

Wakefield Cable TV Advisory Committee

March 15, 2022 Meeting Minutes

Meeting held by Zoom

Members present: Daniel Lieber

Brendan Connell

Members absent: None

Guests present: Ryan Boyd, WCAT Executive Director

Allyson Houghton, WCAT Board President

Paul Norman, WCAT Treasurer

Others present: Eric Reid

Meeting called to order at 3:00 PM by Daniel Lieber.

Members and guests introduced themselves.

There was a discussion about a need for a chair per Wakefield Bylaw 9-21. Brendan Connell nominated Daniel Lieber to be chair. Voted unanimously.

Ryan Boyd made a presentation about WCAT. This included having 5 dedicated staff members, 92% of funding coming from franchise fees paid by cable TV subscribers and cable TV providers. In 2021, they had 641 productions, including 359 government meetings, 67 sports events, and 215 shows/public service announcements, etc. They estimate WCAT has used 654 additional hours of staff time to cover meetings since the pandemic started.

Mr. Boyd explained there are two major challenges facing WCAT:

- 1) Uncertainty of location with a proposed replacement or major renovation to Wakefield Memorial High School
- 2) Funding challenges, particularly with continued decreasing revenue from subscriptions.

There is a need for a comparable or larger space to the current approximately 4200 sq. ft. space WCAT currently has within WCAT. It is imperative there is not a cost for the space as WCAT currently does not pay for rent or utilities associated with the space at WMHS.

For the next three years, there is a projected 5% annual reduction in revenue and 3-5% annual increase in costs without changes in staffing levels.

Mr. Connell asked if franchise fees or equivalent could be levied on internet service charges. Paul Norman explained this was being proposed at a state level, but could not be depended upon as it was not current law.

Mr. Lieber asked about capital funding. There was a discussion about the approximately \$35,000 in annual capital budget expenditures by WCAT, consistent with the capital revenue received by WCAT from Verizon and Comcast. RCN does not pay capital revenue as their contract has consideration for the I-Net (town internet service). WCAT was extending the life of equipment, but some significant new infrastructure equipment was needed. Over the next 3 years, capital expenditures were anticipated to result in approximately a \$200,000 shortfall.

Mr. Lieber recommended continuous vocal space needs be expressed to the Wakefield Public Schools leadership and School Committee members.

Mr. Lieber asked if there was consideration of WCAT becoming a municipal town department and requesting funding from the regular budget as a more stable funding source. Mr. Boyd acknowledged it was a potential idea, but preferred the independence of being a 501(c)(3) organization as politics had made other municipally funded stations inherently political, which was contrary to the goal of being accessible to the public.

Mr. Lieber suggested considering asking for a revision to the current contract with the Town to include more consistent funding in exchange for additional access by municipal entities to coverage by WCAT, but not on a fee-for-service basis. The specific funding (e.g. \$50,000 used as an example) should include sufficient funds to handle operating expenses and capital expenditures. Mr. Boyd, Mr. Norman, and Ms. Houghton indicated they wanted to consider the idea outside of the meeting.

Mr. Connell recommended Mr. Lieber be authorized to prepare and submit documentation of Cable Advisory Board activity for 2021 and 2022. Voted unanimously.

Mr. Connell moved to have Mr. Lieber prepare and submit minutes for this meeting. A draft would be submitted, and unless changes were needed, they would be deemed approved without further action. Voted unanimously.

There were no matters not anticipated presented.

Mr. Lieber moved to adjourn the meeting at 4:02 PM. Voted unanimously.