

## Shelburne and Buckland Cable Advisory Committee Meeting 5/31/06

This was the first public hearing of the “ascertainment” phase of the renewal process for the CATV contracts for the towns of Shelburne and Buckland.

Each participant introduced themselves and expressed their initial areas of concern. Most participants expressed general satisfaction with the service that Comcast has provided under the current contracts.

Joe Judd (Shelburne Selectman) – served as the meeting chair. The Selectboards of Shelburne and Buckland are the official contracting authority, but rely on the efforts of the appointed Cable Advisory Board in the contract renewal process.

Stephen Fitzgibbons (Comcast Manager of Government and Community Relations) – represented Comcast. He pointed out that this meeting was mandated as a public hearing, and not as a question and answer session, but that he would be willing to respond to questions after the public hearing was closed.

Maureen Pike (Shelburne Committee Chair) – expressed interest in line extensions, with special emphasis on Internet access.

Hugh Knox (Shelburne resident) – also wants expanded coverage, pointing out that cable is a factor in home values, and that some people might not choose to move to Shelburne for lack of cable. He also expressed concern on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Community Center that they are currently being overcharged for their public access drop point service.

Mike Duffy (Shelburne resident) – stated that his primary interest is in broadband Internet access, and feels that a short or long-term objective should be to provide universal access to residents of both towns, in the same spirit as the rural electrification projects of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. He also mentioned the Hilltown Broadband group in East Shelburne, and said that they were waiting for a response from Comcast on a proposal for line extensions in their area. Mr. Fitzgibbons asked for a copy of their request (which was forwarded to him by email on June 1).

Dr. Mark Purinton (Buckland resident and chair?) – has a strong interest in the public access component. He oversees the television studio at Mohawk Regional High school, and the broadcasting of governmental meetings in Buckland and Shelburne. He would like to see expansion of the network as well, especially to potential public access points such as the Grange Hall in Shelburne center. He presented a map of specific roads that he has surveyed and feels are suitable for line extensions. He also has prepared a survey that he wants to distribute to residents to ascertain their interest in cable service. He also raised questions about the allocations of the franchise fee that Comcast pays under the current contract, but this was not addressed further.

Dan Fields (Buckland? resident) – brought up a need for lower cost broadband offerings, for example, possible lower bandwidth options for interested customers.

Dr. Purinton and Dan Fields brought up some technical issues regarding “insertion points” and suggest consideration of alternative connection options such as I/P access. Dr. Purinton also requested a map of the current coverage area, and asked Mr. Fitzgibbons if he could accompany the Comcast staff person on his survey of potential line extensions. Mr. Fitzgibbons said that he would provide the coverage map, but he was not agreeable to sending others with their surveying staff.

Dr. Purinton mentioned that the Town of Conway had mandated universal coverage in their most recent contract. This raised some discussion of issues such as home density per mile, which are negotiable in the renewal process.

Mike Duffy asked whether the current contract was available for review, and Mr. Fitzgibbons said that contracts for all communities in the state are available from the Mass. Dept. of Telecommunications and Energy, and Maureen Pike said that she has a copy as well.

Rob Rikken (Shelburne? resident) – arrived late and reiterated the Community Center’s cost concerns.

In the post-hearing session, Mr. Fitzgibbons expressed an understanding of the strong desire for expanded cable coverage, and assured everyone that Comcast wants to provide service to as many customers as possible, as long as makes economic sense for them. He also mentioned that he had received inquiries from residents of Colrain, but couldn’t respond to them, since Comcast has no contract in that area. The question was raised about the possibility of providing coverage to portions of Colrain in close proximity to existing lines in Shelburne. He said that have been occasions where coverage was provided to partial areas in a community, but that there were often difficulties in setting up these agreements.