



## Director Report: February 2021

### Production & Programming

- Remote & Hybrid Meetings: We continue to support the Towns by hosting meetings over Zoom. We are presently doing this for several Boards in Ludlow, several more in Cavendish, 2 in Mount Holly, and 2 in Plymouth. The Mount Holly & Plymouth Selectboards have been holding meetings in the "hybrid" format (part remote / part in-person) and are reliant on us for this. The school Boards and the Andover Select board have been taking care of their own remote meetings, and simply sending us the recordings (on which we then do some simple post-production). All of this results in a higher volume of work (because we are now handling more Boards than before), and in the case of hybrid meetings, it's quite a bit more work, with the equipment & personnel needs. We have added some new equipment and in a couple of cases, I have added some personnel. With the hybrid format, I am still experimenting with the best workflow. I recently brought in a trusted longtime colleague, Tom Dooley to help with this, on a contract basis. So far, he has only worked one day but there may be other upcoming needs. He has expertise in the area and sometimes I just need someone who can focus on one task and give it the attention it deserves. Most of my days are spent multi-tasking or jumping back & forth between tasks.
- Town Meetings: We began this week, with the Ludlow Town Info. Meeting. This was a remote meeting, held on our Zoom account. It was streamed live on You Tube and televised live on TV. Eric handled the meeting, and was relied on to manage the Zoom traffic, acting as the liaison with Marty Nitka, Town Moderator. We have Cavendish's Town Info Meeting on Tuesday night (also remotely over our Zoom). On Saturday, we will be in Andover for a hybrid-format Town Meeting, which will be recorded and promptly turned around to get on TV that night. Then on Monday night we will be in Mount Holly for another hybrid-style Town Meeting. On March 8<sup>th</sup>, we will be in Plymouth for another hybrid Town Meeting.
- Green Mountain HS Basketball: We have been live streaming all of the home games for the boys' and girls' teams on our You Tube channel. Middle School teacher Mr. Norm Merrill had been volunteering on camera. This has been a valued service so far, with each game generating a sizeable (for us) audience. A couple of the games have had over 1,000 views on You Tube. Next week, March 4<sup>th</sup>, we will begin simultaneously televising the games live (so far, it's just been streaming on You Tube with the later playback on TV). The live streaming & broadcasts are being handled with the new equipment that we purchased back in June, for graduation season. After working out the initial kinks, it's been great to have. We are using it more & more, and it's bringing increased attention to our station and our services.
- Ludlow Rec Basketball: We received a request from the Rec. Department to live stream basketball games on Saturdays. We are going to do this starting this Saturday. They have someone who can volunteer to operate camera if we can handle the streaming. With the increasing requests and opportunities that live streaming bring, it makes me realize that I need to get more people trained on the equipment. Due to the pandemic, my availability to handle these productions on evenings & weekends has been pretty open, so it has not yet been an issue.
- Green Mountain HS Skiing: I fielded a request from the ski team to *record* (not stream or live broadcast) their race this Friday at Bromley. I think this would be great. However, I'm not sure I

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can pull it off, since I need to go to Andover Town Office to help Eric do some testing & set up for Saturday's hybrid Town Meeting. He will be handling that – and it's the first hybrid meeting with our new workflow. If anyone is interested and available to be at Bromley on Friday (I don't even know the time yet), I know they would be thrilled to have the coverage.

- Increased Programming Opportunities: There are plusses and minuses to all of these virtual events, Zoom meetings, and the like. For now, I'll just focus on the positives. We have increased programming because of it. We have been seeing a serious uptick in local programming, leading to us casting a wider net and engaging with more people & organizations. Just over this last month, we have received events / presentations (that we then turned into programming) from the Mt. Ascutney Regional Commission, Sustainable Woodstock, the Regional Ash Borer Committee, and a local yoga instructor. It's easy for people to do – and it's easy for us to promote.

## **Outreach & Marketing / Fundraising**

- E-News: Wendy Reynolds has been a great addition to our team. Working as a part-time contractor, she has been cranking out the weekly program highlight e-newsletters. The feedback on these has been positive, and it has led to increased engagement, some new members, and donations. In fact, on Monday's Vermont Edition on VPR (which was on the PEG Funding Study), we were mentioned because of a show that we highlighted in a recent e-newsletter. It was a comment about Zach McNaughton's "Virtual Ice Fishing Clinic" series (produced with the Dept. of Fish & Wildlife).
- Next Steps: Now that we have a good workflow established for the e-news, the next step is to format versions of the programming highlights to the weekly papers and other electronic platforms
- BR Independent School: We now have the MOU in place, which was requested as a way to formalize our partnership. We will begin this partnership by helping support students' History Day projects. History Day veteran (and BRHS alum) Newt Rose & I will be presenting to students next week, as way to get the ball rolling.
- Mill River Union HS: I have a call with the Assistant Superintendent, Brian Hill, on Thursday, to discuss ways in which we might collaborate with the high school. In December, we began televising the MRUUSD Board meetings on a regular basis. And, thanks to Rutland PEG TV, we have played the recent football season over the last month. I am looking to build on this.
- Woodstock Union HS: I will next reach out into the high school & middle school. This can be done in partnership with Woodstock Community TV. Whereas most students from Plymouth & Reading go to WUHS, this is also a good connection for us. I have teacher contacts there as well.
- Town of Reading: I have been doing some outreach in Town, in an attempt to drum up some interest in our services. My plan is to begin with regular meeting coverage and build out from there, as we have with other Towns.
- Memberships: We have taken in several new members, with very little solicitations. This is an area where we could use some help, with the roll out of a true "membership drive".
- Underwriting: I'm pleased to announce that we have 2 underwriters so far in 2021: William Raevis Real Estate / VT Properties and the law office of Marylou Scofield, Esquire. Both joined without any prompting. We have done very little marketing around underwriting. This is also an area that needs some focus.
- Town of Ludlow: During the annual info. meeting (which was held remotely and we hosted over Zoom), Selectboard members Bruce Schmidt (chair) and Justin Hyjek publicly thanked us for the services that we have been providing, and Eric specifically for all of his support managing the meetings on Zoom (if you watch the Town meeting, you will see that Eric is an integral part of it, as they relied on him to "triage" the comments & questions from the public). Bruce went on to say that

the community should be supporting us for the work that we do.

- Other Opportunities: With all of this increased and very visible work (esp. the remote / hybrid Town Meetings & live streaming of sports), we have increased opportunities to market the value of underwriting & business sponsorships. It sure would be great to have a stream of revenue to help fund some of these extra endeavors. Also, in terms of publicity, we have several different compelling narratives that would be good to shape into stories to pitch to local media. Some of these stories started to form last Summer when we were drafting the Okemo Valley Magazine article and have developed since then. The challenge is, as always, making the time for it.

### **New Equipment & Other Upgrades**

- New streaming server – our first of 2 – is being built. The purpose of these is to stream our TV channels over You Tube, so that anyone with an internet connection can “tune in” to our channels, no matter where they are. This will serve the non-cable subscriber population (which constitutes the majority of households in our area) and will provide a new outlet for potential funding. The streams will be hosted on You Tube, but there will be prominent links on the streams our website.
- With all of this new streaming in mind, and all of the other bandwidth-intensive needs of our work, which will only continue to increase, we are in need of a big upgrade to our internet service. Our long-time complimentary service from Comcast ended on January 1<sup>st</sup>. We are now paying the market price for that service, which is nowhere near enough to support these increased demands. The plan was to spend down the settlement funds (that we received from the Comcast vs Vermont case) on an upgrade. I have been in talks with VTel about making the switch over to their fiber optic service (from Comcast’s coax cable-based service). The difference in speed is drastic. I am waiting to hear back on price flexibility. A precedent was set when VTel gave our colleagues at FACT TV in Bellows Falls their top-level business class service for less than market price. I am waiting to hear back if that same offer will also be made to us.
- We now have some new equipment that makes the hybrid meetings and sports coverage that we have been doing better. Some of this equipment was purchased with the \$500 donation made to us by the Town of Mount Holly for the hybrid meeting coverage.
- We bought an additional laptop from Dell through the Tech Soup deal (Tech Soup is an organization that partners with tech manufacturers to make full of partial donations of equipment & software available to non profits). We purchased the first of these in the Fall, with the primary intend for Fred’s remote work. This new one was purchased with the intent to be shared between our new part-time hire (more on that below) and for coverage of hybrid meetings.
- My attention has now turned to our phone system – I am looking to knock that expense down, whether we stay with Comcast or switch over to TDS. Currently, we pay approximately \$200 / month for a system that is more than we need. I expect to have a reduced system in place by April 1<sup>st</sup>.

### **Administrative**

- New Hire: I’ve hired Sarah Devereux, a senior at Green Mountain (and daughter of past Board member Shannon Devereux) top work for us part time. Sarah is tech savvy and went through the AV Production program at River Valley Technical Center. She has been recording church services at St. James in Proctorsville for the last few years. She is helping with live streaming / broadcasting of sports and coverage of hybrid meetings. She will also be helping with some of the marketing work
- PEG Funding Study: The “PEG Access Study” has been submitted to the legislature and is now “out there” and garnering some attention. As mentioned above, Vermont Edition on VPR featured the topic Monday’s show. This week (Wednesday) it is being presented to the Senate Finance Committee. The report itself is quite long, but I will share the main talking points from VAN with

you. And you should listen to the Vermont Edition show: <https://www.vpr.org/post/new-report-assesses-financial-viability-vt-community-access-tv>

- Regional Collaboration: We had a joint staff meeting recently with SAPA-TV to discuss procedures for shared programming. We have several regular programs that we share back & further (school board meetings, church services, sports, Chamber shows, etc.). This was a good exercise. I continue to think about ways to work more closely with SAPA, and other stations in our region. There are some moving parts in our region that suggest the timing is ripe for serious consideration of meaningful collaboration – whether that’s shared resources, administration, or outright merger. Everything should be on the table. For starters, I suggest an exploratory mission, with joint meetings with the other organizations’ Boards, including Woodstock Community TV, CATV, and SAPA. These are the organizations in our region who have been expressing interest in some form of collaboration. We are probably a month or two out from being able to do this. CATV, for example, is now looking for a new Executive Director, so I’m sure that will take up their attention.

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