

Report To Grafton Residents on Cable TV Licensing Process June, 2007

The Grafton Cable Television Oversight, Cable Alternatives, and Cable Advisory Committees are town committees of volunteers appointed by the town's cable license issuing authority, the Grafton Board of Selectmen. In answer to a number of recent questions from town residents, we take this opportunity to report to the community.

In the Spring of 2005 the Board of Selectmen requested the Cable Television Oversight Committee to actively look into opportunities for providing Grafton with additional options for cable television services. Informal discussions were held with officials of Shrewsbury SELCO looking at the feasibility of Grafton participating in a future connection with Shrewsbury's town-owned cable TV system. Members of the Oversight Committee and Selectmen then held additional meetings with cable industry consultants as to the feasibility of providing a Town owned fiber optic network throughout the town of Grafton. After reporting initial findings back to the Board of Selectmen, a Cable Alternatives Committee was formed to further explore the feasibility and costs of these and other cable television options. The Alternatives Committee has been meeting on a regular basis.

In June of 2006 Verizon Communications, Inc. indicated to the Selectmen an interest in having them solicit Verizon to apply for a cable TV license. The usual procedure for cable television licenses is for a cable provider to simply apply to the Town for a license.

Later the Oversight and Alternatives Committees began hearing from cable television industry sources that Verizon was pulling back from cable licensing efforts in a number of Massachusetts communities. The Committees immediately contacted Verizon but were unable to get Verizon to confirm their company policy in writing. An April 18th, 2007 news article in the Boston Globe confirmed that Verizon "will stop seeking new cable TV applications in Massachusetts until it finishes all pending projects." The Committees again contacted Verizon about the story in the newspaper. Verizon replied that in fact they are not initiating any new licensing efforts, and that if Grafton asked Verizon would not respond.

Verizon has filed for regulatory and legislative changes to the cable licensing process at both the state and federal levels. A public hearing on new legislation to put cable TV licensing in Massachusetts under the jurisdiction of state government was held by the Joint House / Senate Committee on Telecommunication, Utilities and Energy at the Massachusetts State Legislature in Boston on June 5th.

The Cable Committees continue to actively pursue ways to provide Grafton residents with additional options for cable television services. The Town has retained legal council to assist with any future cable TV license application from Verizon. Legal counsel will also assist in the anticipated application for re-licensing by Charter Communications of their cable agreement with the town, which concludes on September 20th, 2010. The Town is forming a Cable Advisory Committee to handle the processes of licensing and re-licensing.

The Cable Oversight and Cable Alternatives Committees encourage town residents who have questions and concerns about the cable TV licensing process to contact members of the Cable Committees through the Board of Selectmen's office at the Grafton Memorial Municipal Center at 508-839-5335 extension 180. Current members of the Oversight Committee are Robert Hassinger, Chairman, Mark Durfee, Vice Chairman, members Rick Schultze and Corson Wyman. William Robidoux is an ex-officio member of the Committee. Current members of the Alternatives Committee are Robert Hassinger, Chairman, Mark Durfee, and Ron Fairhurst. The Oversight and Alternatives Committees meet jointly on a monthly basis on Saturday starting at 10:00 AM at the Grafton Cable Access Studios on Providence Road in South Grafton. Additional information on the Grafton Cable Television Oversight Committee and Cable Alternatives Committee can be found at the Town of Grafton's official web site:

http://www.town.grafton.ma.us/Public_Documents/GraftonMA_BComm/cable/CATVcomm2