
Portsmouth
Cable Commission Public Hearing
7:00 p.m. – August 16, 2006
City Hall/City Council Chambers

The Portsmouth Cable Commission held a Public Hearing on Wednesday, August 16, 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
Louis Vinciguerra, Commissioner
Kathleen Pearce, Commissioner
Brian Gregg, Commissioner
Nancy Beach, Commissioner

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

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

I. Introduction John Gregg – The Chairman explained that Comcast has a 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 this Commission is conducting a series of public hearings. This is the third hearing and is intended to solicit input from the general public concerning the future cable interest and needs of the community and the performance of Comcast under the existing Franchise Agreement. In the existing Contract, Comcast has made certain promises relative to customer service, signal quality and the like. This hearing is an opportunity to express your views on Comcast's performance. Also, under the existing Agreement, Comcast pays the City 5% of its Portsmouth generated gross annual revenue. A portion of that revenue funds the City's local Government channel 22 which primarily broadcasts City Council and School Board meetings as well as the meetings of other Boards and Commissions.

Some Portsmouth citizens have expressed interest in the development of a community access channel to carry local produced non-governmental programming. This hearing is an opportunity to express your views on the future cable related needs of Portsmouth and would therefore appropriately include your views regarding PEG Access channels. If you chose to speak please first state your name and address so that we have this for the record. We are here tonight to hear from you and your comments and input will be

important in helping the Cable Commission to make appropriate recommendations to the City Council. The Chair invited the speakers.

- II. Public Hearing** - Bill St. Laurent, 250 Colonial Drive, spoke representing himself and the Taxpayer's Association. He is not sure what is going to consist of and what's going to happen with the access channel that is being proposed, and who is going to run it. As the Taxpayer's President, we do not want to see taxpayer's money paying for this access channel. He feels the channel, if it happens, should be strictly be a voluntary, non-profit donation type of channel. He also feels it would be a good idea when people receive their cable bills there be something in there if they want to donate to the access channel. There should be some kind of way that people who want the access channel pay for it. He does not approve of having the access channel if it is not either donated or non-profit organization.

Martin Cameron, 469 Ocean Road spoke to defend the taxpayer's money. As he sees a ballpark figure of \$250,000 annually and sees this as a couple of teachers, firemen and policemen or some other service personnel and use this tax money for public service and public safety. He feels we should not have to depend on taxpayer's money.

Howard Mangold, 1240 Maplewood Avenue spoke in support of public access, it is very important to have this in the City with today's standards and what is happening in today's world.

The Chair asked the Asst. City Attorney to address correspondence that has been received. Suzanne Woodland stated since the last Ascertainment Hearing the Committee has a number of pieces of correspondence and wants them noted in the Ascertainment record. The Committee will provide Comcast with copies of these pieces of correspondence. Suzanne Woodland identified the correspondence for the record.

1. Letter dated 4/6/06 from the Coordinator of Art Speak generally in support of public access.
2. E-mail dated 4/5/06 from Richard Smith of Cuzzin Richard Entertainment Associates, 93 High Street, Portsmouth, in support of public access.
3. E-mail dated 4/5/06 from Noah Sheola, Producer of NH Theater Group, Stranger than Fiction based in Portsmouth and is in support of public access.
4. E-mail dated 4/6/06 from Tim Gaudreau of 855Islington St. #109 in support of public access.
5. E-mail dated 8/13/06 from Emily Cherin 5 Holly Lane, Exeter, has hosted a radio show on Portsmouth Community Radio and is in support and willing to assist wit public access.
6. Telephone call from Joseph Gobbi dated 8/16/06 who is not in support of public access with emphasis on the cost.

7. E-mail dated 8/15/06 from Peter Somssich on behalf of Amnesty International Chapter 550, 34 Sweat Ave., Portsmouth in favor of public access.

Commissioner Brian Gregg asked Attorney Woodland if the record would remain open for further input between now and certain date. Attorney Woodland responded it will. A date for closure of the Ascertainment process has not yet been set.

Martin Cameron asked how correspondence from residents of other communities would be treated. Mr. Cameron suggested that only comments from Portsmouth residents be used.

- III. **Closing Remarks** - The Chair explained that the next steps for the Cable Commission are to determine what recommendations we feel would be appropriate to include in negotiating a new Franchise Agreement with Comcast. Those recommendations will have to do with public access as well as other matters. We will be formulating our thoughts on this over the next several months and meeting with City Council later this year.
- IV. **Adjournment** - The Chair thanked everybody for being present and the meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John Gregg, Chair