figuring out how much kick-back we are supposed to get, it isn't much. We could get more if cable to accessible to more residents.

Bill stated that the next steps will be to look into the proposed legislation. We also need to look at anticipated need of future Zoom meetings. Barbara stated that she texted Austin to send the information directly to Bill Clinton. Bill asked if it is just the public looking for Zoom, or is it the public plus board members, which would be exponentially more difficult. Patrick stated that his concern is that we have limited funds, he would rather not spend money into old technology or

technology that is no longer working for us. He would prefer that we make wise decisions that will have a long term effect on the town.

The minutes were approved unanimously with an amendment for the two budgetary line items for communications.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:55 p.m.

Approved by:

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Ray Coe, Chair

2/15/2022

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Guy Corbosiero, Vice Chair

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Barbara Anderson, Secretary

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