
Portsmouth
Cable Commission Public Hearing
7:00 p.m. – April 4, 2006
City Hall/City Council Chambers

The Portsmouth Cable Commission held a Public Hearing on Tuesday, April 4, 2006 at 7:00 p.m. at City Hall in the Council Chambers.

John Gregg Chairman called the meeting to order at approximately 7:00 p.m.

The following were present: John Gregg, Chairman
Gene Fisk, Commissioner
Louis Vinciguerra, Commissioner
Kathleen Pearce, Commissioner
Brian Gregg, Alternate

Also present were Alan Brady, City of Portsmouth Webmaster and Suzanne Woodland, Assistant City Attorney.

Chairman John Gregg welcomed everyone and introduced each of the members of the Committee including John Bohenko, City Manager who was in the audience.

- I. Introduction John Gregg** – Chairman John Gregg explained that Comcast has an existing Franchise Agreement with the City expiring December 31, 2007. Comcast has requested a renewal of the Franchise Agreement in accordance with the Cable Communications Policy Act of 1984 and this Commission in keeping with this requirement of this Act is conducting a series of public hearings. This Public Hearing is intended to solicit input from the Municipal Government and non-profit organizations concerning future cable related needs and interest of the community as well as Comcast's performance under the existing Franchise Agreement. Comcast, under the existing Franchise Agreement, pays the City 5% of the City's generated gross annual revenue, a portion of which funds the local government Channel 22. Also, under the existing Agreement, Comcast made certain promises relative to service, signal quality and the like. This hearing gives you an opportunity to express your views on Comcast's performance under the existing Agreement. We are here tonight to hear your views on a community access channel as well as future cable related needs of the City. The input from this hearing will help this Commission make a recommendation to the City Council on a new Cable Franchise Agreement. Please sign in and state your name and address for the record when at the podium.

II. Ascertainment Hearing

a. City Departments

Bob Lister and Pamela McCartney from the School Department were present.

Pamela MacArtney, Career/Tech Director at Portsmouth High School. There is a CTE center at the High School and we are #19 out of 25 approved CTE Centers in the state. The career tech programs have evolved from what was the old vocational trade programs at the high school level, and are a state approved program. We are in the process of trying to shift the TV and production exploratory courses to a full two year 540 hour program. We cannot expand curriculum and provide competency and development to the students in a 540-hour format unless we have some local community access. We are over enrolled and have more students that we can accommodate next year, we have no shortage of interest, nor shortage of activities of kinds of things we can produce if we have the access. We presently have a 9-week course and an 18-week course that students can participate in, but the students are always looking for more. Again, we could get a 540-hour program approved by the State Department if we could have the access. Hope that you will consider our needs when making your decision.

Bob Lister, Superintendent of School, 69 Diamond Drive, Portsmouth. thanked the Commission and City Manager for being able to come before you with input for the Commission and would like the opportunity to work together. We have many young people interested in technology and TV media. Also Portsmouth High serves the towns of Rye, Greenland, Newington and New Castle and interested in involving all students, many students at the Middle School and elementary are interested in TV media and involved in different projects and technology and would like to give them the opportunity to be able to participate. We are anxious to work with the media in the City, Comcast and the Commission for the Municipal Government to provide opportunities for the City's youth. Would also like the opportunity to provide sports and different activities on TV and be able to be on film and want to build community, this is a good way to build community, school spirit. Would like to offer the school's services to work with the Commission.

b. Non-Profit Representatives

Peter Hale, Seacoast Mental Health Center thanked the Commission for the opportunity to be here. Mr. Hale is the Development Director at SMHC and connected with the program at New Heights Teen Center. Being a new resident to Portsmouth realized there is no Community Public Access and the types of programs that SMHC and some other non-profits in the City would benefit by having a Public Access Station. We have an

active group called Senior Moments and Elder Services groups have worked with Senior Moments to put together plays designed to entertain and educate elders and older adults. This population does not have the chance to get out and about and having a public access channel would be ideal to share for people who cannot get out on their own and would be a way to get direct access to the services that SMHC provides. There are lots of opportunities during the year for teens that attend New Heights have a chance to show what they are participating in, concerts, public shows and to be able to broadcast. Would be helpful in reinforcing the positive work and positive view of adolescents and teens in the area.

James Horrigan, 35 Elwyn Avenue, represents the Portsmouth Democrat City Committee, a local counterpart of the Democratic Party state and national committees, a support group for democratic candidates for state and national elections, also committed to an on-going community dialogue of political and social issues and values. A public community cable TV channel interests them and will open up a much broader audience for them. Feels a community channel would be a great investment for our community.

Amy Antonucci representing Seacoast Peace Response with offices at 163 Court St., a non-profit community group focused on doing community educational events, such as concerts, showing films on a monthly basis and would love to go further out to people. They have limited resources and anyway they can alert the community of what they're doing would be great.

Peter Somssich, 34 Swett Avenue, representing Amnesty International, a 40 year old human rights organization worldwide, recipient of Noble Peace Prize, the seacoast's local chapter. One of their functions is to educate people about human rights issues, not only in this country but everywhere in the world. They have many resources available including various DVDs, films, and public service announcements that could be used to broadcast on a public access channel. Asks for support on the effort of allowing this organization and similar organizations to be a part of this process and to open up the cable network to a public access channel. As a resident of Portsmouth felt it would be nice if we had a cafeteria style choice of our cable and feels the quality of our life in Portsmouth could be enhanced if we could pick and chose what cable channels we really want instead of getting cable channel we don't want at all and feels the public access channel could in fact become a competitive channel that could compete with other not so interesting channels provided on cable and may be surprised at how many people tune in more to public access channel than to the cable channels already provided and put some competition back into the cable business. Thinks it would be a good

investment and feels the public access channel is in fact an educational channel. Feels the creativity in this town would be released.

Doug Bogan, NH Program Director for Clean Water Action, a national organization with a local base in Portsmouth working throughout the state focusing more on the Seacoast region. In support of improving community access having a public access channel. The organization does a lot of community outreach, a lot of public education on environmental issues. Encourages the support this initiative to provide better access and have the City support this. Mr. Bogan submitted a letter from the Seacoast Anti-Pollution League organization to be made a part of the record regarding the need of greater coverage of public forums.

John Weiss, 455 Main Street, So. Berwick, representing the Spiritual Assemblies of Portsmouth, hopes the Commission brings about the reality of public access channel, interested in the educational aspect. Spiritual Assemblies is very active and supportive and collaborative with Portsmouth Peace Treaty Committee with last year's events throughout the region, many of them well suited to public access TV and would have provided great access to the citizens of Portsmouth and the entire viewing area. The high community is going to continue to expand its programs for children's education, junior youth and youth activities, prayer and devotional meetings and spiritual enrichment courses. Video communications services could be an essential instrument providing access to citizens in Portsmouth and the entire viewing region. Both public and educational access TV can play a key role for increasing awareness and participation in many diverse activities aimed at community development a primary fundamental aspect of the Portsmouth High Community activities stressing a great deal of outreach in its orientation. They rely on national and regional resources for their special programs that could be used and aired on public access educational channel. His former occupation was a Program Manager for Continental Cable in So. California and looks forward to the opportunity to provide expertise and experience in establishment of such a program and facilities, a great deal of experience working with interns and local government.

For the record, Chairman Gregg indicated receipt of letters from people unable to be here this evening from the Police Department, Library, United Way of the Greater Seacoast and Portsmouth Little League, all of whom have expressed varying degrees of interest in having some access to more community based broadcasting capabilities.

III. Public Comments at the Discretion of the Chair

Martin Cameron, 469 Ocean Road, spoke as a resident taxpayer and referred to the \$280,000 from cable franchise fees goes into the general

funds of the City and would like to see this franchise money remain in the general fund. There is no extra money, every bit is being consumed.

Bill St.Laurent, 253 Colonial Drive, referred to the City spending lot of money, costing the taxpayers a tremendous amount to live here and is getting worse. The \$280,000 originally is set aside to fund things like public access channel and not go into the general fund. Specifically you're going into the taxpayer's pocket and funding for a small amount of people who want a channel, the taxpayers should not have to pay. In favor of a public access channel, but should not be funded this way, should be funded by the people who want it, let advertisers pay for it. Does not feel the School Dept. should receive more money from our general fund. Need to stop paying the taxpayer's money. Please do not touch that \$280,000.

Steve Diamond, 14 Birch Dr., Dover, an independent media producer. Spoke of the importance of alternative media. Commercial media is largely an entertainment media with very little resources. There are citizens journalists willing to do that work. In today's modern age TV media is the press.

IV. Commission Comments

Brian Gregg submitted the following comment noting that of all the people who mentioned public access here tonight, 100% are in favor of the idea and would like the record to reflect this.

Louis Vinciguerra stated because a lot of people are concerned about this coming out of the taxpayers pocket and tax roles, all non-profit organizations have facilities to be able to access and asked if they would be willing to get together and form a separate non-profit organization to support this public access channel so it doesn't come from taxpayers if we can get Comcast to give us the channel in the first place?

Gene Fisk spoke of fears of use of franchise fees and this Commission has not discussed doing this at all and he is not exactly sure where the fear is coming from now. This group has not discussed taking franchise money to do this and we are not thinking about doing this right now.

The Chair commented that the purpose of this particular meeting is to determine what the needs are of the public and in this particular instance City Departments as well as non-profit Agencies regarding the Franchise Agreement we have and will be negotiating with Comcast. As we have heard tonight those needs may have to do with additional capabilities for broadcasting community based programming but also may have to do with use of performance of Comcast with regard to service, etc. The Commission has a number of steps over the next couple of months they

will be taking, intend to have at least one additional ascertainment hearing for the public in general tentatively scheduled for August. We will continue to seek feedback from the public and as some members have stated this evening, the Commission is at this point trying to learn what the community is interested in having what the needs are and have not formulated any opposition regarding what the recommendations will be to the City Council, we will need to do this and whether it will include equipment and another channel or two, what form that might take, what the cost might be, how it would be governed, etc, are all issues that will come at a point in time, but a decision has not been made at this juncture.

III. Adjournment: The Chair thanked everybody for being here and the meeting was adjourned at approximately 8 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John Gregg, Chair