



Director Report: April 2021

Production & Programming

- Meeting Coverage: We have continued to ramp up the coverage of local government meetings, thanks in large part to some of the Boards meeting remotely and handling their own recordings. We do continue to host meetings on our Zoom accounts for some boards (Cavendish Selectboard & Planning Commission, Ludlow Selectboard, DRB, Planning Commission, & Village Trustees, and Planning Commission. The Mt. Holly Selectboard continues to meet in a hybrid format, which we support through a combination of in person production and Zoom. We also have been maintaining a live production schedule of approx. meetings per month. While we don't have viewership metrics for telecasts, we do for the online live streaming (on the You Tube channel). Over the past month, by far the biggest meeting in terms of viewership and interest was the Ludlow DRB meeting on April 12th, which featured the hearing on the planned substance use treatment center in the former Fox Run property by the golf course. As you may be aware, that project is being led by a foundation founded by Trey Anastasio, the rock star and front man of Phish (which as I'm sure you all know was formed here in VT). He was actually on the meeting and spoke at the beginning and the end. This is a hotly-contested issue with passion on both sides (those who recognize the need in this area and want to see it happen vs the abutting property owners who don't want it next door to them or the golf course). The hearing was recessed until the May 10th DRB meeting, which I am sure will be just as lively a conversation and which we will also be streaming & broadcasting live.
- Sammy Blanchette in studio: Local musician Sammy Blanchette recorded a "live-to-tape" concert in our studio, against the green screen. Eric created a "virtual café" setting for the green screen, which came out great. Sammy is very good with promotion, so the concert has been getting some attention. I believe he is planning to do a live concert (streaming & broadcast) next.
- Green Mountain Basketball: As you know, we streamed & broadcasted all of the home games this season, which garnered a lot of attention, particularly with the boys' games, since they had a very successful season, culminating with the Div. 3 State championship, As I mentioned before, due to an exclusive relationship bt. the VT Principals' Association & an outside / national contractor (NFHS Network), no other cameras are allowed during the finals games. In theory, we can televise the games after the fact if we are provided with a copy by someone who purchases it (or we purchase a copy ourselves). This is something we ran into this past Fall when the GM boys were playing in the State finals for soccer. Even though it has never been our procedure to pay for programming, I made an exception and shelled out the \$15 for a digital copy of that game so we could share it with the community (I figured it was a "value added" service that we could offer during the pandemic, since most local fans could not go due to the limits on attendance. I thought I would do the same with the basketball final game, but no one from NFHS has returned my messages. I have been hearing a lot of negative feedback about their customer service and service in general. In fact, it is fairly widespread. It makes me wonder why the VT Principals' Association continues to contract with them. I think a real case could be made for petitioning the Principals' Association in an effort to convince them to keep it local, whether they

contract with community TV stations such as ours or another service provider right here in Vermont.

Outreach & Marketing / Fundraising

- E-News: The email “newsletters” have continued to be distributed weekly and have led to some increased engagement. It has been an encouraging trend and something that we need to continue. It has become a regular piece to the weekly workflow.
- Reading: A discussion about our services was discussed at the recent Selectboard meeting. It all started after a conversation I had with a contact there in Town about gauging the interest of covering their meetings. There seems to be enough community interest, but it was brought to the Selectboard who wanted more information. One of the members of the 3-member Board reached out to me with some questions, and it sounds like they plan to continue to discuss it. Reading is the one “outlier” Town in our immediate area that isn’t currently served with community / PEG Access. We do get some franchise fee funds that are collected in Reading by VTel, but it’s a very small amount (I think there are only a small handful of households in Reading near the Plymouth border that even have access to VTel). However, in our contract negotiation discussions with Comcast (more on that below), we had planned to bring this up and request being designated to serve Reading, since Comcast has served some households in Town for the last 15 or so years. Yet, there is still no officially designated PEG entity, and there should be.
- Memberships: As we have been garnering some attention of late, with the streaming & live broadcasts, meeting coverage, music, etc., and as we head towards Summer, it might be appropriate to do one more membership drive before the close of our fiscal year.
- Underwriting: We have 3 underwriters so far for 2021: Marylou Scofield, Esq., William Raevis / VT Properties & Development, and VTel. Noah, Sharon, & I, as the marketing / fundraising committee, have briefly discussed some next steps, but this really warrants a larger conversation and participation from the full Board.

New Equipment & Upgrades

- Laptop Repair: As I mentioned last month, our 2013 MacBook Pro laptop fell out of its bag and onto the concrete floor, damaging the screen. An insurance claim was filed for a replacement of the screen. The total cost of the repair was \$780, of which we paid \$250. I mis-spoke last month: our deductible isn’t \$500 – it’s \$250.
- Dell Computer Repair: I am still in correspondence with Dell about the repair on the new rack-mounted computer that we purchased for the studio control room. This is now a more pressing issue since we are gearing up to re-open the studio more formally (so far, we’ve only used it sparingly and on a case-by-case individual basis). It sounds like all that is needed is a new part, for which they will send out a technician (they tried this before but the person they sent didn’t know enough about the computer and the Dell support person assigned to our case at the time lacked proper follow-through... go figure).

Administrative

- Comcast: At long last, we are ready to begin the contract renewal process. As a quick refresher, our contract expired 4 years ago, but Comcast put all renewals Statewide on hold while its legal appeal to the State of Vermont was ongoing. The Comcast v Vermont settlement was reached in 2019 (which is how we received the \$23,000 in restricted funds that has been reflected in our annual budgets over the last 2 years), Comcast then reached out to us to renew, but that was then put on hold while VAN worked on a boiler plate template that we could all live with (including Comcast).

That “boiler plate” was intended to be used as a “launching off point” for each of our individual renewals with Comcast. And here we are, ready to go. I believe you all received the boiler plate template a while back, but we can circulate it again and then review it. There are a couple of items that we will definitely want to request that would be additions to that template: adding the designation of Reading (and possibly other Towns) and the addition of high definition (HD) channels.

- Regional Collaboration: This has not gone anywhere since we last met, but I did offer to organize a follow-up meeting on the shared (regionalized) underwriting concept that was discussed last year among some of the other Windsor Co. stations. CATV in White River Junction just hired a new Executive Director – a local filmmaker, Samantha Davidson Green. I will be reaching out to her shortly, to invite her into the discussion.
- Banking: The Finance Committee (John, Noah, & myself) recently met to go over plans to move some of the money that is currently sitting in our checking account into a short-term investment or other interest-bearing account. We are in a fortunate position at the moment where we can actually do this – this has not always been the case. With the uncertain future and with our main funding source on shaky ground in the long-term, this just seems like the wisest thing we can do. More details will be shared during the meeting.
- Annual Meeting: We need to pick a date, time, & location, I propose an in-person, outdoor event, sometime in mid-late June. Let’s discuss. This should be finalized at this month’s meeting.
- Board Election: The Nominating & Elections Committee met & has a proposal for the board to consider. We need to begin recruitment for candidates, so this should be finalized ASAP. Finalizing the date for the Annual Meeting will determine deadlines for notices to soliciting candidates, the preparation & distribution of ballots, and voting.