



NORTHBRIDGE COMMUNITY TELEVISION

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December 13, 2018

The Honorable Ajit Pai, Chairman
The Honorable Michael O'Rielly, Commissioner
The Honorable Brendan Carr, Commissioner
The Honorable Jessica Rosenworcel, Commissioner

Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
455 12th Street, Southwest
Washington, DC, 20544

Dear Chairman Pai,

We write to support the Comments of the Cable Act Preservation Alliance ("CAPA") and to disapprove of the proposals and tentative conclusions set forth in the FCC's September 25 Further Notice of Proposed Rule Making in *Implementation of Section 621(a)(1) of the Cable Communications Policy Act of 1984 as Amended by the Cable Television Consumer Protection and Competition Act of 1992*, MB Docket 05- 311.

If the FCC continues on this path, our 501(c)(3) community television facility, Northbridge Community Television (NCTV) will lose a substantial, if not all funding to our charitable organization.

What is Northbridge Community Television?

Our dedicated NCTV staff train our residents/consumers how to properly create a TV show for broadcast on our community channels. When these volunteers are certified, they have the ability to use their/our state-of-the-art studio and check out professional TV production equipment completely free. We are a very small organization. In the past 10 years our operational funding has fluctuated between 125,000 to 200,000 a year. Despite our small budget our volunteers are producing 7-10 new Northbridge based productions weekly. Some of our shows include 6 diverse church services broadcast weekly. Four of which are produced right here in Northbridge. We record and broadcast all Board of Selectmen and town meetings at no cost to the town. Our volunteers produce Northbridge Rams, Football, Baseball, American Legion Baseball, Northbridge Junior League Baseball. Our longest running volunteer produced program, going on 25 years is called Sportsline. The hosts discuss all things sports with a concentration on school sports in town. Several of our shows are call-in shows so as to engage our community. We have a show called Town Talk. This show is obviously everything about the town and is an hour long live call-in show. Another show our volunteers produce is called,

About the Valley. In this show a more broad concentration of the Blackstone Valley of which we are located. Guests include over the past few months have been Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce, Northbridge Public Schools, National Parks Service, countless local charities, local bands and local, state and federal politicians and candidates from both sides of the isle. Since this show is also a live call-in show, a resident has a great opportunity to add their two-cents or even talk directly to a candidate or politician.

Community Outreach

Everyday, one way or another, NCTV performs community outreach many non-profit organizations, Northbridge Senior Center, Northbridge Association of Churches, Town of Northbridge, Northbridge Public Schools, Rockdale Youth Center, St. Patrick's Church, Armenian Church, Fairlawn Christian Reformed Church, United Presbyterian Church, Pleasant St. Christian Reformed Church, Whitinsville Social Library, Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce, Kathryn M. Huston Mission Circle, local scouting, Friends of Northbridge Elders, Northbridge Fire Department, Northbridge Police Department, Northbridge Historical Commission, Whittin Community Center, These are just a few of the many organizations we to support. We make charitable donations to the school system and our local community center. From 2013 through 2016, NCTV threw a Christmas Party for the kids in town. We had Santa, music, snacks, magic show and gifts for all. This became so huge for our facility that we had to find another way to give back during the holiday season to the kids who just don't have anything. Starting last year we formed an alliance with the Rockdale Youth Center. This organization is in the same neighborhood and street where we reside. It made perfect sense to give to this organization during the holiday season as many of the kids who came to our Christmas Party also use the Rockdale Youth Center. Last holiday season NCTV donated 250.00 to the youth center along with stacks of coloring and activity books and toys. We were happy to hear the youth center used our funding to give gift cards to the students who use the facility. This year our Board of Directors have approved a 500.00 donation for the Rockdale Youth Center, however with the uncertainty of funding, we may need to hold back this year. We have already held back on our yearly donation to the Northbridge High school Yearbook as a result of the funding uncertainty.

We are most proud of this following outreach. We believe it is unprecedented. Back in 2012, my office heard that our local American Legion Post #343 were about to close their doors permanently. Their building had a bad roof and in rough shape. Booking their hall was only generating 75.00 a month. They just could not sustain themselves. A good number of our volunteers are veterans so we knew we needed to take action. NCTV formed an alliance with the American Legion Post to lease a portion of their banquet hall paying them rent. Since our partnership, the Legion was able to replace their roof and continue with their charitable work they have been doing for many years. The Legion members still have a section of the building and were able to section off yet another portion of the building for another charitable organization called the Virtual Giving Tree, rent free. This additional charity under our roof provides needy seniors with items they just cannot afford. Seniors would get approved by the senior center in town and they would be provided with food toiletries, soaps, blankets, water, and food for their pets to name a few items. If the FCC continues the path they seem to be on, we are certain that 3 charitable organizations in Northbridge will be forced to close.

Charter Communications (Spectrum)'s Relentless Attack on our Community Channels

Our Community TV channels have already been attacked by Charter Spectrum with a breach in the cable license which further weakening the value paid by the consumer and our stance in the community. In 2013 the Town of Northbridge signed a cable license with channels 11, 12 and 13

reserved in the cable license for use by the public, education and government until 2023. In 2014 Charter Spectrum violated that license without notice to our facility and moved our channels to 191, 192 and 194, placing their Spectrum owned commercial channel which mostly plays infomercials at 193 breaking up the 3 community channels. The unapproved moving our resident's community channels has hurt us significantly. You do not have to be in the community television industry to see how being on channels 11, 12 and 13 for 25+ years, then all of a sudden, without notice or approval by the town, Spectrum moves them. This anti-community Charter Spectrum policy has caused and will continue to cause significant damage to the integrity of our channels and the outreach we perform everyday. Charter Spectrum's response to fix the breach was to raise the bills of the consumers in Northbridge and to give that additional funding to our community TV facility to make up for their breach. Northbridge Community TV rejected the residents paying to clear their breach in the license. Yet another possible move for our channels is in the future. Charter Spectrum made a statement in writing regarding the forced moving of the community channels in Hawaii, quote: *"Specific to PEG Access Channels, Charter is providing a contiguous local public policy and government genre channel grouping that is consistent nationwide. The location of PEG Access Channels in this grouping will be consistent and reasonably contiguous statewide."* The threat in Hawaii was to move their channels to the 1300's. This year, the community channels in 5 towns in Massachusetts were moved to the 1300's. At the Board of Selectmen Meeting on 10/20/2014, the Selectmen were told all community channels in Massachusetts will be on 191, 192 and 194. We can only expect the near future moving of our community channels once again to the 1300's further burying our small charity into obscurity.

Charter Spectrum have been gearing up for years to eliminate community TV. Forcibly moving all their community channels to what is known as "Digital Siberia," (55 community channels throughout Massachusetts alone) to the refusing to allow us what is now the current standards, HD and listings on the programming guide. Only select communities are granted those courtesies according to Charter Spectrum. All these factors together with these new proposed rules seem to be designed to make community TV less relevant and easier to just eliminate.

Our request for information almost 2 weeks ago from both the Senior Communications Representative and the Government Relations Department of Charter Spectrum remain unanswered at the time of this reply being filed. Our question is how will these rules affect our community 501c3 facility?

Charter Spectrum in our Community and Their Perceived Intention

It is my opinion that Charter Spectrum realized that their huge corporation is no longer serving the community interest. The powers that be needed a way to generate the appearance of being community oriented. Based on our research it is our contention that Charter Spectrum's game plan is to eliminate all PEG TV channels with the unwitting help of the FCC, to turn around and offer local programming in an effort to mimic what PEG channels produce everyday and then sell ads thereby monetizing "hyper local" programming. We have already seen Charter Spectrum talk about getting exclusive broadcasting rights to high school games. That is what we do. Without ads. Charter Spectrum could never do what we do but that is not stopping them from recently offering interns to work in many local commercial Spectrum stations coast-to-coast that are just now popping up. Spectrum is gearing up to monetize community programming even before the FCC rules decision. What does that tell us? Is the FCC's decision already made?

Bottom Line

The proposed rules will not lower the consumer bills. The bills will still go up year after year. The 7 million dollars spent to lobbying organizations so far in 2018 by Charter Spectrum is not spent to save their consumers money. It is directly related to them increasing the revenue stream to a corporation with a current value of 73.7 billion dollars. Finding ways to increase revenue is good business, however not on the backs of your local partners. However, the cable industry effectively attacking small community TV charitable organizations who provides the cable companies with thousands of hours of free programming every year, is not the way to do it. Yet instead of propping up community channels, Charter Spectrum gives CEO of Charter Communications, Tom Rutledge in one year, 98 million dollars in salary and benefits. The lobbying and salary and benefits should be the issue, not the tiny 3.5% of gross revenue profits in Northbridge. These proposed rules will empower a company like Charter Communications who's corporate behavior since their 2009 bankruptcy, towards the consumers and PEG TV has been abominable.

Back before Charter Spectrum was able to become a massive company they use to be involved in our town at events. I cannot remember a single instance of Charter Spectrum involvement in our community in a positive fashion in at least 10 years. Back when Charter cared about the communities they serve, NCTV and Charter shared a great partnership. As a direct result of Charter's behavior those days are unfortunately over. We are open to continuing a partnership with them, but I just do not see that happening as they are no longer local and in breach of their contractual agreement as Charter representatives have admitted in writing and in public meetings.

The local presence of our PEG channels enables the residents/consumers of the Town of Northbridge MA to watch uniquely local programming about their community and local events and issues of interest to them which is the intent of the PEG provisions of the 1984 Cable Act – to enhance local voices, serve local community needs and interests, and strengthen our local democracy. By defining “franchise fee” in an overly broad fashion to include “in-kind” support, the FCC’s proposals will shift the fair balance between cable franchising authorities and cable operators and will force communities to choose between franchise fees and PEG channels, – something that was never the intent of the Act.

Our volunteers, viewers, residents/consumers and dedicated staff are all our family. Our mission is to bring our residents together through the use of community media. Please deviate from the current trajectory, otherwise the ripple effect will be enormously destructive in Northbridge MA.

Our volunteers, viewers and the multiple non-profits we support appreciate your consideration and hope you will protect PEG channels in our community by choosing not to adopt any of the proposals in the Further Notice.

Sincerely,

Bill Tartaglia



Executive Director

Northbridge Community Television

“A 501(c)(3) Charitable Organization,”

“Proudly serving the consumers of Northbridge MA of over 30 years with “Truly local programming without gavels or censorship”

Community TV station faces possible forced shutdown

Contributed by Bill Tartaglia
NORTHBIDGE - Northbridge Community Television Inc., (NCTV) foresees a bleak future for their numerous volunteers, viewers and the many local non-profits they support as Charter Communications (Charter Spectrum) and others have formed an alliance with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to end funding for your community public, education and government channels.

The proposed complicated and broad rules in FCC Docket 05-311 will effectively and dramatically slash, with the potential to completely remove all of the funding to the 501(c)(3) charitable organization known as NCTV, which has been in operation serving the residents of Northbridge for 30 years.

These FCC/Charter Spectrum-backed proposed rules create uncertainty for all community TV facilities country-wide as they are positioning Charter Spectrum and others to be able to eliminate funding, which is federally mandated for the cable provider to pay for use of your public land and right-of-way, and to provide funding for local town-based community channels.

Why are these rules being proposed? New technology will reportedly require more infrastructure on the poles every 300 to 500 feet, the size of a pizza box to be placed on poles. The cable companies simply do not want to pay for

use of public land that is directly maintained by the taxpayers in cities and towns.

These rules also will only allow funding to come from cable TV revenue, as opposed to the current gross annual revenue from the town, which will have a significant and destructive impact on NCTV funding.

Yet another part of the rules says that a cable company may deduct anything the cable company decides is an in-kind contribution. Charter Spectrum could place a value on our three community stations and charge it back to NCTV.

That is only the beginning. Virtually any service the cable company provides could be charged back to our charitable facility. Senior discounts, any free or discounted services to the town or school system, use of fiber lines, location on the cable box, live broadcasts from the school or town hall, to name a few. It is quite possible that the town and or NCTV could get a bill instead of funding, as these proposed rules are very broad and not specific.

Another reason for these proposed rules is Charter Spectrum is not making money off of community television, but that is all going to change. Right now, in advance to the FCC's decision, Charter Spectrum is launching small channels all over the country to supply the viewers with

"hyper local" programming, which is what NCTV has been doing for over 30 years. They are actively hiring interns and staff for these new commercial stations. It is expected these new channels will attempt to mimic your community channels with the exception of adding commercials into your

"hyper local" programming. It will not be locally town-volunteer-produced programming. Charter Spectrum is worth close to 75 billion dollars. In Northbridge, Charter Spectrum reported it had generated \$5,674,924.83 in total revenue from 4691 subscribers in Northbridge MA. NCTV receives 3.5% of the gross revenue after Charter deducts what they have determined is "bad debt."

After said deductions, what is left is what determines the 3.5% that goes to NCTV. Due to the availability of this funding, Northbridge residents 18 years or older, including business owners, have the benefit of learning how to produce programming, gain certification to book studio time, and borrow professional TV production equipment. Upon satisfactory completion of the workshops, our new-found volunteer producer can produce non-commercial programming for NCTV. Every service NCTV offers, including TV production workshops for certification, studio time and bulletin postings are completely free,

thanks to the cable consumer's funding.

NCTV mission

Funding is also used to support the NCTV mission statement, in part: "Our Mission is to bring the community of Northbridge together through community media." A substantial amount of the funding is given right back to the community through community outreach and services. So far, in 2018, NCTV has lent a hand, in one way or another to the following non-profit organizations and people: residents of Northbridge, our volunteer base, our viewers, American Legion Post #343, Virtual Giving Tree, Northbridge Senior Center, Northbridge Association of Churches, Town of Northbridge, Northbridge Public Schools, Rockdale Youth Center, St. Patrick's Church, Armenian Church, Fairlawn Christian Reformed Church, United Presbyterian Church, Pleasant St. Christian Reformed Church, Whitinsville Social Library, Kathryn M. Huston Mission Circle, local scouting, Canines for Kids, Friends of Northbridge Elders, Northbridge Fire Department, Northbridge Historical Commission, Whittin Community Center, Rams Football, Rams Baseball, American Legion Baseball, Northbridge Junior Baseball, Northbridge PTA and Bundle Up Blackstone Valley Coat Drive, to name a few.

NCTV is also directly responsible for saving the Ameri-

will remain in breach of contract until May 2023.

In a bizarre and cruel twist, when NCTV asked FCC spokesperson Kathy Berthot, "why wouldn't these rules take place at the end of our Northbridge Cable license which is in 2023," Ms. Berthot said, "some facilities have 20-year licenses. We cannot wait 20 years to enforce the rules." She then went on to explain that these rules, when enacted will begin 30-60 days from the acceptance of said rules.

Charter Spectrum's Senior Communications Director Heidi Vandembrouck and Senior Director of Government Affairs Melinda Kinney were posed a simple question and were given ample time to answer.

"How will these rules affect our 501(c)(3) charitable community facility?" No response was received from either of these Charter executives as of this article's publication. To quote a former Spectrum government relations manager, Thomas Cohan, "Charter has no obligation to your charitable organization," based on the lack of response, Cohan's statement seems to be accurate.

If you want help filing any type of comment, in opposition or support of the rules to the FCC, contact NCTV staff at 508-234-0200 or stop by the studio at 198 Church Ave., Northbridge MA 01534. We will walk you through the procedure.

GIFT GALLERY CLOSING

CLOSING

Farewell



THINK AHEAD!!!

Valentine's Day

Confirmations

GIFT GAL