

Austin Community Technology and Telecommunications Commission

Regular Meeting – August 9, 2006

<http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/telcommission/>

Agenda

All items are for discussion and possible action

1. Call to order.

Commission Chair Chad Williams called the meeting to order at 7:41 p.m. Commissioners in attendance were Chad Williams, Chip Rosenthal, Wendell Ramsey, Deborah Hill, Jim Howerton, John Green and Arthur Sampson. Commissioner Stephen Martin was absent. Staff in attendance was Rondella Hawkins, Sheena Harden and Jane Reina.

2. Adoption of agenda.

Motion to adopt the agenda was made by Commissioner Hill; seconded by Commissioner Green. Vote 7-0. (Commissioner Martin absent)

3. General citizen communications. (3 minutes to speak)

No one signed up for general citizen communications.

4. Approval of minutes from the July 12, 2006 Commission regular meeting.

Motion to approve the minutes from the July 12, 2006 regular Commission meeting was made by Commissioner Rosenthal; seconded by Commissioner Howerton. Vote 7-0. (Commissioner Martin absent)

5. Presentation on the possible effects of Broadband Over Powerlines on Ham Radios (Glen Reid)

Glen Reid a local ham radio operator stated that in April 2006, Pete Collins with the City of Austin's Communications & Technology Management announced that the City of Austin was going to conduct a test of broadband over powerlines (BPL) on the Austin Energy Grid in September 2006. Ham radios operators are concerned of the interference potential and have voiced their concerns with Mr. Collins. They not opposed to BPL they are only opposed to the potential is has to cause radio interference.

Mr. Reid stated that as a voluntarily non-commercial communications service, and with their own personal equipment and no compensation, hams provide emergency communications to the Red Cross, Salvation Army and the National Hurricane Center. They also provide emergency communications for local flooding and weather events, and operational communications for local marathons. Many hams are volunteers in the weather spotter program with the National Weather Service. They also operate the Arches System which

provide data communications for area hospitals in case of mass casualties. Hams are a part of the Austin – Travis Emergency Communications Center.

For more information please contact Mr. Reid at k5fx@arll.net or (512) 263-5700.

6. Telecommunications & Regulatory Affairs Office Report. (Rondella Hawkins)

a. Legislative update on Cable TV/Video franchising/telecommunications.

Rondella Hawkins, Manager of Telecommunications & Regulatory Affairs (TARA) Office, reported that Congress is adjourned until September 5th so the City escaped the passage of video franchising national legislation for now. Congress returns on September 5th until the third or last week of September before they adjourn again to prepare for the November elections. They might come back for a lame-duck session after the November elections.

The Senate Committee bill that passed on June 29th was finally released yesterday: Still analyzing it but preliminary analysis is:

- The FCC's required to provide a one size fits all franchise except for % of franchise fee, number of PEG channels and some POC's for local governments.
- Local franchise authorities will be responsible for customer service complaints.
- Local franchising authority must grant franchise within 90-days.
- Video service providers must comply with local Public Right of Way management rules.
- Appears to be an additional one percent of gross revenues for public, educational and government access TV.
- Audit process by local governments for last 3-years with 5% underpayment, provider pays for audit.
- No impact on current franchise agreement until it expires.
- Impact on state laws appears to be that state can tax satellite providers but any law that conflicts with the HR 5252 is not permissible. In Ms. Hawkins opinion that means that any state that has a law with a required state franchise will be preempted.
- Definition of gross revenue seems to be fairly complete and not out of sort with our current definition.

Ms. Hawkins also reported on the status of playback equipment for PACT:

- Playback and video archiving equipment has been ordered so that PACT may assume responsibilities to provide playback services for each of the three public access channels.
- On 8/10/06, staff is seeking Council authorization to amend the City's agreement with Grande Communications for three additional months to provide playback services through November 30th. Recommended by Emerging Technology and Telecommunications Committee on 7/26/06

- In addition to the playback equipment, Communications & Technology Management is expanding the City's communications infrastructure at this City site as well. The planned upgrades will position the facility to be a major GAATN site and a hub for the City's wireless mesh network.
- There are significant facility modifications including air conditioning, electrical and re-cabling work that are underway that need to be completed before the equipment can be installed.

Dale Cornibe, Media Producer with Travis County Television, stated that he was there to get an update on the Federal Legislation regarding cable franchising and how it will affect the access channels.

b. Grant for Technology Opportunities Program (GTOPs) update. (wp2)

Sheena Harden, Program Coordinator for TARA, reported that one GTOPs awardee, Life Changes, has defaulted on their agreement and will be returning a portion of their grant back to the City. Staff is currently conducting a full audit of Life Changers program to insure that all the work they did was in fact done so staff can include final scores on the GTOPs 05 Annual Report.

Ms. Harden is working on getting a televised public service announcement recorded for the 07 grants.

7. Public Access Community Television (PACT) update (wp3)

a. 2006 Alliance for Community Media Conference.

Garry Wilkison, Public Access Community Television General Manager, stated that a number of people from PACT attended the Alliance for Community Media Conference in Boston, MA from July 5th to 8th. He reported that access centers from around the country are worried about the national legislation. Communities are looking into many innovative ways to create a survival mode. They now want to call the studios Community Media Centers so it is no long strictly television. They want to incorporate radio, Internet, and in some cases community theater.

b. Texas Access Group (TAG) Regional Conference.

Linda Litowksy, Public Access Community Television (PACT) Executive Director, reported that PACT has offered to host this years Southwest Alliance for Community Media Conference. Groups from Public, Educational and Government Access have been invited.

On August 18 - 20, 2006 from 12:00 to 5:00 p.m. PACT will host a Public Access TV Reunion and Free Speech Forum called Access the Future.

8. Discussion and possible action on Austin Community Technology and Telecommunications Commission's FY 2006-2007 Budget recommendations. (wp5)

- a. Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Relief. (Hill) (wp1)

Motion to approve the Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Relief resolution was made by Commissioner Ramsey; seconded by Commissioner Rosenthal. Vote 5-1-1. (Commissioner Howerton opposed. Commissioner Sampson abstained. Commissioner Martin absent). The resolution reads:

WHEREAS, the City of Austin is committed to emergency preparedness and the best possible disaster relief outcomes for both local disaster victims and guests of our city evacuated from disasters elsewhere; and

WHEREAS, the Community Technology and Telecommunications Commission is committed to providing recommendations regarding beneficial community uses of technology in the City of Austin; and

WHEREAS, Austin Free-Net provided exemplary services to the City and evacuees in the Katrina shelter and thereafter in the community and on the Internet; and

WHEREAS, Austin Free-Net is now working with the City's Communications & Technology Management department to form a Technical Response Team and online resources to facilitate future disaster planning and responses; and

WHEREAS, Austin Free-Net is a member of the City's Citizen Corps Council which is a group of community disaster responders under the umbrella of the City's Office of Emergency Management; and;

WHEREAS, Austin Free-Net is uniquely qualified to assist the City and other agencies with community computer assistance volunteers;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE AUSTIN COMMUNITY TECHNOLOGY AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION:

To recommend that the Austin City Council approve \$30,000 to fund disaster preparation efforts by Austin Free-Net to be used for the following items: \$1,200 for software capable of tracking and scheduling up to 500 volunteers; \$3,000 for a mobile workstation with wireless data service; \$15,000 to fund ten hours weekly for disaster planning and coordination; \$10,000 to fund ten hours weekly for a part-time trainer to work at shelters and with Austin Free-Net volunteers; and \$800 to fund additional coordination work by the Austin Free-Net financial director.

- b. Survey on technology (follow-up to 1996 City of Austin survey).

Motion to approve the Survey on Technology resolution was made by Commissioner Ramsey; seconded by Commissioner Rosenthal. Vote 4-1-2. (Commissioner Howerton opposed. Commissioners Green and Sampson abstained. Commissioner Martin absent). The resolution reads:

WHEREAS, access to and utilization of technology are critical to improving economic opportunities and quality of life for the citizens of Austin; and

WHEREAS, broadband access has been found to enhance economic growth and performance of local communities, according to a recent study conducted by the

Massachusetts Institute of Technology on behalf of the U.S. Department of Commerce; and

WHEREAS, identifying the segments of Austin that are underserved in the areas of access to the Internet, to other communications technologies, and to measure the level of technology literacy in the community is necessary in order to know where the greatest need lies; and

WHEREAS, it is important for the City of Austin to make a comprehensive effort to look at the full range of impacts that technology is having on our City and region and to develop a complete current data set of technology indicators; and

WHEREAS, it important to know the current state of general availability, adoption and use of broadband and of different technologies in order to determine a baseline of access to technology and use by our citizens; and

WHEREAS, it is important to measure the local economic impact of broadband deployment, access, and its use in Austin, to develop public policies including technology-led economic development and digital divide grants programs; and

WHEREAS, the City of Austin conducted a survey in 1996 that measured availability and usage of various communications technologies, including broadband access; and

WHEREAS, significant changes in technology availability and utilization have occurred in the decade since that survey; and

WHEREAS, as more competition across platforms develop, it is important to know if all delivery systems offer the same quality of services needed to support the information economy and the applications deemed as essential by users;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE AUSTIN COMMUNITY TECHNOLOGY AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION:

To recommend that the Austin City Council direct appropriate funds in FY 2006-07 to conduct an information technology survey that determines general use and access to the current range of available communications and related digital technologies and media, that is statistically sound and with an adequate sample size; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the survey be supplemented by a map of technology access and use with the goal of identifying the segments of our community that fall within the commonly known definition of the “digital divide”;
and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that community partners should be identified to help develop the survey methodology and share in the costs.

- c. Funding for Public Access Community Television.

Motion to discuss the Public Access Community Television relief from paying utility bills resolution to help with funding for Public Access Community Television was made by Commissioner Green; seconded by Commissioner Howerton. The motion to approve passed on a vote of 5-2-0. (Commissioners Green and Howerton opposed) (Commissioner Martin absent). The resolution reads:

WHEREAS, the non-profit Public Access Community Television (PACT) has entered in to a 2 year contractual agreement with the City of Austin to operate and maintain the public access channels 10, 11 and 16; and

WHEREAS, in a short period of time PACT has worked to rectify many of the administrative and procedural problems that recently plagued the management of public access channels for the City of Austin; and

WHEREAS, many of the operational expenses and equipment repairs has become the responsibility of PACT; and

WHEREAS, PACT is housed in an aging, city-owned building that had not been maintained properly for a significant amount of time; and

WHEREAS, PACT has to pay utility bills for an aging building that is not energy efficient;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE AUSTIN COMMUNITY TECHNOLOGY AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION:

To recommend that the Austin City Council relieve PACT from having to pay the monthly utility bill for a city-owned building;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the funding budgeted for monthly utilities at the city-owned building utilized by PACT be instead budgeted for necessary equipment repair, equipment purchase, outreach efforts and educational programs.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that PACT may use this funding, previously budgeted for utility fees, to pay an annual amount of \$3,000.00 for the voting membership fee of the Alliance for Communications Democracy, a national non-profit organization that seeks to increase awareness of community media through educational programs and participation in court cases involving franchise enforcement and constitutional questions about community media.

Motion to approve the Green Building resolution the help with funding for Public Access Community Television was made by Commissioner Ramsey; seconded by Commissioner Green. Vote 7-0. (Commissioner Martin absent). The resolution reads:

WHEREAS, the non-profit Public Access Community Television (PACT) has entered in to a 2 year contractual agreement with the City of Austin to operate and maintain the public access channels 10, 11 and 16; and

WHEREAS, the building at 1143 Northwestern Avenue, Austin, TX 78702 which houses public access television for the City of Austin is in need of repairs and maintenance upgrades; and

WHEREAS, the City of Austin has proclaimed itself as an Energy-Efficient Capital; and

WHEREAS, in 2003 the Texas Legislature passed legislation which mandates that all municipally-owned buildings reduce their energy consumption by 5% annually;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE AUSTIN COMMUNITY TECHNOLOGY AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION:

To recommend that the Austin City Council approve the funds necessary to achieve the Silver level LEED certification in accordance with the City of Austin Sustainable Building Guidelines and the Leadership in Energy and Environmental

Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System for the city-owned public access building.

Motion to approve funding for a series of quarterly community technology workshops resolution was made by Commissioner Rosenthal; seconded by Commissioner Ramsey. Vote 7-0-0. (Commissioner Martin absent). The resolution reads:

WHEREAS the Austin Community Technology and Telecommunications Commission makes recommendations to the Austin City Council in matters regarding beneficial uses of community technology and access television; and
WHEREAS the City recognizes the need to best utilize its public access television resources, as well as increase attention to digital divide, technology access, training and other community technology issues; and
WHEREAS the City and the Commission have an interest in supporting effective technology education and outreach efforts; and
WHEREAS on June 24, 2006, the City and the Commission jointly co-sponsored a community workshop on the topic of public access television; and
WHEREAS the June 24 workshop was successful and community response indicates support for a continued series of workshops;
NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE AUSTIN COMMUNITY TECHNOLOGY AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION:
To recommend that City approve \$2,600 funding and staff resources for a series of four (quarterly) community technology workshops, each to focus on a topic of interest to Austin residents.

Motion to approve adding funding to GTOPs for administrative cost resolution was made by Commissioner Rosenthal; seconded by Commissioner Ramsey. Vote 7-0-0. (Commissioner Martin absent). The resolution reads:

WHEREAS the Austin Community Technology and Telecommunications Commission makes recommendations to the Austin City Council in matters regarding beneficial uses of community technology; and
WHEREAS the Grant for Technology Opportunities (GTOPS) is a grant program operated by the City and founded in 2001 to provide matching funds for local programs that provide technology opportunities and bridge the digital divide; and
WHEREAS the GTOPS program has been remarkably successful in achieving its goals; and
WHEREAS these levels of success can be achieved only through continued, diligent administration of the program;
NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE AUSTIN COMMUNITY TECHNOLOGY AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION:
To recommend that Austin City Council approve \$4,000 funding for administrative costs of the GTOPS program for FY 2006-07.

9. Grant for Technology Opportunities Program (GTOPs) Task Force Recommendations. (wp4)

Commissioners Green, Rosenthal, and Williams volunteered to serve on the GTOP's Task Force. This task force will review and streamline the grant process. The Commission also welcomed citizens to serve on this task force if they wish. For more information you can visit ctiaustin.org.

10. Resolution on Time Warner Cable's Basic Tier programming. (Sampson)

This item was tabled until the September regular meeting of this Commission.

11. Task Force on New Sources of Funding for Access Television update. (Williams)(wp3)

Commissioner Williams reported that many of the resolutions the Commission passed at this meeting came from this task force. The next meeting of this task force is tentatively scheduled for August 21st or 22nd at 7:00 p.m. at the PACT studios at 1143 Northwestern Avenue.

12. Update reports on networking relationships with other boards/commissions and groups, citywide and Austin Community Technology and Telecommunications Commission information items.

Commissioner Williams stated he is in contact with Music Commission Chair Teresa Ferguson regarding a tour of Music and Entertainment Television's (METV) new studios on South Congress.

13. Council Committee for Emerging Technology and Telecommunications report. (Williams)

Commissioner Williams reported to the Council Committee on the Commission's resolution regarding the location of the National Geographic Channel; amended the Commission's by-laws to reflect the Commission's new name; Austin Free-Net's presentation on Hurricane Katrina evacuee assistance; resolution on continued television coverage on Channel 6 and GTOPs budget recommendation.

14. Future agenda items for the Austin Community Technology & Telecommunications Commission regular meeting scheduled for September 13, 2006

- Update from GTOPs task force. (Green)
- Resolution on Time Warner Cable's Basic Tier programming. (Sampson)
- Presentation from Dorkbot on Doing Strange Things with Electricity.
- Presentations from former GTOPs recipients.
- Update on Broadband over power lines pilot project. (Pete Collins)

15. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 10:30 p.m.