



Administrative

- Remembering John Cama: Former Board member & volunteer John Cama passed away recently. I got a chance to speak with him just a couple of weeks ago. He was a good guy & a big supporter of Okemo Valley TV. He will be remembered fondly. He & his wife Marylou moved from Plymouth to Florida a little over a year ago. She was an Okemo Valley TV underwriter, through her Killington-based law firm, before selling it & retiring.
- Staffing Updates: Gavin finished up his part-time work for us last week, before heading back to Champlain College for his senior year. Peter is shifting his part-time work schedule with us, as he is now working as an instructor at the Expeditionary School at Black River. This should work out better in everyone's favor.
- Finance: Wendell has continued reconciling the accounts. We will soon have a Finance Committee meeting with Bob to go over Treasurer duties & discuss a plan for the development of formal accounting policies.
- Cable Funding: We saw an 8% decline in revenue from Comcast's Q2 payment, from last year's of the same period (quarter ending June 30th). The Q1 payment (March 31st), however, was up 1.5% this year over Q1 2023. VTel's Q2 payment was just about the same as last year's. It does seem that, overall, the decline is happening, but it is slow.
- Strategic Planning: Our current strategic plan was adopted in 2016. It was intended to be a 5-year plan. In May 2023, we started a new strategic planning process, which generated some good ideas & enthusiasm. However, it proved difficult to keep momentum going; as such, progress fell apart. We did not hold another session until this past Spring, nearly a year later. Newt has suggested pursuing a "Non Profit Capacity Building Grant" from VT Community Foundation for hiring a consultant to help manage this for us.
- Policies & Procedures: Last year, an ad hoc Policy committee was formed on the Board. Its task was going to be to review all Policies & Procedures that we have "on the books" – both Operations & Personnel. These have been in need of updates for some time. It was probably an unrealistic expectation to think we could get through that work by committee. Beginning in July, along with Rebekah & Peter, I have been going over the operating Policies & Procedures. We are making revisions, one policy at a time; at each Board meeting, I will present drafts to the Board for review. This should be a much more expedient way of getting this work done. It would make sense for the Personnel Committee and me to work on reviewing and drafting revisions for personnel policies.

Buildings & Grounds / Equipment / Infrastructure

- Walk Through: Last week, the Buildings & Grounds committee held a walk through of the facility. Bob documented in on video. I shared the documentation related to the building project: floor plans, "Building Program" (spreadsheet detailing the needs of each room part to the build-out) & the cost estimate.

- Setback: A technical glitch related to the integration of our master control server with our network configuration has created a problem over the last few days, inhibiting our operational workflow and taking the video on demand on the website offline. While the support service we receive from the company (Tightrope) is usually good, they do not provide support during “off hours” (no evenings or weekends). This has occasionally created a problem. When we have a problem such as this, requiring extensive troubleshooting, there is a chain reaction, resulting in getting behind on other work.
- Website: Something that has been getting put off for quite some time is the next chapter of our website. The platform that it is on (Drupal) is now severely out of date and in need of replacement. It was a very solid and robust content platform in its time for us and served us well as a content management system for many years. But now, not only is the version we are on no longer supported (and therefore vulnerable), but the management of the back end is quite complex. There are not many options for outsourced support. The person who I have worked with for many years, Joe Golden, is one of the only – if not the only – one left in Vermont doing Drupal support work, and he is getting away from it. We need to migrate the site onto a new and more “user-friendly” platform. Wordpress looks to be our best option. And it so happens that Peter builds & manages Wordpress sites. We have been talking and have a plan to move forward. Expect to see a newly designed & improved website by the end of 2024! We would be hiring Peter as a contractor for this work, which would be separate from his work as Okemo Valley TV staff.
- Rewiring & Neatening Up: Over the years, when I have needed more help with hand-on work, especially technical buildouts and infrastructure-related projects, I have brought in some outside help, namely an old colleague, Bill Marcinkowski. He is coming this Thursday to re-wire and neat up behind our master control rack. He will then come back soon to do some re-wiring work on the AV system at Plymouth Town Office (while that should not necessarily be a project within our purview, it's the path of least resistance and easiest solution to a problem).
- Phone System: The big savings in this year's operating budget is to be with the phone system. Namely, we are switching over our VOIP system from Comcast to TDS. This work was supposed to be completed by TDS during the 1st week of July but due to miscommunications & delays on their end, it still hasn't happened. They are supposedly coming to do the work this Friday.
- Comcast Delays: Comcast was supposed to switch over the connection inside our building from coaxial cable to fiber last year – they even came in to install hardware in our rack in preparation. That was well over a year ago, and I have not heard a peep since, despite my repeated requests for an update. This has been a problem for a long time, as the signals that we send them are severely degraded, due to the old, outdated equipment & infrastructure that is in use, necessitating the signals to be converted multiple times over. All you have to do is look at a side-by-side comparison of our channels on Comcast vs VTel. It is night & day. The first steps of this conversion over to fiber and replacement of equipment was in the Winter of 2018-19 – and that was only after many requests over several years and other communications related to the degraded signal quality. It's comical at this point.

Production

- Tasty Twist with Sammy B: Sammy has been a regular in the studio, hosting 11 episodes of his series “The Tasty Twist” as of today, with several more on schedule in the coming weeks. On the one hand, it has been a fairly resource-intensive project for us. And in some ways we have felt that strain, but on the other hand, the show is generating a lot of buzz & interest. The views

on each of the episodes exceed the views for any other on our website & You Tube channel. Plus, it's bringing new & different people into the studio, some of whom might want to come back & get involved in other ways.

- “Pro Bono” Productions: In addition to the government meeting coverage (which is plentiful!), we try to provide other “pro bono” coverage of community events. This level of production coverage is intended to be simple yet professional – and the point is to “share the wealth,” such that different organizations benefit from our service. Over the past month, we have provided the following coverage pro bono:
Best of Summer Festival (Chamber of Commerce), Chamber of Commerce Annual Meeting, Cavendish & Mount Holly Summer Concerts, Old Time Story Hour (Black River Academy Museum), Community Lunch (Black River Good Neighbors), Naturalization Ceremony (President Calvin Coolidge Foundation). If you know of other events happening in the area or have other ideas for our pro bono production services, please let Rebekah & I know.
- Production Service for Hire: We occasionally field requests for production services that would go beyond what we can give away for free. These are infrequent (though this is an area for potential expansion as we explore more revenue generating opportunities). Earlier in the month, we were hired to provide AV support for and to record the Lake Rescue Association Annual Meeting. That organization also had been discussing other video work for which they would like to hire us, but that may be on hold.

Collaboration

- Middlebury Film Festival: I helped a colleague at Middlebury Community TV (MCTV) by recording a Q&A session last week during the Middlebury Film Festival. I stayed for the evening to take in a screening & Q&A session with the legendary Oliver Stone. MCTV is another small station, like us. I am always looking for ways our small stations around the region & the State can collaborate & pool resources more. Of course, there are more ways to do so with the other stations right around us, such as SAPA, Woodstock Community TV, & Windsor on Air, but sometimes there are opportunities such as this one in Middlebury that make sense. We all need to be doing this sort of sharing of resources more. Also, the new Director of the Middlebury Film Festival was just announced, and it happens to be someone we know from our work with the Town of Mount Holly – Caitlin Boyle. In addition to helping out on the side as a clerk to the Mount Holly Selectboard, [she has built a career in filmmaking](#), with a focus on using film as a tool for social change & civic engagement (sound like some familiar overlap?). It can sure be a small world sometimes.
- SAPA: We still do not have any progress on the agreement with Comcast re: Town of Reading designation. This is not so much a SAPA issue as a Comcast lack of response issue. If anyone wants more information about this nuanced & convoluted partnership, please let me know. Suffice it to say that it involves antiquated cable TV regulations and the prospect of more (albeit nominal) funding for us.

Community Engagement / Fundraising

- Outdoor Film Screening: The Aug. 3rd screening of Stefan & Wendy’s film, “The Forgotten” was a success. Not only should they be commended for making their film, and then using it to do some good and help fellow Vermonters during a time of similar need, but also for the tremendous amount of work (and money) they put into event. In all, about 60 people were in attendance. It was

a nice summer evening in our parking lot that helped to raise \$1,200 for the flood relief fund. For the station's contribution, we provided the space and some staffing (there were 4 of us working), plus additional volunteer labor. Kudos also to 16-year-old Cyrus Gross of Cavendish, who provided (and built) the staging & screen. It was great to have Claire's Film "Therapy Won't Kill You," which helped to make it more of an event, along with the food & games. I think we should consider doing other screenings in the future. There was a lot of positive feedback.

- Grant Award: We were among the 7 recipients in the State of a FY2025 Cultural Facilities grant from the VT Arts Council, we received the top dollar amount award, at \$24,000, towards the completion of the final phase of our build out. I was interviewed by Vermont Public for a short story that they ran about this: <https://www.vermontpublic.org/local-news/2024-08-14/vermont-arts-council-grants-for-cultural-spaces-public-art>
- Other Grant Applications: We should be hearing back from The Windham Foundation in September. We also recently applied for a grant from the VT Mutual Insurance Foundation. More applications are in the works. Again, this is a critical time for raising funds through grants. We must next turn our attention to local fundraising efforts – we need to have a follow-up conversation to a presentation that was given at our Annual Meeting by our fundraising & development consultant, Donna Lubrano. We will kick off that conversation at the Board meeting this week, keeping it to a higher-level overview, but the work should commence among the Community Engagement Committee. This and the Summer membership drive, should be the committee's present focus.
- Summer Membership Drive: Thanks to an anonymous & unexpected gift of \$1,024, we have a leg up in membership revenue. However, we are not making much progress getting new members as of yet. The outreach for this needs to be a priority.
- Youth Media Collaboration: I have been having conversations with some interested parties related to developing a project around youth, media, & journalism. Some of us are meeting this week to brainstorm. There is growing interest, especially as we evolve to include other forms of media (in particular, podcasting).
- Merchandising: We are long due to review our merchandising options. Last year, we discussed this with Abby Childs, who handles merchandising for some other local organizations. More recently, Sammy has brought up his family's company, Blanchette Sporting Goods, as another option. This would be another topic for consideration by the Community Engagement Committee. I am thinking for starters we probably want T-shirts, polo shirts, and possibly a long sleeve option. At one time (long ago), we had hats which were popular.

Radio

- Low Power FM: The radio advisory group met a couple of weeks ago to review the to do list and brainstorm some more. We now have call letters, approved by the FCC: WLUD. And the frequency is 104.7 FM. Tentatively the station will be branded as "Black River Radio." The committee will be surveying others from our contact list for names, but so far there is some interest in keeping that name. Jim Alic will be attending the Board meeting to provide a report.