Cable Franchise Committee Meeting

01.25.21

Attendees: Timothy Goodwin, Paul O’Brien, Marshall Goldberg, David Wells, Lynn Hinchee, Tavis Austin, Peter Schneider

Meeting was called to order at 7:04pm

Paul read the preamble re Covid-19, virtual meeting, etc.

1. Survey update.

2. Next Steps

Paul introduced Beverly Woods, IT director and Tavis Austin, Town Planner.

Announced that he will not be returning as a member of the board of selectmen.

I will be here until the 2nd week of March. Hopefully you will keep going. The town really needs your brain power.

1. The Survey:

We sent it out through the electric bills and put it up on the town website. We got over 1,000 responses to the survey. We have 95% of our homes (4000 homes) as subscribers to Atlantic Broadband. So, we have a 25% return. I told Atlantic Broadband that I can’t give you exact data but there are kudos and there are concerns. Research from 10 years ago, what was important to them then is the same as what is important to them now.

Beverly

Shared her screen to reveal the results of the survey. There were probably two dozen customers that just said “No”.

Do you feel ABB provides you easy access to customer support? Majority said “No”.

Paul

If I were on the board of directors of ABB, how would I react? The first reaction is we look like crap, defend, defend, defend.

The second way you can look at the data. We just got unvarnished input re our product and services. It is cheaper to keep customers than to go get new ones. What is our retention strategy? How reliable is the survey? The results are all over the map. It is possible that location has an impact on the service. They have no online customer care, you wait 30 or 40 minutes to talk to someone. The knowledgeable nature of the staff. Are we giving our customer care people enough information to do their jobs.

Outages.

They need to get better about communicating about what is going on. Their orientation is to be a utility.

The survey results are all over the map re installs, repairs, billing anomalies not communicated.

Are they giving you a good product? 50/50 results. That is a satisfaction question. Are you satisfied with the price you pay, are you satisfied with your service?

The killer question. Given what you know, would you recommend ABB to a friend. 7 out of 10 said “I would not.” This says that they have a very tenuous grip on their customer base.

As a homework assignment, we sent out a data request to ABB. Pair up those answers with the survey results. What they are measuring and what our customer’s value don’t sync.

I am going to bring up alignment issue and what our consumers out there are telling me.

If we could get some smart kids at Kingswood and have them do some analytics.

Over 1000 responses is good data.

How long have you been a customer? Only a relatively small number of new customers.

Frequency of outages is an alarming statistic.

Easy access to customer support? 522 said “No”.

Do you think their support team is knowledgeable?

They get good marks on the internet side but not so much on the cable TV side.

Timely information about outages. Not good.

Have you had a bill dispute? Bill accuracy appears to be a concern.

Has a repair person come to your house?

Multiple visits required. Problems keep on going.

Satisfaction? 50/50

Are you loyal?

Positively not.

Beverly

Verbatims. Take each bucket and make it into a document so that you have all the answers to the lengthier questions.

Easy access to customer support.

How long it takes to get somebody on the phone. Trying for a period of a week or more and getting disconnected after 45 minutes on hold.

Do you find the support team to be helpful? Once you get them, some of them are good. Cable TV seems to be a trouble spot for support.

We have more than two kinds of customers.

Some people have cellphones with good coverage and then there are people that lose their cellphone when there is an outage, their phone is out when there is an outage.

Billing disputes connected with the problem of how hard it is to get an answer. You are frequently on hold. Outages, we don’t get any credit. Is it worth it to be on hold for 40 minutes to get $3.00 off your bill?

Atlantic says you can go on vacation, but when the customers return, Atlantic turns it back on with every extra option and nobody knows this until they get their bill.

Paul

What would you like ABB to address?

Reliability.

Access to customer service.

Not having to remove the battery from the modem every time the service goes down.

These results are a cry for help.

Lots of people only have ABB because there is no choice.

Commentary from the committee:

Paul

Are you surprised?

Lynn

I’m not surprised. I hear it in every community, because you have a monopoly because there is only one provider in each community.

Peter

Big picture. The landscape is changing so rapidly. The way of buying services and what you’re buying is changing rapidly. I don’t know what the future is going to look like in terms of delivering service. What serves us the best going forward in contractual relations with providers?

Paul

I share your opinion.

Lynn

Under the current market circumstances, what do you believe your options are?

Paul

I will get to that.

David

Comcast Commercial install did not want to touch anything to do with ABB. Very successful install with Comcast. 1.5 hours on the phone with the Sales guy for a 4 hour install.

Timothy

Is there anything we can do to encourage competition?

Paul

Let’s table that for a second.

Peter is saying the data is interesting but crawling around in the soil with these guys is not something we want to do.

There is a narrative here and David is saying there might be another choice out there.

Tavis

I’m new to New Hampshire, even newer to ABB. I live in Rochester, we signed up for Metrocast. Metrocast was purchased by ABB. We got Consolidated for home wifi.

Going forward, who actually controls the data. They all have certain bandwidth allocations. How do we find someone with the biggest bargaining chip.

Paul

Research. Rural America is not a good deal. Trying to ask the state entity to get into the internet business is not a good idea. We have to have more choices. Could we invite Consolidated to build in our territory? Consolidated put out a press release saying that they were going to fiberize Northern New England.

We have been trying to get wireless in here. Regulatory framework for wireless is difficult.

My advice is that we are going to put out an RFP. We’re going to invite Comcast, Sprectrum, Consolidated. We will probably need to rewrite our contract with ABB. The model has got to be more competitive. Continue to treat ABB as a partner. You can’t yell at them. You can’t threaten them. All you can do is keep turning the crank on them and get more competition.

There has been overbuilding, Laconia, Rochester, Gilford and Bristol. Except for Bristol Consolidated did the overbuilding. Bristol built their own.

I do think we should have a public meeting. ABB is going to have stand in front of the public.

The cable industry is at a bit of a pause. The federal communication used the word Title II, which means they would be regulated like the telephone companies.

There is no clear path to getting it fixed. Myself, Tavis and ABB are going to have a direct discussion about the survey results.

We will get you more of a write up on the survey results.

Beverly

Two things.

1. I was thinking where is this really going and to what extent can the current contract be modified?

2. We have a lot of long-term systemic problems, but it would not be very difficult for ABB to fix the long wait times for customer service. If you could say something to them about putting more people on the phone.

Paul

My service with ABB is extremely reliable. I would say the quality is good. I don’t know if the price I pay is good or not. If they have some smarts they would look through the survey issues and address it. They need to get somebody who worries about improving the numbers.

Marshall

Having worked with Consolidated as a customer and trying to work with Spectrum, what concerns me is that I don’t think the service would be any better than what ABB is doing. I would try to align with the most financially robust. Currently, we need to work with ABB to get better.

The CEO of Comcast was brought into the company six years ago to fix this issue and he did a great job. If you’re going to send out an RFP don’t forget Comcast. Consolidated is the incumbent.

2. Cares situation and Browns Ridge Rd.

ABB has completed the North Wolfeboro area. They were the first company in New Hampshire to turn up broadband service. We lit up 22 out of 24 properties. (One property owner didn’t want the cable companies on their land.)

Consolidated Communications has completed all of their work. That leaves the telephone company to do their work.

On Warren Sands Rd. ABB has requested the make ready assessment work. Consolidated has been paid $4100.

Everybody has been paid. It should be completed soon.

It is a lesson in regulatory rules.

Lynn

I’ve got it.

Timothy

What is the connection with Consolidated?

Paul

They own the poles. They have been paid. So now it is a matter of time, they have to do their portion of the work withing the shot clock.

Lynn

It will be good to tell people that it is going to happen.

Paul

It is coming.

Next meeting.

I will probably do a signoff meeting with whoever replaces me. I hope you all stick around and keep this going. I want you to push hard for the citizens in Wolfeboro. I will give you all of my contacts. Nadine at ABB is new and very, very good. She keeps her eyes on Facebook. Melinda Kinney is at Spectrum. If you decide to stay on the committee Lynn, I know Mike Lacata and Leo Dwyer at NH Electric Coop. They have completed their fiber work.

We will have another meeting before I go.

Marshall

Thank you for your service.

David

Thank you as well. I hope all the other folks stay on. We need the continuity.

Timothy

Thumbs up.

Tavis

Gonna miss you my friend.

Beverly

I second what Tavis said. You will be missed.

Paul

To all of you, you are not part of the old usual suspects. I strongly encourage you not to lose your take charge, get to the point mode of operation. Take care.

Meeting adjourned at 7:30pm

Submitted by Karen Lancaster