

Meeting Minutes

TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION MEETING

Thursday, December 16, 1999 - 6:00 P.M.

City Water Department - 300 Bliss Avenue

Present: Chairman Rackow, Alderman Phillips, Commissioners Bartosz, Colantonio, Curtis, Patton, Pintar, Wyhuske

Absent: Alderman Walther

Also

Present: Mayor Wescott, Telecommunications Coordinator Quirk, Clerk Zdroik, Alderpersons Sevenich, Aldinger, John Klismet (Park Ridge),

Charles Kell (Whiting), Ken Shibilski (V of Plover), Jim Ebenhoe (Charter), Susan Jirgl

(Charter), Tom Bauman (Charter), Susan Kampmeier (Journal), Mike Kemmeter (WIZD)

1. Approval of minutes of October 12, 1999.

Commissioner Patton moved, Commissioner Wyhuske seconded, for approval of the minutes of October 12, 1999.

Ayes, all, nays, none. Motion carried.

2. Report of Marcus Cable.

a. Explanation of variations in cable TV bills.

In a letter from Telecommunications Commission Chairman Rackow, dated December 8, 1999, addressed to Scott Behn, District Manager, Charter Communications and Susan Jirgl, Operations Manager, Charter Communications, the chairman raised some questions on the franchise fee, FCC fee and the sales tax as shown on the Charter cable bills.

There were several variations on the franchise fee on the cable bills for the months covering January to December 1999. Chairman Rackow **brought these variations to Mr. Behn's attention in August 1999. Ms. Jirgl informed the Commission that a letter was written to Chairman Rackow giving reasons for the variations. It was confirmed that Charter undercollected for some of the period.**

The FCC fee also showed some variations. After the FCC pointed out that Charter had undercharged for some time, Charter is now making up for the undercharge.

The sales tax shown in the cable bills also varied. The cable bill showed \$1.89 for the months of January through May 1999, \$2.00 for the months of June through October, and \$1.55 for November and December.

**Jim Ebenhoe, Manager, Franchise Government Relations, Charter Communications, stated that between Charter's district information service regional corporate information services people, these matters will be taken care of soon.**

Commissioner Colantonio asked what response could be given to people who might have questions on the variations in their cable bills?

Mr. Ebenhoe suggested that customers who have questions on the variations should be advised that Charter is currently experiencing billing and programming problems and they are working to have the problems taken care of.

Commissioner Colantonio said he is concerned that if there are billing and programming problems and the bills are too low and the cable company recoups the shortage at a later date, then the rates will show some sort of increase.

Ms. Jirgl said the error occurred as a result of the change from a flat fee to the percentage. Charter is resolving this and the good news according to Ms. Jirgl is that the customers are not being overbilled and the franchise commitment is being met.

Mayor Wescott asked when the billing discrepancy was first discussed?

Ms. Jirgl said it was brought to her attention sometime in August 1999.

Chairman Rackow and Alderman Phillips voiced their concerns that Charter is undercollecting sales tax and is in procedural violation with the **Department of Revenue. Alderman Phillips suggested unplugging the cable company's computer and start all over again.**

**Ms. Jirgl said the district office has nothing to do with this. This is beyond the district's level. It is a corporate billing system out of Dallas.**

Doug Duba, business manager, Charter Communications out of the Wausau office and a few other people are working on the variations in the cable bills. Mr. Duba has done an analysis and could explain the variations better, but due to a family emergency in Iowa, Mr. Duba is unable to attend the meeting tonight.

**Commissioner Colantonio, on behalf of the commission, questioned the cable company's ability to effectively monitor the process. He asked if the cable representatives convey to the organization the need to maintain accountability in the billing process.**

**Chairman Rackow said when the analysis is completed, there will be adjustments and there will be cries all over again. The City Clerk's office unnecessarily be bombarded with calls about it.**

Charter Communications closes their fiscal year in December.

b. Details and potential dates for the rollout of new services in our community, such as digital services and cable modem services.

Ms. Jirgl said the digital services and cable modem services, which are optional services, are expected to be rolled out in January 2000. They are currently in the testing phase.

Digital services include cable programming, digital music services but not HDTV. The time frame for HDTV is 2002 according to Ms. Jirgl.

The digital programming package will offer 125 more channels, 20 additional music choices and other enhancements.

Ms. Jirgl would like to bring an expert in providing Internet Service to the next meeting. He would need about 45 minutes for the presentation.

c. Identify where new services are currently provided by Charter throughout the nation.

Commissioner Colantonio asked if the cable company is planning to deploy services other than digital services and cable modem services?

Ted Bauman, Technical Operations Manager, Charter Communications, Wausau Office, said video in demand is not in the 2000 budget but the equipment is compatible.

d. Complaint letters.

**Three complaint letters were received by the City Clerk's office for the period August 1999 to November 1999. Of the three complaints, two complaints have been resolved in a very timely manner and one will be resolved shortly.**

3. Subcommittee reports:

- a. Needs Assessment - on standby.
- b. Ordinance Revision - presently working on the revision.
- c. Regional Commission - not active at this time.
- d. Drafting Franchise Agreement - on standby.
- e. Strategy - did work on the Regulatory Ordinance revision.

4. Date, time, and location of next meeting.

No action was taken on this agenda item.

5. Adjourn into closed session at approximately 6:30 P.M. pursuant to Wisconsin Statutes 19.85(1)(e) to discuss telecommunications franchise negotiations.

Commissioner Patton moved, Alderman Phillips seconded, to adjourn into closed session.

Roll Call: Ayes: Chairman Rackow, Alderman Phillips, Commissioners Colantonio, Curtis, Patton, Pinter, Wyhuske.  
Nays: None. Motion carried.

6. Reconvene into open session (approximately one and one-half hours) for possible action on refranchising matters.

Alderman Phillips moved, Commissioner Bartosz seconded, to reconvene into open session.

Roll Call: Ayes: Chairman Rackow, Alderman Phillips, Commissioners Colantonio, Curtis, Patton, Pinter, Wyhuske.  
Nays: None. Motion carried.

7. Adjournment - 8:45 P.M.

The meeting minutes reproduced on this website are derived from the computer files used to produce the official minutes for the City of Stevens Point, but are unofficial. The minutes on this web site cannot be certified under s. 889.08, Wis. Stats., and cannot be considered prima facie evidence under s. 889.04, Wis. Stats. Certain tables, maps, and other documents that are a part of the official minutes are not included in the files reproduced on this website. Please consult the printed minutes, available in the City Clerk's Office, for the official text. The decisions made by City of Stevens Point boards, committees, and commissions (other than the Police & Fire Commission) are advisory only and are not binding on the City until affirmed at a meeting of the Common Council. Some of the minutes on this web site might not be approved by the Common Council as of today.