

UTILITY ADVISORY TASK FORCE
MEETING MINUTES
November 22, 2021 - 7:00 PM
Warren Craft Meeting Room

The mission of the Utility Advisory Task Force is to assess the level of communication and service from the utility companies providing services to Bernards Township, identify areas of concern and in need of improvement, suggest ways to collect and report chronic outages and disruptions, facilitate and/or coordinate resident feedback to the Board of Public Utilities, and represent Bernards Township customers before the BPU when appropriate.

Present: Edelstein, Estrin, Fields, Fischer, Guibord, Romano, Shah
Absent: Monaco, Neiman

- 1. Call to Order**
- 2. Flag Salute**
- 3. Open Public Meeting Statement**
- 4. Approval of Minutes**
The October 20, 2021, meeting minutes were approved as submitted.
- 5. Altice USA/Optimum Presentation on Operations, Infrastructure, Reliability and Service**

Marilyn Davis, Area Director, Government Affairs, Craig McLeod, Sr. Director of Construction and Kevin Robinson Director of Field Operations of Altice USA/Optimum (“Optimum”) made a presentation on Optimum operations, infrastructure, reliability and service in Bernards Township (“Township”). They acknowledged and addressed various internet service issues in the Hills section of the Township. They reported that data consumption in the Hills increased by 72% when the Covid-10 pandemic hit, whereas Optimum was prepared for a 20% increase in consumption. As a result, in the Hills, Optimum has added new nodes and split existing nodes to expand their capacity by 50%. Ms. Shah asked if there is currently enough capacity in the Hills. Mr. Robinson stated that peak node service is desired to be about 60-70% of installed capacity, but instantaneous and unpredictable loads in the Hills have exceeded that design criteria. He reported that there is usage monitoring of the Hills to help project what additional capacity is needed, but said it is difficult to do capacity upgrades in the Hills because of the fragmented management structure of the Hills presented by the numerous Homeowners Associations (“HOA’s”). Mayor Fields agreed. Ms. Shah noted that the Utility Advisory Task Force (“Task Force”) had given maps and contact names to Optimum to help facilitate meetings with the HOA’s and Ms. Davis reported Optimum is regrouping internally to set up meetings with the appropriate HOA contacts.

Mayor Fields reported Bedminster is having similar issues with their portion of the Hills. The HOA’s so far have been unresponsive so Mayor Fields is coordinating with Bedminster’s Mayor to facilitate meetings between Optimum and the HOA’s. Ms. Shah stated single family homes within the Hills are not part of an HOA. Mayor Fields noted

that, unlike private property, certain parts of the Hills are on public streets owned by Township along which Optimum needs no permission from the HOA's or property owners to install fiber. Ms. Shah added that owners and HOA's should cooperate because poor internet service could actually lower housing values in the Hills since so many residents work from home. Ms. Davis stated that property values are generally 3.1% higher with fiber internet, and she wants to identify all stakeholders so everyone's needs can be addressed. Mr. Estrin stated the Task Force should get true points of contact for each HOA. Ms. Fields responded that there is a Township ordinance requiring all HOA's to provide contact information to the Township which information should be a best resource.

Ms. Davis acknowledged there had been a breakdown in customer service levels during Covid 19. Employees were out sick and overseas customer support centers were closed. Optimum is proactively working to improve customer service by tracking KPI's (key performance indicators) and monitoring call rate, timely technical arrival, repeat visits and field customer feedback. Optimum also had problems with the quality of work some sub-contractors were performing and terminated those relationships.

Mr. Guibord asked about the status of the Board of Public Utilities investigation into Optimum service. Ms. Davis reported they are in the discovery phase of the investigation and hope to have the matter resolved by December. Optimum has put a quality control process in place to improve service. Ms. Shah stated she is not getting the level of service she is paying for and Mr. McLeod said he would perform an assessment of her house.

Mayor Fields said the Township will continue to work with Optimum after the Task Force ends its appointment in December. Mr. Edelstein suggested Optimum work with HOA's that are responsive and not wait to hear back from all of them before work can begin. Mr. Robinson suggested running fiber through Allen Road and leaving a fiber connection for HOA's that aren't interested or responsive. Mr. Guibord noted that because Optimum is not a public utility, it does not have the power of eminent domain to acquire the easements necessary to install fiber on private property or private streets if an HOA or property owner refuses. Optimum therefore needs their cooperation, or they will not get fiber internet. Mr. Edelstein recommended that the Task Force, the Township and Optimum make public through the media the name of any HOA that does not cooperate to allow the Optimum fiber internet installation in the Hills.

6. Public Comment

Melissa Moss residing at 62 Ramapo Drive stated she participated in the Task Force internet survey and the level of service she receives from Optimum is poor. She suggested that Optimum first start the project with the Patriot Ridge HOA as the residents are part of a WhatsApp group and very communicative. Ms. Davis, her team and the Task Force felt that to be a great idea and Ms. Davis will work with Ms. Moss.

Michael Schlemovitz residing at 283 South Finley Avenue stated he had Cablevision for 15 years, then Verizon and now Optimum. He has had 4 routers replaced, dropped service multiple times a day and said this has been going on for years. He no longer calls Optimum Customer Care. Optimum will do an assessment of his home as well as the home of Ms. Moss.

7. Status of Draft Report to the Township Committee

Mr. Guibord will revise the draft report to reflect Optimum's presentation and email it to the Task Force members for review/comment and approval at the December meeting.

8. December Meeting Agenda

The Report to the Township Committee will be on the agenda for approval.

9. Comments by Members

Mayor Fields thanked the Task Force for all of their work, especially with Optimum.

10. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:23 PM.

**Submitted by Scott Guibord
On behalf of the Utility Advisory Task Force**