

## **SUMMARY MINUTES**

### **CITY/COUNTY TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION Wednesday, March 1, 2023**

VANCOUVER CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS  
415 W 6<sup>th</sup> Street, Vancouver, Washington

### **APPROVED AGENDA**

#### **I. CALL TO ORDER – 3:30 p.m.**

##### **A. Roll Call**

**PRESENT: Dicker, Green, Hinds, Rogers**

**EXCUSED: Hale, Shephard**

**ABSENT: None**

**STAFF PRESENT: Demmon, Archer**

##### **B. Approval of Minutes for December 7, 2022**

**Minutes approved as submitted.**

##### **C. Review and Approval of Agenda for March 1, 2023**

**No changes. Demmon introduced Stephen Archer from the Clark County Prosecuting Attorney's office providing legal support for the meeting.**

#### **II. CITIZEN COMMUNICATIONS**

No communications taken.

#### **III. OLD BUSINESS**

##### **A. Cable Franchise Renewal Update**

Demmon provided an update on the cable franchise negotiations with Comcast. He stated that negotiations have been progressing but at a slow pace. He said that a second negotiation session has been added each month to help move the negotiations along.

Demmon stated that due to the slow negotiation progress, it is unlikely that negotiations will be completed in time to get the franchises approved by the July 1 deadline. He said that it is very possible that the existing cable franchises will have to be extended another six months to finish franchise negotiations. He added that this is not uncommon to extend the current franchises, it happened when the current franchises were negotiated in 2012. He said that staff will probably bring this to the Commission for their recommendation at the June meeting but requested that Commissioners keep their calendars open just in case there needs to be a meeting before then.

#### **IV. NEW BUSINESS**

##### **A. Comcast Performance Review 2021-2022**

###### **1. Staff/Commission Comments**

Demmon stated that per the cable franchise agreement with Comcast their performance is to be reviewed bi-annually. He reminded the Commission of the importance of documenting Comcast's performance for use in determining franchise extensions and renewals.

He stated that staff sent a letter on January 18 to request information for the review and Comcast's response was received on February 22, both of which were included in the Commission's packets.

Demmon stated that notice for the performance review and public comment was sent in a press release and added to the City's and County's social media platforms.

###### **2. Comcast Comments**

Samantha Ridderbusch, Comcast Director, Government & Regulatory Affairs, provided an overview of their report. She stated that Comcast has reviewed the public comments that have been received as of this date and will follow up with those customer's that need a resolution to an issue. She said that

**Comcast takes customer service very seriously and are always looking for ways to improve that experience.**

**Ridderbusch provided information on how customers can interact with Comcast. She stated that Comcast has three retail locations in Clark County that customers can come in and have their questions answered. She also said that there are resources on Comcast's website that customers can sign up to receive storm and outage notifications.**

**Ridderbusch stated Comcast has invested nearly one million dollars in Washington state to advance digital diversity, equity, and inclusion. Comcast is working with non-profit partners, including Boys & Girls Clubs, Goodwill, Urban League, and YWCA, in the state to provide program and event contributions, foundation grants, free internet connectivity, employee volunteerism and giving campaigns, broadcast services, courtesy services, technology, and equipment. She added that Comcast continues to provide their Internet Essentials program to assist lower income households to obtain internet services.**

3. Additional Items for Consideration

**None.**

4. Public Testimony

**Dicker opened the public comment. He stated that as of this date, staff has received about 12 written comments.**

**Dr. Patricia Mayes – Mayes discussed the issues she's experienced with Comcast customer service. She explained that she received her latest bill, and it was \$273. She said that she called customer service to find out if Comcast offered a senior package or discount. She was told that they do not offer a senior discount and that her services were going up to \$308 starting in March. When she questioned the cost, she was told that she has high-definition television and a higher speed internet service, but the customer service rep stated that she could lower the cost a bit.**

**Mayes stated that the customer service rep spoke in broken English and was very hard to understand. She was on the phone with the representative for over an hour trying to get her to understand that she didn't want to change any of her services except to lower her internet speed to reduce the cost. The**

representative assured her that only the internet speed was reduced. Mayes said she later discovered that she had lost her streaming services. She has been to the local Comcast store and has spoken to other customer service representatives on the phone, both of which were hard to understand, trying to get the issue resolved.

Mayes complained about Comcast's high rates, including the high cost of the broadcast and regional sports fees. She feels that there should be a provision in the franchise that Comcast offer a discount to senior citizens. She feels that Comcast has a monopoly and other providers should be allowed to offer services in Vancouver.

Mayes also complained that Comcast's internet service was not reliable; she had to get a hot spot from Verizon to connect her tablet.

Dicker thanked Mayes for providing her comments and understood her frustration. He explained that the Commission only has regulatory control over Comcast's cable television service, not any other services Comcast provides. He also explained that Comcast does not have an exclusive franchise; another provider can apply for a franchise. He said that there was another cable television provider in Vancouver/Clark County, but they did not renew their franchise as the market did not support their investment.

Green asked where customers can go to make complaints about the Comcast services that are not regulated by the Commission.

Demmon responded that the Washington State Utilities and Transportation Commission regulate Comcast's telephone service and the FCC regulates their internet service. He said that the City/County Cable Office is available to intervene to help resolve issues with Comcast that customers are unable resolve themselves. He added that, unfortunately, the City and County are unable to regulate Comcast's cable television rates or the associated fees due to FCC rulings.

Hayes asked why Comcast doesn't have customer service representatives in the area.

Dicker responded that it is a business decision on Comcast's part on where their customer service centers are located, and the Commission has no regulatory control.

**Rogers encouraged customers experiencing issues with Comcast to contact the City/County Cable Office. She said staff has personally helped her resolve a couple of issues before she became a Commission member.**

**Demmon added that Comcast is working with Clark County to build out broadband services to rural areas in Clark County. He said that the COVID-19 pandemic brought the issue of underserved areas to light.**

**Dicker wanted to clarify that Comcast charges customers the Broadcast and Regional Sports fees to recoup their programming costs. He said that Comcast pays the broadcast channels and sports channels fees to air their programming, and they are allowed by the FCC to recoup those costs from their subscribers.**

**Demmon stated that staff has received about 12 written comments and is following up with the customer if there are issues that need to be resolved. The comments received include needing more competition to high cable rates.**

**Green commented that the Commission has heard from many Comcast customers that they have had difficulty resolving their issues with Comcast despite the fact that there are three store locations in Clark County. He wondered if this issue is being addressed during the cable franchise negotiations.**

**Hinds stated that he expects that during the cable franchise negotiations there will be a number of Comcast customers bringing similar complaints.**

**Dicker encouraged Comcast customers to contact the City/County Cable office with their comments about their cable television service.**

**Rogers asked for clarification that the customer service standards in the being negotiated are more comprehensive than the current franchise.**

**Demmon responded that was correct; he current franchise only relies on FCC customer standards.**

**Dicker added that Comcast has improved their customer service over the past few years and is continuing to make improvements.**

5. Commission and Comcast Discussion

**No further discussion.**

6. Direct to Staff as Appropriate

**Demon stated that he will prepare a draft report incorporating Comcast report information, comments received during the review period and complaints received during the past two years. He requested that the Commission send any other information they would like to see incorporated in the report to staff. He said that the report will then be sent to Comcast review and then to Commission. The final report will come before the Commission at during the June meeting.**

**Rogers said that Ridderbusch mentioned that Comcast has put money into digital equity projects and wondered if that included adding a senior discount.**

**Ridderbusch replied that the Internet Essentials program is available for seniors, but they must be lower income. She said that she wasn't sure about any discounts on the cable services.**

B. Franchise Update

1. PEG Access

a. TV ETC Update

**Xander Hayes, TV ETC Coordinator, informed the Commission that the bid grant for TV ETC's PEG grants has been opened. The broadcaster and conversion project at McKennzie stadium will begin this month.**

**Hayes said that he is working with his TV ETC colleges and ESD 112 IT department on expanding student live video production opportunities at the district levels and then down to the school level. He said that this moves the live productions to the school level, instead of fixed set of students producing all live the content for the district. He added that Columbia River High School has been doing this very successfully for several years. He said that this will get more students involved and more live programming produced.**

Hayes stated that Evergreen and Vancouver Public Schools hosted fentanyl awareness forums with the Clark County Sheriff's office and Vancouver Police department which were aired on the channels.

b. Clark/Vancouver Television Update

Demmon provided an update on CTVV activities. He said that the mobile upgrade PEG Grant project is being finalized and staff will start ordering equipment for the City Hall and Public Service Center switcher replacement later in the spring.

Demmon informed the Commission that there will be possible upgrades to the Council Chambers later this year that will impact where the Commission will hold their meetings. He said that staff will keep the Commission informed.

**V. COMMUNICATIONS**

A. Comcast

**None.**

B. Commission

**None.**

C. Staff

Demmon reminded the Commission that election of officers will take place at the June meeting.

**VI. NEXT MEETING DATE: Wednesday, June 7, 2023 (a meeting was subsequently added for April 19, 2023)**

**VII. ADJOURNMENT – 4:30 p.m.**

*AN AUDIO RECORDING OF THIS MEETING IS ON FILE IN THE CITY CLERK'S OFFICE; A VIDEO RECORDING OF THIS MEETING IS ON FILE IN THE CITY/COUNTY CABLE TELEVISION OFFICE.*

**Telecommunications Commission**

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**Attachments:**

1. Letter dated January 18, 2023, to Comcast requesting information for Biennial Review
2. Comcast review comments received as of March 2, 2023

Approved \_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Paul Dicker, Chair  
City/County Telecommunications Commission