

Spotsylvania County Government

Cable Television and Telecommunications Commission

2003 ANNUAL REPORT

The last annual report was given to the Board of Supervisors in April of 2003. Below are highlights of the Commission Minutes:

Cable Commission

In February 2003, the Commission voted to keep the present officers, Don Shelby as Chairperson and Scott Meade and Vice Chairperson.

The Commission noted that there is a problem when a member holds a position until someone else is appointed because there is technically no vacancy. The number necessary for a quorum was discussed and it was decided that it should be the majority of the non-vacant seats.

The Commission would like to become a part of the process for a year by helping with the progression and getting familiar with the issues to see what value it can offer. The Commission can then report back to the Board after a year on what it has done and let the Board determine at that time what they expect from the Commission. It was agreed that the Commission suggest its interest to the Board in their Annual Report and obtain the preliminary plans from the Planning Department to keep current with the issues to help determine its value to the County, as well as the Cable Commission.

In April 2003, Don Shelby welcomed Mr. Joseph McBride as a new Commission member, representing the Salem District.

The Board approved the PEG Channel policy in April 2003. ***[See "Exhibit "A" attached]***

Mr. Scott distributed a newly revised Cable Commission Mission Statement, which was approved by the Commission. ***[See Exhibit "B" attached]***

The Commission welcomed Mr. James McCumber as the new Battlefield representative.

Brian Scott advised that there is a Wireless Telecommunications Ordinance meeting set up for Monday at 9:30 in the Board of Supervisor's Executive Room with the wireless committee and the consultants, ATC.

Bert Brittain of the Lee Hill District advised that he is resigning from the Cable Commission, however, he will be helping out until a replacement is assigned.

The Commission welcomed Bernard White, who will be representing the Livingston District.

Adelphia Communications

Adelphia advised of the following:

- The entire e-mail platform has been updated, to include new features. It now has 5 accounts, the storage space is increased, etc., with a more branded look, rather than a generic.
- The letter to the Board on the commercial rate changes, which was partially due to the sports programs. The reaction from the business community has not been too bad to date. Adelphia has not lost any accounts as of yet and one advantage is that our rates are not higher than competitors.
- They added 4 new digital channels – 3 of which are Fox sport nets at \$4.95 per month. The other is a religious network, which is slightly delayed, but should be happening at any time.
- They added adult programming in the end of February. All channels are the pay-preview, except one, which is the basic Playboy channel, a subscription-based service. The key difference is that the transmission is different and is not an analog service. There is “zero” opportunity for someone to see a scrambled picture or hear audio that they have not chosen. It is very secure and this announcement only went to digital customers.
- They have made progress on implementing the 24/7 dispatch center. They have already expanded from 7:00 a.m. to midnight, Monday through Friday, and 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday. They are monitoring the trouble calls as they come in. They see a trouble call pop up immediately and it does not sit there unnoticed overnight or over the weekend.
- There are two primary call centers answering 23,000 calls and each employ 400-500 personnel each. However, some calls may have to be shifted to another call center if the volume becomes high.
- Their company penetration is approximately 62%, which is approximately 73,000 customers. Their last rate increase was due to operational increases, mostly programming costs. Mr. Shelby advised that the FCC oversees the cable companies and does not allow the Commission to have jurisdiction over any rate increases.
- Adelphia is now holding themselves to higher standards. Service work and installation for power link and cable service are running 2 days or less at any given time; installation or repair service will be taken care of within 1 to 2 days; and Adelphia is changing their call center to Pennsylvania and are realigning the districts to balance the load.
- The percent of modem complaints is very close to the number of cable complaints, but that they have seen an improvement in the modem complaints. The problems could be from a virus, or someone running their service illegally. They are trying to run tests more often, along with attempting to contact people before any shutoffs are done to try and help them first. The Commission mentioned that there should be greater consequences as far as prosecution for those who are abusing the service.
- HDTV services were launched and they had some beta testers. It has been well received and Adelphia is looking at expanding it still, noting that it has limited choices at this time. Adelphia had an agreement with certain channels to test them for a limited amount of time, but there should be a few more that will come back on.

- The C-Span bus stopped in Spotsylvania on December 19th at the Courtland High School showing different educational programs that the bus does and cable does in classrooms and with government.

In reference to High Definition TV delivery, Adelphia noted the equipment has been ordered and delivery should be in December. They did not know what the additional costs would be.

The commission noted that Adelphia's three weeks response time is unacceptable from anybody in any industry. They also noted that Adelphia's service is getting worse where complaints are coming in now more than ever, due to the call centers. Many customers are verbally complaining of at least a 30-minute wait when they call into Adelphia. There appears to be no communication amongst each other in the different call centers. This makes Adelphia look bad, puts more pressure on the Cable Commission, and is the reason the Board of Supervisor requested to talk to the Commission. Adelphia noted that the local office throughout the day monitors every call that comes in to the call center and we should see more of next-day service.

In reference to the Adelphia/VACO Bankruptcy Update, Cox noted that Ron Cooper, CEO for Adelphia, gave a positive report at the convention held in Norfolk.

Adelphia vs. Cox rate comparison was distributed to all, along with recommended changes to the Adelphia "bill" to help cut down on calls coming into the County office. ***[See "Exhibit C" attached]***

The Commission noted that most of the complaint calls coming into the County pertain to rudeness from the call center representatives and inquired whether there is any training given to help the call centers on customer service. Adelphia could not answer about the call centers, but did note that there is training for the Technicians locally, to include communication with the customer when they are first hired. In addition, Adelphia has initiated addressing the service problems as they come in with the Technicians involved.

Lisa Cash introduced Paul Combs, Adelphia's Assistant District Manager for the western part of the state, who will be attending any upcoming Cable meetings if Ms. Cash is unable to attend.

Cox Communications

- Cox added three new channels on March 31st - ESPN Classic, Do-It-Yourself (DIY), and Fine Living. He also noted that Discovery Civilization changed its name to Discovery Times and in April 2004 they launched Digital Video Recording (DVR) service, which allows the customer to record information without a VCR, all directly onto the cable box, up to 80 hours, at a cost of \$9.95 per month.
- Cox noted a rate increase of \$5.00, which would take effect May 15th. The rate will go from \$34.95 to \$39.95 per month.
- Cox distributed a list of the new channels being launched in the Fredericksburg lineup and that the programming changes are scheduled for October 15, 2003. It was also noted that Cox is still working diligently with Seitel to resolve the issues to get the "call answer speed" back down.

- Cox's corporate strategy on HDTV is to roll out to the 25,000-and-above customers first. It has already been rolled out to Fairfax and they are rolling it out to the rest of Northern Virginia where there are over 240,000 customers. Mr. Riley noted that it would probably not be before 2006.

CRRL Information Technology

Chris Glover, the CRRL Information Technology Representative, noted that they started running public access channels and that Debbie Kline is the new person handling it.

Germanna Community College

Ms. Jacque Hirsch, GCC Information Technology Representative, noted that Germanna College is doing on-line registration for the students. They are hopeful that by next registration we will have the problems ironed out. We are also trying to resolve the security risk of one student seeing another student's information and have an automatic kick-out time. They have also kicked off a statewide purchasing system on line and all vendors have to register with them.

Ms. Hirsch also mentioned that they do on-line instruction through the blackboard system. The college has also recently bided on a Title 3 grant to expand the college hours to 24/7 and will start building video conferencing. A groundbreaking took place on April 25th for the 2nd building at Fredericksburg Campus focusing on the workforce.

Cellular Towers

The Commission has been tasked by the Board with reviewing applications for Cellular towers. Some of the parties involved in the process is the Technical Review Committee (TRC), consisting of county staff, a consulting firm, Mid-Atlantic, and a policy group, to include Board of Supervisor Bob Hagan, where both groups review it based on our policy and how it is written. Mr. Scott also noted that a member of the Cable Commission could participate in the group, which he believes would help when we have to take something to the Board. It was requested that Mr. Scott present the Cable Commission's views to the policy group.

Brian Scott advised that review of the Tower Applications on Special Use Permits (SUP's) by the Cable Commission was just approved by the Board. He will be meeting with the Planning manager on the cell towers to discuss the process on how the information is to come to the Cable Commission prior to going to the Planning Commission. The Planning Commission would like someone from the Cable Commission involved. It was decided that Mr. Scott would attend the TRC meetings to represent the Cable Commission, and Mr. Eastwood noted that he would also attend the next meeting to decide if he would be capable of representing the Commission.

In addition, the County is revising the Telecommunication Facility Replacement Policy. The Board would like the Commission to identify where there is a need and where all the towers should go in the county. This would be a one-year trial to show how the Commission can be an asset to the Board of Supervisors and how it can be viewed as a telecommunication commission, not just cable.

Citizens

A citizen who resided on Plank Road noted that he has come before the Board of Supervisors previously with a complaint, and requested Brian Scott to talk to the Board about considering another cable company to service the County. He stated that the service is very poor for the cost each month.

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