

City of Lincoln
Telecommunications/Cable Television Advisory Board
Meeting Minutes – June 29, 2023

Members Present: Ed Hoffman, Jim Johnson, Steve Kiene, Laurie Thomas Lee, Bennie Shobe, Jamie Wenz

Members Absent: Demet Batur, Tim Klein, Helen Meeks

City Staff: Kelli Britten, Tim Sieh

ALLO: Andrew Vinton

Charter/Spectrum: Dayton Murty

Call to Order/Introduction

The meeting was called to order at 4:10 pm by chair Ed Hoffman. Hoffman made note of the copy of the Open Meetings Act at the back of the room. Board members and guests introduced themselves.

Review and Approval of Agenda

Shobe moved adoption of the agenda; Lee seconded; motion carried 6-0.

Minutes

Draft minutes of the December 28, 2022 meeting had been distributed prior to the meeting. Hoffman noted that a reference to board member Helen Meeks had misspelled her first name. Shobe moved approval as corrected; Lee seconded; motion carried 6-0.

Old Business

Hoffman requested that the following items be included as ongoing agenda items in the Old Business section for future meetings:

LNKTV Partnerships

Public Access on Allo

Funding of LNKTV

Tour of our Physical Facilities; both here and at Allo and Charter

Wenz said that he likes the idea of a tour; he would especially like to have an update on Public/Community Access.

New Business

Discussion of Board Member roles

Sieh led a discussion of board member roles.

In 2005 the ordinance was strictly a cable ordinance. That provided the board with authority to deal with cable rates, disputes between customers and franchisees; general policy related to cable services, public access. In 2015, the new ordinance expanded the scope to the Telecomm Advisory Board. The description of board duties were moved from 5.15 to 5.17 in the Lincoln Municipal Code. The board's current duties include:

- Consider unresolved complaints
- Consider Telecomm issues: Cable Issues, Universal Service Fund, and other technology-related items.
- At the request of the City Council or Mayor, the board may consider initiatives relating to technological items.

Sieh thinks the topic that Hoffman has raised about Free Wifi would be an appropriate role for the board. There are a host of other things that we could take up. However, the board has only advisory roles, we cannot actually create policy.

Wenz asked whether there are any topics that are being considered by the Mayor or the Council that we need to be aware of. He believes that we have been in cruise mode. Sieh said that he believes Wenz is correct. We may want to consider things like 5G. The County is putting in a fiber network outside of the City of Lincoln; we might want to consider what that would look like. There are certainly topics that could be taken up. Hoffman thinks we might want to have an ongoing agenda with all these topics. Wenz said we should think about what kind of focus we should have. Hoffman said that Public Access is an important area. Wenz said that there are similar discussions going on with things like AM radio.

Wenz said that regarding Public Access, it would be interesting to know how much use is out there, and how much need is there. Hoffman said that we should look at the continuing role of PEG channels.

Citywide Broadband

Hoffman asked Kiene if he could say anything with regard to 5G. Kiene said that the need has decreased, but he doesn't know what the status is across economic boundaries. It is available in the libraries and the City/County Building.

Hoffman said that part of the Allo franchise when we set it up contained discussions of free Wifi for nonprofits and wireless for low income folks. Iron Horse Park had free wifi at one time. Kiene said we could check with other cities to see what they have. Hoffman said he had checked with other cities with respect to Government Access. Wenz said he has checked with respect to the schools regarding their hot spots that they had during Covid. The schools had some statistics with respect to who has what access. He said that we could check with Mindy Burbach at LPS. Lee said that connectivity is needed in low-income areas. Britten asked if there are cell phone plans anymore that aren't unlimited data. Vinton said that most plans have unlimited data but they usually have a cap.

Free WiFi in Certain Areas

Hoffman said that he would like the board to look into the status of free WiFi in Certain Areas; he would like to see it happen. Kiene asked who would use it. Hoffman said that in some cases connectivity would be better. Sieh said that for this issue it would probably be advisable to create a subcommittee that meets with that as a focus.

Allo Report

Vinton reported for Allo. He is their in-house attorney.

Allo has been active. Largest customer is the State of Nebraska; they also provide service to the City County Bldg. They are trying to reach out into the harder to serve areas, including Hallam, Kramer, Branched Oak Observatory (which had to turn down a NASA contract due to connectivity issues), and the western end of Seward County.

Lincoln is in the top tier of connectivity; they hope to be able to say that about Lancaster County soon.

ZooFest is July 6-8. Allo is a sponsor; there will be public WiFi there.

There are concerts outside the Mill on Wednesdays.

They have worked on citywide WiFi with their electronic partner Kali.

They have a service called ConnectEd: If you have connectivity at UNL then you automatically have it at UNK too. They are trying to set up that kind of connectivity with LPS.

They have a service called SmartTown: Allo customers who are within line of sight of an Allo router can be connected. They believe that in places like Lincoln or Scottsbluff this will help connectivity. Hoffman asked if there is the ability for non-Allo customers to have connectivity to these services. Vinton said yes; they did that at the Innovation Campus concerts. If people scanned the QR code then they had connectivity for the duration of the event. He would be glad to talk to the city more about it.

Hoffman asked what the status of Public access on Allo is. Vinton said that they would love to have those conversations with Spectrum to get those channels. Hoffman asked if there is a question of access. Vinton said he thinks that it's a question that would need to be asked. Sieh said that this is probably something that would need to be discussed at a future meeting. Wenz said that when he was in a role with the City, Windstream had an encoder in the rack downstairs, which received the stream from Time Warner, and that was put out on Windstream. The engineering groups back then were able to work out some kind of solution. Sieh said that we would be glad to have the City be the "middle person" in that discussion.

Vinton said that Allo has an Affordable Connectivity program: a provider can put a \$30 discount on low income households (ACP recipients). That program will expire either Q1 or Q2 of 2024; they are trying to work with Congress to keep it going. Lee asked about the program that the Biden administration was doing recently; Vinton said that's a capital construction project. Money will be distributed by the State of Nebraska Broadband office.

Charter/Spectrum Report

Murty reported for Charter/Spectrum.

They have 32 million subscribers in 14 states; in Nebraska they serve 91 different communities.

They have been awarded 3.8 million dollars to expand broadband.

Murty said he will be glad to get some information to Allo on the Public Access program. He wants to be part of that conversation. He appreciates the discussions with Sieh about the franchise agreement.

Hoffman said he would like to have the board do a tour sometime. Vinton said that they recently gave a tour of the training facility; they would be glad to open it back up.

City Reports

Nothing to report this month.

Public Comments

None.

Adjournment

Lee moved adjournment; Kiene seconded; motion carried 6-0. Meeting adjourned at 5:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Jim Johnson, Secretary