

City of Lincoln
Telecommunications/Cable Television Advisory Board
Meeting Minutes – April 29, 2021

Members Present: Ed Hoffman, Jim Johnson, Steve Kiene, Laurie Thomas Lee, Helen Meeks, Sandra Washington, Art Zygielbaum

Members Absent: Kate Engel, Rebecca Henderson, John Neal

City Staff: Diane Gonzolas, Tim Seih, Jamie Wenz

Charter/Spectrum: Jeremiah Blake

ALLO/NelNet: Doc Wininger

Others Present: Demet Batur (appointed to replace John Neal; not yet confirmed by City Council)

Call to Order/Introduction

The meeting was called to order at 4:03 pm by chair Art Zygielbaum. Zygielbaum made note of the copy of the Open Meetings Act at the back of the room. Board members and guests introduced themselves.

Agenda

In addition to the previously distributed agenda, Gonzolas suggested that the board may want to consider a resolution honoring Steve Huggenberger, recently retired from the City Attorney's office. Sandra Washington moved a resolution of the board honoring Huggenberger; Laurie Thomas Lee moved; motion passed 7-0.

Agenda was approved with that addition.

Minutes

Minutes of the February 27, 2020 meeting were read. Hoffman moved approval; Meeks seconded; motion passed 7-0.

Election of Officers

The board's first meeting each year is the annual meeting, at which the board elects officers for the coming year.

Nominations were opened for Secretary. Jim Johnson was nominated, no other nominations. Vote was 7-0 in favor.

Nominations were opened Vice President. Ed Hoffman was nominated, no other nominations. Vote was 6-0 in favor; Hoffman abstaining.

Nominations were opened for President. Art Zygielbaum was nominated, no other nominations. Vote was 7-0 in favor.

Update on FCC in-kind ruling

Tim Seih from the City Attorney's office gave an update. The ruling started in 9th circuit; transferred to 10th circuit; briefs submitted in October 2020; the FCC voted to hold in abeyance and removed from courts. FCC heard arguments two weeks ago; we are waiting to hear more.

Meeks asked if the city submitted an amicus. Sieh said we did not, but we are a party to the case.

Gonzolas said that the City is committed to continue service, regardless of what happens with the ruling.

Performance Evaluation Follow-up

Zygielbaum asked for an update.

Gonzolas said that this has kind of been put on hold for a while due to the pandemic, but she will try to get it moving again.

Washington asked for a synopsis of the performance evaluation. Zygielbaum summarized the main points.

Zygielbaum would like to see us move towards a franchise of all types of broadcasting, not just cable.

Hoffman asked if there is a difference between the franchise fees and the use of the conduit? Sieh says that there is a difference.

Charter/Spectrum Report

Jeremiah Blake reported. While many industries had to shut down during the pandemic, theirs is more important than ever. Spectrum has done a number of initiatives for people who work at home. They gave 60 days of free connectivity for people with children in the home; they worked with the school district to provide a bulk connection product to people who need it (Spectrum Internet Assist); they have been aggressive at the federal level to use grants to connect. When the pandemic set in, Spectrum gave all employees a \$1.50 / hour pay raise; they also raised their minimum wage to \$20 / hour.

They have closed down the retail store in their old office at 16th and Old Cheney, and opened two new offices in Lincoln.

Zygielbaum says that there were complaints about a light tower; not dimming at night.

Meeks commented that one of the things that people had requested was to consider channel changes. Blake said that he has no new information.

Hoffman asked about the studio use. Blake said they are currently not letting people in to use it, due to pandemic restrictions.

Allo Report

Doc Winger reported for Allo. It has been a really busy time for them. The company is experiencing organic growth; they gain about "an Ogallala a year." Allo gave 60 Days free service for people that were impacted by Covid. They have an emergency program coming online; there are a number of ways that people can qualify; if you qualify then you're eligible for \$50 a month broadband support. In Lincoln 500 MB service is \$75; Allo is letting qualifying people have that for free. The program will start May 12. Zygielbaum asked how Allow is going to publicize this service; Winger said that they would get the word out in lots of different ways. Allo is working with various nonprofits such as the Food Bank, etc., to publicize it. Allo thinks that there will be supplemental funding when the EBB (Emergency Broadband)

funds run out. Zygielbaum asked if this requires users to sign contracts to stay with Allo afterwards; Winger said no. Washington asked if the program would continue in the event that the HHS secretary says that the emergency is over if there was still funding; Winger said that the program will end when either money runs out or the HHS secretary says that the emergency is over, but that there will be a 60 day transition. He thinks that the FCC might extend it until money runs out.

Winger said that there are 650 employees at Allo, of which about 400 are in Lincoln. Most are currently working from home. The first phase of returning to work will start next week. The location of their current building was pretty crowded anyway; it's good to have the ability to work from home.

Winger said that he has worked full time in telecommunications policy since the 1980s; that's a subject that he enjoys.

Hoffman asked for confirmation that with regard to the 81 nonprofits, they're without charge; Winger said that's correct.

Hoffman asked how the wi-fi free zones coming? Winger said that they have one in their building, and one in Iron Horse Park. Zygielbaum said that we need the city to look at that too.

Zygielbaum commented on a personal level that he is chair of the statewide Lied Performing Arts committee; and Allo has been instrumental in providing help.

Windstream/Kinetic Report

No report.

City Reports

Zygielbaum commented that Jamie Wenz and the City have been very helpful in his work with the Lied Center.

Gonzolas said that Wenz has been very helpful during the pandemic. It has been an interesting year. We are very fortunate to have a great City channel to keep people informed. Early on we were doing daily briefings, now doing once a week. Probably when the risk level goes green they will be less frequent but still helpful.

Wenz gave a verbal report; he will get us a written report later. He said that Beau Wolfe and Melissa Fuller have worked continually to figure out how to keep things going during the pandemic. Each board and commission wants to conduct their meetings in a different way. Daily and weekly briefings have either been fully Zoom or partially Zoom. When the public schools closed down, the City worked with them to get their K-5 curricula on the service. Different grades would be on at a certain time; there were rebroadcasts on TV or video for some Internet broadcasts.

Zygielbaum said that somebody needs to get the word out about how much work has been done.

Wenz said that one of the big things that has been done is close captioning for all of their programming.

Gonzolas said that the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing requested interpreters; that's been useful.

There is now a fiber link between the City facility and the Lied Center.

There was live coverage for the Investigator Herrera funeral.

The city has added Roku and Apple TV apps; there is live streaming of all programming on Roku and Apple TV.

The studio helped provide communication during civil unrest; programming on PPP loans; programming on mental health; Veterans Day & Memorial Day events online; Commission on Human Rights; LPD & LFD; many other events. Melissa has been producing a ton of health programs.

Gonzolas said that the live feeds have really been an aid to the media as well for the Mayor's news conferences.

Washington moved a resolution of thanks for all of the work done by Jamie, Beau, and Melissa; Hoffman seconded; motion passed unanimously.

Adjournment

Lee moved adjournment; Meeks seconded; motion passed 7-0. Meeting adjourned at 5:09 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Jim Johnson, secretary