



Members

Derek Dobosz, Chair
William Courchesne, Vice Chair
Joel McAuliffe
Robert Zygarowski

APPROVED 5-5-2021

**MINUTES
February 18, 2021**

The following are the minutes of a public hearing held Thursday, February 18, 2021 at 6:30 PM in the City Council Chambers, Fourth Floor, City Hall Annex, 274 Front Street, Chicopee, MA 01013

Members Present Dobosz, McAuliffe (Conference call), Zygarowski, Courchesne

Members Absent

Also Present Dan Garvey (Associate City Solicitor), Councilor Laflamme, Councilor Tillotson, Councilor Balakier, Councilor Labrie (Zoom), Andrew Vernon (IT Chief Information Officer)

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM

In compliance with the Open Meeting Law the Chairman asked if anyone in the audience was recording the meeting. Seeing none the meeting continued.

Councilor McAuliffe stated he is taping and live streaming this meeting.

ITEM #1

BE IT ORDERED THAT the Utilities Subcommittee meet to discuss Charter.

Councilor Dobosz stated that he has received a lot of phone calls regarding Charter. He stated that the Mayor suggests that we come up with a goal to see what we want to accomplish, what we feel the problems are and to work with the Mayor's office on improving this situation.

Councilor McAuliffe stated that Charter Spectrum has been operating the City of Chicopee for a number of decades; it's both the television and internet service provider.

He stated that they have a virtual monopoly over our residents which in turn they reward them with frequent outages, poor customer service and the raising frequently of prices. Last year in the middle of the pandemic they seek to approve from the FCC to put data caps on their internet customers who were forced to work from home and participate in remote learning.

Councilor McAuliffe stated this hearing will serve as step one in a fact finding mission for the City Council to hold Charter Spectrum accountable while encouraging the Mayor to use the regulatory authority granted to him by section 10.2 in the city 2016 cable contract called Charter Spectrum for the Council for a performance evaluation hearing.

Public Input

Jason Surprise 10 Sampson Street stated that when there are outages and he calls Charter, the automatic response does not address the issue that he has. He stated that Charter requires every television that receives cable to receive a box. He stated that he has two and it costs fourteen dollars every month and he is already spending a separate fee on cable.

Jean Kirchner 11 Arlmont Street stated that Charter Spectrum has an app that you can't use on many of your platforms. She stated that it's almost like a monopoly on these digital boxes. She stated that she can get the app on her iPad but not on her television set. We don't need the digital boxes they just need to make that app available.

Lori Milner, lived at 72 York Town Court, Chicopee but has since moved out of state because the issue she had with Charter is related to that. She stated that she turned her equipment in and still received bills for them. She emailed them her receipt and thought it was cleared up but they turned her over to a collection agency and she thinks that's and outrage.

Debbie Guardino, 220 Wildmere Street, stated that her major issue is with the internet. She stated over the weekend she had to reset her modem four times. She stated that she pays eighty dollars a month for internet and Wi-Fi. She stated that her husband had to buy an antenna to watch a race on Sunday. She stated that she works from home doing training and meetings on zoom and she gets unstable connection throughout the whole time. She stated that she does not think she's getting what she's paying for. She stated that she is waiting very patiently for Fiber Crossroads and she plans on switching. She stated that Charter is doing nothing to keep me as a customer.

Council McAuliffe stated that he was on the cable television advisory committee going through the renegotiation process of the cable contract. He stated dealing with the number of complaints such as programing, pricing, and customer service he is seeing more people cut the cord from Charter. He stated that thankfully we have seen the development of Crossroads Fiber throughout the city and where it is available the take rate is significant. He stated that we will continue to listen to the residents and relay the

concerns to the Mayor and to Charter. He stated that he would like to see Charter called in for a review where the questions and issues of the public can be answered. He hopes the Council will advocate to the Mayor to quickly develop Crossroads Fiber across the city and to continue to make sure that service gets offered in more places.

Public Input

Jeff Quarter, 53 Shalay Street stated that he is a technology enthusiast and he also works for the University of Massachusetts as a Senior System administrator, so dealing with technology is my everyday thing. He stated that dealing with Charters tech support constantly has become a quarterly deal especially with Covid 19 in that their service has been rendered. He stated that he is paying the max for internet so he could have a stable connection as well as my children in the house and Charter has been failing with that. He stated he had fifteen service calls with fourteen individuals that showed up as well as the Technical Supervisor to come to my house to fix the issue. They ran three different lines from his home he stated that this has become almost a yearly deal for him. He would like to see if the Council would work on a better resolution to accelerate the development of Crossroad Fiber.

Jess Dawson, 104 Johnson Road stated that she doesn't have much to say positive about the Charter internet experience. She works from home due to the pandemic and her son does school at home as well. She stated that she has had multiple issues with the two of them being there with the internet as well as the cable. She stated that her neighborhood has Elementary school, Job Corp and Charter School. She stated that they aren't anywhere near getting the Crossroad Fiber, she was told maybe next year. She stated that it's hard to believe with having city schools on the street. She stated that being mostly residential here it will be harder to get the votes in.

Councilor Courchesne stated that he would not provide Charter with any information prior to the next meeting. He stated that when they appear before the public and City Council I want a spontaneous answer. He stated that he doesn't want a prepared statement from Charter. He stated that he has issues with Charter. He had to keep restarting his modem and had to go out and buy a new one.

Councilor Tillotson stated that technology is changing so quickly that the contract becomes obsolete. He stated that there may be a need to amend the contract and bring it up to date.

Councilor Balakier stated that this is a starting point to get some ideas. He stated that the citizens seem to have common issues. He thinks it's a good idea to go back to the Mayor, look at these comments and take a look at the contract.

Councilor Zygarowski stated that customer service is always a problem. He stated he gets complaints from people, why they have to pay for these boxes. He stated that he can't see paying for these boxes. He stated that he would like to see a senior discount for cable. He stated that a lot of seniors are not involved in some of this technical stuff.

Our city has been built on our seniors and helping our seniors. He stated that the Mayor is the sole authority for negotiating the contract.

Councilor Dobosz stated that our current contract for Charter was signed in 2015 and will be up in 2025.

Councilor Zygarowski stated that Charter makes a lot of money having the contract with the City of Chicopee. He stated that we have to make it a lot easier and affordable for residents.

Councilor McAuliffe stated that they do have a senior discount it is five percent on the basic tier but if you have a tier that's higher you do not qualify. He stated that there are a number of residents who do have basic cable and are not able to take advantage of it because it is not advertised and no one tells them about it. He stated that you can't expect Charter to stand up after all these years and do the right thing. We want them to address the problems that people have now. He stated that this Council and City Government have done the right thing and developed an alternative that other communities don't have.

Andrew Vernon stated that the city internet is provided by Crossroads Fiber business. He stated that Charter provides service to a number of offices and buildings as well as schools throughout the city as part of that Charter contract. He stated that due to the events of the pandemic the telecom department by way of DESI has been asked to support the families throughout communities with internet service and basic network connectivity as of late June 2020. He stated that services could be made better to those families in Chicopee who have Charter services. He stated that the packages with Charter may not always be sufficient for home internet use as it relates to remote learning. He stated that there are so many cases where the services with Charter Spectrum could be made better.

Councilor McAuliffe stated that if a child's parents are in a low income neighborhood and they've had past problems with Charter and their bills had arrears at some point, they would not offer those free services to those families that they say they are offering to the public. He stated that the school department has had to pick up the tab by offering those Wi-Fi hotspots which is significantly slower. He stated that we did see the need for change and Crossroads Fiber is a huge key to the puzzle here and it's something other communities don't have. I hear people asking when can we get this service. He stated that he hopes the city makes it more of a priority and we need to double down on our commitment to make sure more people have access to Crossroads Fiber.

Andrew Vernon stated that what Councilor McAuliffe stated about the backdated bills with Charter Spectrum is accurate.

Councilor Labrie stated that he has received calls the payment drop box has been removed.

1. Authorize to send Chairman Dobosz to bring the following issues to the Mayor:
 - A. Customer service
 - B. Drop box
 - C. Equipment and related expenses
 - D. Outages
 - E. Discounts for students/seniors
 - F. Advertise those discounts
 - G. Flexibility with those affected by Covid-19 pandemic
 - H. Data caps
2. Send letter to Mayor requesting a Charter performance review hearing in front of Special City Council meeting.

Councilor McAuliffe motion to approve - Councilor Dobosz 2nd the motion - motion passed

Committee vote 4 - 0 favorable

ITEM #2

Councilor Zygarowski motion to approve the minutes of July 30, 2020 - Councilor Dobosz 2nd the motion - motion passed

Meeting adjourned 7:30 PM