



Director Report April 2023

Administrative

- Personnel Reports: I have submitted year-to-date timesheet & PTO reports for Rebekah & me to our Personnel Committee. Rebekah has 11 PTO days remaining and I have 7. I will be taking mine for a trip in early May. I will be away from May 1 – 9. That will use up all of my remaining days from the 2-year “carry over” period that was allowed by the Board.
- Policies & Procedures: With the hiring of our new staff member, Peter, I am reminded of the need for updated Personnel Policies. We do have Personnel Policies, but they are very old and in need of updates. This was going to be one of the areas we looked at this year by the Policy Committee, but we did not make progress with mobilizing that committee & getting it off the ground. This is an area to focus on in the coming year. We also need to update our Operating Policies & Procedures and to draft & adopt policies & procedures for accounting.
- VTEL: The Certificate of Public Good (CPG) renewal proceedings should be wrapping up soon. The final deadline (reply briefs) is on May 9. This is our opportunity to respond to VTel, who responded to our pre-filed testimony. That, and all information related to the case is on the PUC site here: <https://epuc.vermont.gov/?q=node/64/172854/FV-Case%20Summary-Portal>
- VAN Annual Meeting: Vermont Access Network, our statewide membership org., is holding its annual meeting Friday, May 5 in Rutland. Peter & Rebekah will be attending it.
- Statewide Advocacy Progress: The VAN Advocacy Committee is working with allies in the legislature to procure an appropriation for FY2024, as another year of “bridge funding”, while also helping in the development of a proposal for a new communications service-based revenue stream.
- Investments: At its last meeting, the Board approved the Finance Committee’s recommendation of investing some funds through short-term investments by setting up an account with Fidelity. Wendell & I processed the application and cut a first check for \$60,000 to get us started. In future months, we may be able to invest more, but with a few large expenses coming up, I knew we needed to keep a good portion liquid & available in the checking account.
- Credit Card: We have had a Business Credit Card with what is now M&T Bank (formerly People’s United) for many years. However, the credit limit has always been low (\$2,500). Following conversations I’ve had with the Ludlow branch manager, Art Randolph, I propose requesting an increase to \$10,000. Before we can request an application, which Art will help us process, the Board needs to formally approve requesting the increase, and that decision must be documented into approved meeting minutes. So, at the earliest, the request can be made in May, if the Board decision is made during the April meeting.

Equipment & Website Upgrades

- Master Control / Playback Server: Our current master control server (the system that handles the scheduling & plays out our programming) is approx. 8 years old. It was purchased in tandem with a video-on-demand server, which handles the processing of broadcast files for publishing to our website. The cost of both servers plus installation back then was nearly \$30,000. They are in need of replacement. We budgeted to do that this year. The time has

come. The good news is that the vendor we use (Tightrope Media Systems) have “B- stock” units of their playback server (Cablecast), for more favorable pricing. Also, we no longer need to have a separate server for the video-on-demand. Instead, we can purchase a software-only version and use our own storage for the files. The total cost for this type of solution would not exceed \$22,000. I have quotes from two resellers, both of whom I know and with whom I’ve worked. I would ask the Board to approve this expenditure so we can get the new solution in place ASAP. We will then be able to resolve the issue we have faced with our video-on-demand storage (at present, I have taken all of our pre-2019 video-on-demand offline, which means you will get an error if you search for any videos on our website from before 1/1/2019. That will no longer be an issue – we can get all of that content back online. The main thing to consider is that we were going to have to replace this server system sooner rather than later anyway. 8 years is a long run.

- Website Upgrade: I am still waiting to get estimated membership annual costs to join the Localeyz, the cooperative that runs the website platform onto which we are looking at migrating our Drupal-based site. Founded by a colleague, Emily Frazier (who also did a lot of work on our website in the early days of getting set up on Drupal) Localeyz is a platform using customizable widgets that are tailored for our business in community TV / media. Most of the cooperative members / clients are our other colleagues of ours, including Brattleboro Community TV, The Media Factory of Burlington, Amherst (MA) Media, Derry (NH) CAM, and PhillyCAM. More info on Localeyz can be found at localeyz.io. As reported last month, the set up & migration would cost approx. \$2,500. Annual costs for the platform would be approx. \$700. And then there are the membership costs, which as of this writing are the still the one unknown (although they would be anticipated to be no more than \$1,000).

Community Engagement / Outreach

- Town AV systems: We now have systems in the Town Offices in Ludlow, Plymouth, & Mount Holly, each owned by the Town. The most recent installation – in Mount Holly – went a lot faster and more smoothly than the others but was also left not-quite complete. Each installation has required some troubleshooting, extra equipment, and installation, as well as a considerable amount of my time. The end result will be worth it but it has been a rough road getting there, particularly with the Ludlow system. In Ludlow, a bit of outreach and some damage control is required, as the inadequacies of the system have created several technical issues resulting in meetings being held up, delayed, and in one case cancelled altogether. We are now going back to the old way of doing things – with our own equipment – for the time being, until there is a plan for fixing the issues. The main issue is that not everyone understands the issues; we do not come out looking good when the system is not working. The assumption is that we are at fault. I am now trying to get the Town officials, administrative staff, and the Boards to understand the factors and how they can be resolved. Another big factor is that the Boards have been trying to do hybrid meetings in recent months, without any kind of preparation or advanced planning. This what like putting the cart before the horse. I have suggested to the Boards & Town staff that we do a training on how to conduct hybrid meetings & best practices, once the new system is fully operational & working to expectation. I am working with Scott Stearns from Friends of the Ludlow Auditorium (FOLA) on a plan and I have reached out to potential vendors to come in and do the work. We will then present the Town with a proposal.

Fundraising

- Underwriting: Thank you to Open Door Vacation Rentals (Noah's new company) for coming on board last month as an underwriter. As a way of expanding the underwriting program and trying new things, we are inviting each underwriter to record a short testimonial about why they support us. It's another opportunity to give credit where it's due by giving some extra exposure to the business without it being an advertisement. We will be recording testimonials with Noah & Kathy Burns (owner of VT Properties / William Raevis) in the coming weeks, and hope to do them with the others as well. We have learned that Marylou Scofield has sold her law practice and it is now Mountain View Law. We have updated the underwriting credits to the new name and will be reaching out to the new owners. Underwriting is run on a calendar year basis, so they 2023 underwriting contribution Marylou made on behalf of the business is good through December 31st.

Also, on a related note about expanding the underwriting program, Becky Wynne, our volunteer & enthusiastic supporter (who attended the February Board meeting), had a proposal to help develop a new offering to businesses. That is, to create short marketing videos that be shared on a business's website & social media platforms. This is an idea worth exploring, and is perhaps a good topic for a discussion on future revenue generation, particularly as we delve into strategic planning.

- Grant opportunities: There are numerous grant opportunities for us to explore, both programmatic, with Okemo Valley TV as a lead applicant, and for building-related upgrades, be in partnership with the Town, who would need to be the lead applicant. As far as the grants where we would be a lead applicant, I am going to try to get an application submitted to the Vermont Arts Council for a "Cultural Facilities " grant. Deadline is May 1. We have been successful with those in the past. As far as partnering with the Town, I have reached out to Brendan McNamara, the new Town Manager. I have not heard anything yet.

Buildings & Grounds

- Exterior of Building / Site Work: Related to the grant opportunities with the Town, it would be helpful for us to know what, if anything, is in the Town budget for FY2024, in terms of the property. I had conversations with the former Town Manager, Scott Murphy, about the needs. He had informed me that he thought that the drainage & paving would be in the budget, but that was a while ago and I have not heard anything since. Here is a Google Sheet that I put together for Scott Murphy last Fall, which outlines the needs:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Yf58ntGX7iK2bvHKE4kL-e4AqAaHh-2L0r06qrr2gUQ/edit?usp=sharing>

- Energy Efficiency Grant Opportunity: I have also reached out to Brendan McNamara with ideas for proposals for Municipal Efficiency Resiliency Program (MERP) grants. First & foremost, the Town Hall auditorium needs much improved weatherization. It is so hot in there during mid-Summer that FOLA will not hold events. And up by the roof, in the balcony, where we work and all of the new AV equipment lives, it is even hotter. That seems to be an obvious choice for a grant application. And then there is our building, which is lacking in weatherization & energy efficiency. There is a webinar for the MERP program, being held by the VT Department of Buildings & Grounds on Tuesday April 18th. Interested municipal officials from across the State are encouraged to attend. It would be helpful to reach out to any of your municipal contacts in Ludlow, mention our interest in partnering with the Town on these projects, and encourage them to attend the webinar.

- Plumbing: Thanks to the Town for having hot & cold water valves added to the water system in the mechanical closet. That work was completed last month. This is something that has been lacking, and will prove to be very useful for cleaning (filling mop buckets, etc.)
- Shed: Back in 2017, we built the shed to address a need for more storage. It was staff project that Summer & Fall, led by Ed McEneaney who worked for us for 4 years and did building & carpentry work. Ed continued to make some improvements on it over the next 2 years, and it has suited us well, except that the roof has been problematic. The shed is situated in a wind tunnel, and sections of the corrugated metal on the roof often get loose and bang around. A lot. It has gotten worse, and needs to be addressed ASAP. I do have a plan for it and was just waiting for Spring (this Winter, I simply leaned a heavy ladder against the loose section, but the wind keeps finding a way!). I was surprised that the neighbors had not complained, but all of that changed when someone did stop by to complain, saying it'd been an ongoing issue for 2 years. I was not there when he stopped by but would like to assure him that it is being dealt with.

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