

## Spotsylvania County Government

### Cable Television and Telecommunications Commission

#### *2008 ANNUAL REPORT*

The 2007 Annual Report was submitted to the Board of Supervisors in June of 2008.

#### **Cable Commission**

Current Spotsylvania County Cable Television and Telecommunications Commission ("CTTC") members are as follows:

<b>Battlefield</b>	<b>Jason Greenwood</b> Email: <a href="mailto:jgreenwood.wfg@gmail.com">jgreenwood.wfg@gmail.com</a>	<b>Exp.</b>	<b>10/14/12</b>
<b>Berkeley</b>	<b>Larry Raymond</b> Email: <a href="mailto:poriver1@verizon.net">poriver1@verizon.net</a>	<b>Exp.</b>	<b>9/11/11</b>
<b>Chancellor</b>	<b>Herbert W. Pritchett, Sr.</b> ( <i>Chairperson</i> ) Email: <a href="mailto:hwpritchettsr@yahoo.com">hwpritchettsr@yahoo.com</a>	<b>Exp.</b>	<b>10/25/12</b>
<b>Courtland</b>	<b>Dwayne Reynolds</b> Email: <a href="mailto:reynoldsjd@comcast.net">reynoldsjd@comcast.net</a>	<b>Exp.</b>	<b>11/13/11</b>
<b>Lee Hill</b>	<b>Bradley R. Cobb</b> Email: <a href="mailto:braycobb@verizon.net">braycobb@verizon.net</a>	<b>Exp.</b>	<b>1/10/10</b>
<b>Livingston</b>	<b>Annie C. Lindner</b>	<b>Exp.</b>	<b>4/11/10</b>
<b>Salem</b>	<b>Joseph McBride</b> ( <i>Vice Chairperson</i> ) E-mail: <a href="mailto:jgmcbride@verizon.net">jgmcbride@verizon.net</a>	<b>Exp.</b>	<b>2/25/11</b>

In January 2008, motions were passed to maintain the current members' positions. Herbert Pritchett will remain Chairman and Joseph McBride will remain Vice Chair.

In September 2008, Mr. Edenton stepped down from the Commission as representative of the Berkeley District. In November, Mr. Larry Raymond was appointed as the new Berkeley District representative and Mr. Jason Greenwood was appointed as the new representative for the Battlefield District. Mr. Pritchett was reappointed to the Commission effective November 25, 2008.

#### **Meeting frequency**

The CTTC meets on the second Thursday of each month. Information regarding meetings, minutes, and agendas can be found at <http://www.spotsylvania.va.us/departments/infoserv/cablecom/>.

## Staff Contacts

Brian Scott, Director of Information Services  
Jane Reeve, Deputy Director of Information Services  
Karen Karkos, Secretary to Commission  
Chris Hinzeman – School Board Information Technology Representative  
Chris Glover – CRRL Information Technology Representative  
Jacque Hirsch – GCC Information Technology Representative

## Complaints/Comments

Customer service complaints should be directed to the respective cable company, as noted:

COMCAST	800-COMCAST (266-2278)
COX	540-373-6343
Verizon	800-VERIZON (1-800-837-4966)

Unresolved customer complaints, franchise agreement questions, and all other comments and/or questions should be directed to [cabletv@spotsylvania.va.us](mailto:cabletv@spotsylvania.va.us), or 540-507-7560.

## Cox Communications

### Overview

Cox Communications provides service to 1,128 customers in Spotsylvania County, primarily in the Northeast area of the county. Customer service contact information for Cox is 540-373-6343.

The Cox Franchise Agreement expires in January 12, 2013.

### Program Offerings

Over the past year, Cox Communications has increased internet speeds, added more HD channels, and 13 new international channels.

### Service Fees

On August 12, 2008, the FCC granted Cox Communication's petition for a declaration of effective competition status in Spotsylvania, Stafford and Fredericksburg. This exempts the company from rate regulation and is free to charge subscribers different rates for the same service. See Attachment A for Cox's current fee schedule.

### Customer Service

Cox has made numerous changes over the past year in efforts to improve customer service response times. Changes include transitioning to a new call center, managing call queue overload routing, and improved processes.

### **Transition to Digital Service**

Cox has transitioned most channels to digital service. Limited basic channels will continue to be carried on analogue.

### **Service Expansion Plans**

At this time, Cox has no plans to expand further into the County.

## **Comcast**

### **Overview**

Staff estimates that Comcast provides service to approximately 65% of the County. Customer service contact information for Comcast is 800-COMCAST (266-2278).

In September 2008, Comcast made a grant award to the Spotsylvania Educational Foundation in the amount of \$9,900.

The Comcast Franchise Agreement expires on July 7, 2012.

### **Program Offerings**

Over the past year, Comcast has increased internet speeds, added more HD channels, and 13 new international channels.

### **Service Fees**

Comcast now offers Fancast.com, which is the You-Tube of television programming. This allows customers to program DVRs away from home, receive movie release information, and various other functionalities. See Attachment B for Comcast's current fee schedule.

### **Customer Service**

In January, 2008, Comcast opened a new 500-seat call center. Goals of the call center are designed to improve customer service response times, increased training for customer service representatives, and call queue overflow management.

### **Transition to Digital Service**

Over the past year, Comcast has transitioned most channels to digital service. Limited basic channels will continue to be carried on analogue.

Comcast is currently offering numerous HD channels to their customers.

## **Service Expansion Plans**

Comcast Service was expanded to the Retreat at Chancellorsville in March 2008.

Comcast is reviewing plans to possibly extend service to the Lake Anna area; however, this would be a long-term plan due to the size of the project. As of November, 2008, the return on investment is not sufficient to justify the cost of construction.

Comcast reviewed extension of service to Liam Lane in the Livingston District; however, deemed it too rural to build infrastructure out in that area.

## **Verizon FIOS**

### **Overview**

Staff estimates that Verizon provides service to approximately 5,000 customers. Customer service contact information for Verizon is 800-VERIZON (800-837-4966).

The Franchise Agreement with Verizon expires in October 25, 2021.

### **Program Offerings**

See Attachment C for a list of Verizon's current service offerings.

### **Service Fees**

See Attachment D for Verizon's current fee schedule.

### **Customer Service**

Verizon won the Customer Satisfaction Survey for TV, phone and Internet service, where Verizon customers are happy with their service.

Verizon's FIOS Plan is being done over a 4-year span.

Verizon's work schedule is now out on their web site, and is listed street-by-street and should be updated quarterly.

Verizon FIOS technical support now offers the customer a call back in a certain amount of time on a problem.

Verizon laid out fiber down Route 3 towards the Fawn Lake area because of the new areas that are being built out that way. However, the fiber is only for Internet, and not TV service.

### **Transition to Digital Service**

Verizon converted to an all-digital service mid-summer 2008, removing the analog simulcasting. Existing customers will need to purchase a converter box in order to convert the digital signal.

## **Service Expansion Plans**

Verizon is continuing to finish FIOS in the Lees Hill area. Per the Franchise Agreement, Verizon is committed to open the Brokenburg center in 2010. They are currently still working on the 2010 build schedule, which will be formalized in August or September of 2009.

## **Telecommunications/Cell Towers**

### **Overview**

Little cell tower expansion activity has occurred in the County during 2008. Verizon and AT&T both expressed initial interest in new tower construction or co-location on existing towers; however, no further action was requested by either vendor.

The County received an offer from a company to buy all our tower leases, paying the County cash up front and taking over the existing lease agreement payments. This offer was subsequently denied due to the estimated revenue loss.

The Lake Wilderness public safety communications tower memorandum of agreement was signed between the County, the National Park Service, the state, and the FCC, allowing the construction of the tower to begin as of the first of the year.

### **Cavalier Telephone**

The Board approved a Public Hearing for a Franchise Agreement with Cavalier on February 12, 2008. However, the County never received further communications from Cavalier to move forward with their proposal.

### **Fred Tech Wireless Hotspot**

In January, 2008, the County received a quote to install wireless connectivity inside the food court at Spotsylvania County Towne Centre. No further action has been taken.

In March 2008, Bob Hagan of the Fredericksburg Chamber of Commerce worked with the state to try to allow wireless service at the Welcome Center. VDOT voiced concerns of traffic hazards should a wireless hot spot be installed. The Chamber was working with the Secretary of Technology to try to move this initiative forward. However, this issue is now on hold. The Board was asked for additional funding back in July, but this has not been approved due to budget constraints.

### **Rural Wireless Broadband**

In 2008, the County received an unsolicited proposal for providing wireless internet service throughout the County, to include the rural and lake area. The County met with the vendor in response to their proposal, but found legal issues with the proposal. The vendor is refining their proposal at this time and should hopefully bring something back to the Cable Commission at a later date. This proposal is a viable alternative for rural wireless broadband.

### **School Board Information Technology**

The schools have continued to run point-to-point fiber throughout the County to connect schools to the technology office. The schools did collaborate with the County on fiber sharing to save construction and monthly recurring costs and prevent fiber build-out redundancy; however, County fiber funding was pulled due to the economy and budget shortfall.

### **Central Rappahannock Regional Library (CRRL) Information Technology**

The Regional Library started a 10,000 square foot addition at the Salem Church Library. The branch closed down for approximately 2 weeks to move from the existing building to the mini branch.

### **Germanna Community College (GCC)**

In January 2008, the Governor awarded GCC grant money to open a leased facility in Stafford.

In September, the college was working on an RFP to lease a building in Stafford to expand their presence in the Stafford region.

### **Wireless Service Authority**

The Wireless Service Authority plan went in front of the Board in January and a Public Hearing was held on February 12, 2008. The Wireless Service Authority was approved by the Board in February.

In June, Mr. Scott and Mr. Pritchett met with County Supervisor Hap Connors regarding obtaining some grants and how to work through the process. The Board is very committed in getting wireless in the County and hopefully will move very rapidly to obtain wireless throughout the County.

In August, the County Attorney accepted the challenge to move this forward with the State Corporation Commission (SCC). In December, additional information was sent to the County Attorney's office to move forward with establishing a wireless service authority in the County.

### **Wireless Master Plan RFP from Planning Department**

The County met with the vendors to discuss their proposals. In March 2008, the County sent out an RFP for both the wireless master plan and for a company to review identified specifications. The purpose of this plan is to identify specific areas throughout the County where towers could be placed, along with what type of tower, and a way to consolidate as many vendors on a tower as possible.

In July 2008, a status report was presented to the Board of Supervisors on the Master Plan, Broadband, the Wireless Hotspot and the Wireless Service Authority, with a request for additional monies to begin the process. The Board tabled it until September 2008, after the next budgeting forecast. The Board then decided that this plan will be delayed until further notice pending budget approval.

### **Public Broadcasting on PEG Channel**

The County has a current Public Use Policy, which is currently under review by the County Attorney's office. Items under review include: what organizations are allowed to air programs over the County's government channel; are facilities adequate to support external requests; who has final authority to approve/deny requests, appropriate content, and additional resources required to support expanded use.

### **Miscellaneous**

- Basic Service Rates - The question on whether the County can regulate basic service rates was addressed and found that there may be a way to regulate these rates at this time. However, the County does not have the required Certificate of Authority from the FCC. Research indicates that the County can possibly apply for authority from the FCC, either singularly or in collaboration with an adjoining jurisdiction. It is proposed that the Cable Commission pursue this further to determine if feasible.
- Stimulus Package - Stimulus package funding for public/private purposes may be available to expand broadband in the more rural areas. The State is talking about coming in to expand broadband services in the County in their next stimulus package. At this time, the County is working on a document requesting funds to come into Spotsylvania County to expand the service, specifically in the western part of Lake Anna, and to also help with our public safety communications. The State has already asked the broadband vendors (Comcast, Cox, Verizon, etc.) to identify those areas where those funds might be used. A decision may be made by mid-December.
- Technology Zone - The County is looking at establishing a "technology zone". This is an area to encourage certain technology companies to move into so that they can receive a tax break.

### **Objectives for 2009**

- Continue to monitor levels of service of the three cable companies franchised to do business in Spotsylvania County, and regularly report findings to the Board of Supervisors.
- Expand information available on the County's website related to cable and telecommunications initiatives.
- Explore feasibility of acquiring rate regulation of basic cable service from the FCC.
- Develop proposal requirements for a possible public/private partnership to provide wireless broadband services in rural areas of the County.
- Complete revision of the Public Use Policy for presentation and approval by the Board of Supervisors.