

BOROUGH OF GETTYSBURG
59 EAST HIGH STREET, GETTYSBURG, PA 17325
COUNCIL PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES
JANUARY 17, 2019

President Susan Naugle called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM at the Gettysburg Area Recreation Building, 545 Long Lane, with the following Councilors present: Mr. Wesley Heyser, Ms. Patricia Lawson, Mr. Christopher Berger and Mr. Charles Strauss. Vice President Jacob Schindel and Mr. John Lawver were absent. Staff present included: Mayor Theodore Streeter; Borough Manager Charles Gable; and Borough Secretary Sara Stull.

Others present include: Kristen Ritchey, Government and External Affairs Manager, Comcast Cable; Raymond Gouker, Founder, Community Media of South Central PA, (ACCTV), formerly Adams Community Television; Jeff and Nancy Cook, 234 Baltimore Street; Ralph Serpe, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Adams County Community Foundation; Mike and Mary Malewicki, 2 West Broadway, Matt Moon, 98 Springs Avenue; Samuel Huber, 64 Breckenridge Street; Glenn Blocker, 51 Hanover Street; and Rebecca Brown, 785 Baltimore Street. Representing the press was Michael Cooper-White with the *Gettysburg Times*. Mark Werley, filming for Community Media.

President Susan Naugle announced that the public hearing is to hear comments from Borough residents regarding the upcoming renewal of the COMCAST Agreement as a cable franchise operator.

Manger Gable said that the current 12-year contract with Comcast expires in May 2020, and that the Borough receives approximately \$36,000 per year in franchise fees. He said that the purpose of tonight's meeting is to offer the public an opportunity to participate and to provide comments relative to a review of the past performance of the Comcast Corporation as a cable operator, and to assist in the identification of the future cable-related community needs of the Borough of Gettysburg. All comments will be carefully considered as Council negotiates with Comcast.

Kristen Ritchey, Government and External Affairs Manager, Comcast Cable, gave a brief summary of their efforts to "improve the customer experience" and to make services "more customer friendly."

Public Comments

Matt Moon, 98 Springs Avenue, expressed his concerns with the excessive rate increases each year. He asked Council to consider the fees when negotiating with Comcast.

Samuel Huber, 64 Breckenridge Street, said that he doesn't find Comcast to be customer friendly. He said that Gettysburg needs more competition so that residents can shop around noting the only alternative is Dish TV.

Mike Malewicki, 2 West Broadway, expressed his concerns with the high rates Comcast charges, and urged Council to continue exploring other alternatives.

Glenn Blocker, 51 Hanover Street, complained that Comcast doesn't have a local office in Gettysburg, noting that he had to drive to Shippensburg.

Ms. Ritchey responded that equipment can be mailed through the local UPS Store at no charge. She noted that another Comcast location will be opening soon in Chambersburg.

Ralph Serpe, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Adams County Community Foundation, said that the fee should be increased to help Community Media. He also expressed his frustration with a recent service outage that affected several families and businesses. Mr. Serpe said that after two days with no response from Comcast, he filed a complaint with the Federal Communication Commission (FCC). He said that he felt Comcast response to the FCC complaint was unsatisfactory, and noted “when they’re the only game in town that gives them the upper hand.”

Councilwoman Patricia Lawson, said that she was surprised to learn that by setting the fee the Borough is essentially levying a tax on the Borough taxpayers. She asked if better pricing and reasonable terms could be negotiated if the Borough were to join with other municipalities.

Jeff Cook, 234 Baltimore Street, promotes Community Media and has been a “Sports Chat” host for many years. He gave a brief history noting that it was formerly known as Adams Community Television (ACTV). Mr. Cook said that Comcast in the past paid ten cents per customer for the “PEG fee” to support Community Media

Nancy Cook, 234 Baltimore Street, promotes Community Media and said that she has volunteered over thirty-years working with Ray Gouker. She feels Comcast should provide more to Community Media, who provides a lot for the community.

Ray Gouker, Founder, Community Media – ACCTV, gave a presentation about the non-profit organization that he founded over thirty-years ago. He said that they cover local government meetings, educational, sports, and other major community events. It brings neighbors together to share who they are and what they’re doing. Mr. Gouker said that the non-profit organization is facing financial challenges since Comcast no longer provides funding like they voluntarily did for many years. He noted that similar community media entities are “funded through the franchise fee,” and said that Gettysburg doesn’t pass along any of the five percent collected by Comcast. Mr. Gouker said that in negotiations with Comcast, municipalities are free to insist that they charge a “PEG Fee” to support Community Media. He pointed out that these fees can only be used for capital costs and not operating expenses.

Manager Gable said that the “PEG Fees” are part of the discussion for Community Media. He noted that Borough Council has engaged the Cohen Law Group of Pittsburgh to help with the negotiation of a new contract.

There was no public comment at this time.

Moved Mr. Heyser, seconded Mr. Berger to adjourn the meeting at 8:25 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Sara L. Stull
Borough Secretary