

## Cable T.V. Committee

### March 23, 2026 Meeting Minutes

1. Call to Order: 4:30

Present: Richard, Jim, Pat, Lou, Kathy, Jill, John, Danica

Guest: Jerry Gerlach, IT Director

4. Approval of Minutes

*a. March 6, 2026 Meeting Minutes*

Motion by Pat, seconded by Jim to approve the minutes. Vote: unanimous.

5. Discussion

*a. Interim Plan Update*

Jerry Gerlach, IT Director, shared information about the Castus software and the status of the two channels. Both channels go out from a box located in City Hall. Any approved user can upload video files (MP4, MPG, etc) and schedule content from the Castus website from any location as long as they have an internet connection. There is a firmware update that Castus will be running overnight to fix the issue that is causing a loss of audio on the channel. In the interim between the Public Access Director's retirement and the hiring of a new director, we can load existing content onto Channel 3 and 85 so the channel is not dark.

Jill mentioned that if people are going to submit programming, they should fill out a playback form. Richard shared that historically the producer has been responsible for the programming and the City accepts no responsibility. Jill said that a form could formalize this agreement. Jim suggested an online form.

Danica is meeting with the City's CivicPlus account representative on Tuesday and will ask what the cost would be to stream the Public Access channel on the website. She can get a quote for one or both channels.

Richard shared the history of why we have Channel 85 as one of the channel numbers. Typically the numbers were 2, 3, and 4 for three channels but companies try to push them up to higher numbers. He also explained that one of the channels was given back by a previous decision of the City Council.

Jill asked if the Committee has typically received a monthly report about cable subscribers. This has not typically been the case.

Richard explained the acquisition of the Public Access building and West Brook Skating rink, which was done with Special Revenue funds. This building is fully paid for with no mortgage.

*b. Review Franchise Agreement & PEG Access Ordinance*

This information was provided to the Committee in their agenda packet for informational purposes.

*c. Recommendation to City Council for Public Access (Future Plans, Job Description)*

Danica shared that the City Manager asked for the Committee to bring forward a recommendation to the City Council about the future of Public Access for consideration at their April 7 meeting. The recommendation should address whether the Committee believes that we should move forward with a model that includes producer-generated content or if the focus should strictly be on government meetings and actions. If the recommendation is to continue producer-generated content, it should include a plan of steps that can be taken to revitalize the existing program.

Jim suggested that we put the recommendation forward by outlining options and sharing which option we recommend. He does not think we should put in significant effort on a detailed plan until we have direction. He outlined that the options are: abandon the channel altogether and continue to let the funds go into the general fund, do the traditional PEG and set funds aside as per the ordinance, or just do governmental meetings.

Lou would like to see both channels continue to be programmed and suggested that we can add more ways of getting programming out over time, such as streaming on the city website, YouTube, etc.

Pat asked about what happened to the other originating sites and if they were still required per the contract given its expiration date. Richard explained that the current contract is still in effect even though it is expired.

John asked who would speak and what we would say. Lou suggested that the Chair should speak. Richard agreed to speak.

John suggested that the Council might ask how many households in town have access to the Cable TV channel and how we expand that. Lou explained that it is hard to get an estimate of subscribers from the cable company. Richard explained that in the past, about 70% of households were cable subscribers.

**Motion by Lou, seconded by Jim, to move forward a recommendation on April 7 to continue the existing program and follow what is in the ordinance. Vote: unanimous.**

Jill walked through the details of the proposal she drafted, which outlines an idea for what the next several years of a Public Access program could look like.

Jim asked Pat what she thinks the Council would like to see from the Committee to support the request. Pat said that people have been vocally upset about the loss of print journalism in Biddeford and say that they want to know about things happening in the community that don't get traditional news coverage. She feels that Public Access could help meet this need and thinks it would be well supported by the Council to reestablish the two existing channels. She also mentioned that reestablishing alternative locations for broadcasting would be beneficial for the City given the growing need for meeting space.

Danica suggested that the Committee put together a list of bullet points to present to the Council about what the goals are to improve the program and what the needs are to achieve them. The Committee supported the following ideas:

- Restore the Special Revenue Fund for Public Access to support ongoing operation of the studio and program.
- Clean up the building to make space inviting and more productive for different types of programming to be filmed (videos, podcasts, etc).
- Recruit a new Public Access Director who would recruit volunteers and work with local organizations to increase programming.
- Sustain a model where producers have an opportunity to film and edit their own programming. To do this, there would need to be investment in computers and video editing software for them to use, as well as upgraded cameras to support higher-quality programming.
- Share content in new formats (such as YouTube and social media) to expand reach.

- Stream to City website again by using franchise fees to buy a module through CivicPlus to support online streaming.

Jim explained the difference between the General Fund and a Special Revenue fund. While the City's ordinances say that "Any franchise fee paid to the City of Biddeford pursuant to any agreement with a cable TV franchise shall be dedicated to the operation and facilities of PEG access", they are currently deposited into the General Fund.

Pat pointed out the amount of funding that we are bringing in through the franchise fee has dropped significantly over the past several years as the number of cable subscribers decrease. She suggested that we have to be careful about how we move forward with budgeting for the program given decreasing revenues. Jill suggested finding other ways to bring in money on a regular basis, such as a membership program.

The Committee discussed attendance at the Council meeting on April 7. While Richard will speak as the Chair, Committee members were encouraged to attend to support the proposal. Jill would like to assemble a list of people who are supportive of Public Access to come and speak in favor during the public comment period related to the item. Danica suggested that longtime Committee members could reach out to their personal contacts and encourage them to attend.

Jim asked if there will be an order or resolution associated with this request. Danica shared that she requested guidance about how the information should be presented, and the City Manager said she will be talking to the Mayor and will pass along clearer direction.

#### 6. Other Business

The Committee set the next meeting for Tuesday, April 14 from 4 PM – 5:30 PM and planned a regular meeting time of the **first and third Monday of the month**.

#### 7. Adjourn

Motion by Kathy, seconded by Pat, to adjourn. Vote: unanimous. Meeting adjourned at 6:35 PM.