

COMMUNICATIONS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Communications Advisory Committee (CAC) is the Westford town board that advises and represents the interests of the Westford Board of Selectmen in their role as Franchise Authority for cable television and with regard to other services provided by Westford's cable operator (currently Comcast Corporation). The CAC also advises town residents regarding similar services that may be provided over media other than cable by a variety of broadband companies. Such services include Digital Subscriber Line (DSL) Internet access, and Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) local and long distance telephone service. The CAC does not deal with dial-up Internet access or conventional telephone service. Formerly called the Cable Advisory Committee, the CAC's charter was extended by the Selectmen in 2004 to include oversight of the additional broadband services mentioned, and the Committee's name was changed accordingly.

Dave Levy
Chair
Ken Woods
Vice-chair
Marc Davidson
Secretary

Jim Silva
Tony Vacca

The CAC negotiates and enforces cable TV license provisions with Comcast, which has been the town's cable operator since January of 2003. The CAC also serves as an advocate for individual Westford citizens in all matters involving the cable operator, as well as providers of other information and communication services (e.g. Internet access and IP telephony), which may be subject to a variety of regulatory frameworks. We encourage all interested parties to attend our meetings to air their concerns, to ask questions or just listen. CAC meetings generally take place monthly at the J.V. Fletcher Library, starting at 7:00 PM. Check postings at Town Hall for specific dates or contact the CAC to find out about upcoming meetings.

Apart from the issue of perennial price increases – and associated interest in “competition” (see below for more information on this topic) – there have been very few concerns voiced by subscribers regarding residential cable service in Westford in 2007, the third year of the term of the current Renewal License with Comcast.

The most important concerns of the CAC over the past year continued to involve the operations of Westford Community Access Television (Westford CAT) during its second year as Westford's Local Access Provider, in accordance with the associated provisions in the Renewal License, and as otherwise in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding now in force between the Board of Selectmen and Westford CAT. Westford CAT is an independent, non-profit corporation and is governed by a board of directors comprised of members of the community of Westford. Ron Zimmerman continues to be responsible for all day-to-day operations of the Westford CAT studio, which relocated in the summer of 2007 to a new facility at 487 Groton Road (Route 40). Ron also oversees all off-site Local Access production activities in Westford.

Westford CAT operations continue to use Channel 10 for rebroadcast of town government programming, which is broadcast live on Channel 8 along with local and regional public access programming as well as the Bulletin Board. Educational programming from the Westford Public Schools continues to be broadcast on Channel 9. For more details, visit the very informative Westford CAT website at: <http://westfordcat.org>.

Throughout 2007, the CAC has been awaiting an application from Verizon to franchise FiOS TV in Westford, in conjunction with the rollout of FiOS Internet and Phone services (which are not locally regulated). Many neighboring towns already enjoy FiOS services. Although the CAC supports the desire of Westford town government to encourage expansion of consumer choice in cable TV providers, we also strive to maintain the high degree of municipal “negotiating power” relative to the cable TV franchise process that has been so successful in protecting municipal and private interests over the years – as exemplified in the hard-won Local Access provisions we now enjoy as the result of past negotiations with Comcast under the current franchising framework. In light of the increasing interest in FiOS expressed to the

Communications Advisory Committee

CAC by Westford citizens over the past year, the CAC hopes that Verizon will soon initiate their fiber-optic infrastructure buildout and engage our town in the process that will culminate in a FiOS TV Initial License in Westford.

The CAC website, now hosted at www.westfordma.gov/cac, provides Westford citizens with information on a variety of cable-related topics, and is slated to be updated and enhanced with new content in 2008.

In 2007, the CAC consisted of five volunteers appointed by the Board of Selectmen to renewable one-year terms. A quorum of three or more members is required to conduct official business.

The Westford CAC can be contacted by letter mail at Town Hall, or preferably by sending email to: cac@westfordma.gov. CAC Chair Dave Levy also invites telephone inquiries and voicemail at his home phone, 978-692-2290.