



## Director Report February 2023

### Administrative

- Comcast update: Representatives from the Vermont Access Network Board have been in discussions with Melissa Pierce from Comcast about the upgrade to HD channels. The upgrade for all of us will be taking place this Spring. For us at Okemo Valley TV, the work is a little more involved, because we are still transmitting to Comcast over old analog coaxial cable equipment. Melissa Pierce attended our November 17, 2022 Board meeting to discuss our contract renewal in general and specifically where things stood with the cable replacement / clean-up (from the incomplete work they initiated in 2019). We discussed the replacement of coax cable and the accompanying hardware with fiber optic cable and transmission equipment. Comcast agreed to this, and in December, Melissa drafted a “side letter”, which our Board signed, and served as an addendum to our new contract. During the Nov. 17<sup>th</sup> meeting, Melissa was also asked about HD channels; she told us that this was in the works and she had been meeting with the VAN reps. and it looked like we would all, indeed, be getting our channels finally upgraded to HD in 2023. The word from VAN is that  
There are 2 interesting things to note here:
  1. On November 15<sup>th</sup>, two days prior to our meeting with Melissa, Comcast introduced new offerings whereby HD service will soon be included with all video service tiers, including Limited Basic service, at no additional cost. So, it was already a forgone conclusion that we would soon get HD
  2. In order to be able to transmit in HD to Comcast, the cabling and transmission equipment would need to be updated. So, I surmise that the cable replacement work and upgrade to fiber optic was also a forgone conclusion. As it happens, we are only one of 4 Comcast stations in VT still transmitting to them over the old analog hardware. The others are Windsor-on-Air, Woodstock Community TV, & Middlebury – all very small stations. All of the others are either transmitting via fiber optic cable or an IP-based solution at this point.In any case, the long-outstanding cabling work will soon finally be taken care of, as will the mess that was left behind.
- VTEL CPG: As mentioned, VTel’s cable TV Certificate of Public Good (CPGs) is up for renewal. CPGs are required for public utilities to ensure that the public good is being met. Cable TV is regulated as a public utility (interestingly & surprisingly, the internet is not). We essentially exist as a PEG Access TV station due to a public good requirement placed on cable operators. The Public Utility Commission is the 3-member quasi-judicial Board that is in charge of regulating public utilities and issuing CPGs. The Vermont Department of Public Service (is the agency within State government that is in charge of representing the public interest related to telecom, energy, & water / wastewater. As part of the CPG process, the Department is required to conduct a Community Needs Assessment to provide input and help determine what the public good requirements should be. That is happening now – I will send an email to Board members with more detail about this. While the Department will include in its Community Needs Assessment any input it receives related to PEG Access, there is also a way to make sure any concerns get heard, by voicing them directly to the Public Utility Commission. And this is done through a formal process by filing a Motion to Intervene. I have done this, on behalf of the 6 PEG Access organizations who contract with VTel. This means that my

involvement in the CPG is limited to a formal process and all communications from me must go through the PUC. Everyone else, including Board members & other allies, can provide input in other ways. I will explain that in my email.

- VAN Legislative / Advocacy Work: The VAN Advocacy team is working hard again this legislative session, in partnership with Action Circles, building on the foundation that has been laid. The focus now is on drafting a piece of legislation focused on a “Community Media Public Benefit Fund”, that is exploring the idea of a pole attachment fee, which would be assessed to telecommunications company for connecting to poles in the public rights-of-way. A percentage of this fee would go to fund PEG Access. The concept has supporters in the House; more to come on this.
- Part-time Field Producer Position: I have interviewed one candidate so far. Another backed out. I expect to have the position filled within the next week or so. This is a 15-20 hour / week position. In addition to the new hire, I would like to build a pool of production people / stringers to fill in on occasional shifts. This would be a good opportunity for regional collaboration.
- Time Off: I am planning to take 5 work days off after Town Meeting, between March 9 - 15. That will leave me with 7 days remaining of PTO before June 30<sup>th</sup>. I have a tentative trip planned in early May that would use those remaining days. This is the last year – 2<sup>nd</sup> of a 2-year plan – to use up unused days that were accrued during the early COVID period of 2020-2021. The Board approved a one-time exception to carry over days from this period, to be used over a two-year period, ending 6/30/2023. With the remaining carry-over (10 days), added to the earned 33 days of PTO, I have a total of 43 days this fiscal year (FY2023). “PTO” is all-encompassing, and includes all holidays, personal days, and vacation time. I have my timesheet and PTO usage, as well as Rebekah’s, to share with the Personnel Committee (and for anyone else). I maintain all of this information in a spreadsheet.

### **Community Engagement / Fundraising**

- Underwriting: There has been limited activity in this area. The one update from me is Becky Wynne, who is a new community member who has taken interest in us & had gotten involved as a producer, volunteer, & advocate. She also has a consulting business, through which she has expressed interest in being an underwriter.
- BRIC Pitch Event: At the end of the month, I will be participating in a “pitch event” run by Black River Innovation Campus. It’s for one of their members who is working on a project that is related to community / public access TV.
- Outreach in Reading: I have been speaking with the Chair of the Reading Planning Commission / Zoning Board of Adjustment, Jean Goldsborough, about our involvement in Town. She has been sending us the recordings of her Board’s meetings- for some time & we run them. She & some other are interested in getting the Selectboard meetings covered- presently they are not recorded. I have expressed interest in helping with this, as it is in line with our overall goal to broaden our engagement & reach, and we have discussed doing more in Reading. We are officially designated in Reading by VTel, but VTel only serves a small handful of households in Town. The larger cable provider is Comcast. We have requested that same designation from Comcast, but as Melissa Pierce indicated to us, it’s not technically feasible for them to assign us as the PEG provider in Reading. Comcast TV subscribers in Reading see SAPA-TV, however SAPA is not designated either. Therein lies another opportunity for regional collaboration.

### **Production / Programming**

- Legislative Updates / Partnership: We have continued to record weekly legislative updates from new State Rep. (and former Okemo Valley TV Board member) Tesha Buss. The hosting role is now being done by Tom Ayres from Vermont Standard. These

are shared with Woodstock Community TV. I am trying to make all legislators aware of this opportunity, while also reaching out to other local news outlets about possible collaboration on doing something similar.

- Town Meeting Coverage: We are beginning to put together a plan for Town Meeting coverage. This is always resource-intensive for us, and more so now that we are supporting hybrid meetings. With new AV systems now in place in Ludlow and Plymouth Town Halls, and the anticipation of a 3<sup>rd</sup> system being in place in time for Town Meeting in Mount Holly, the logistics of equipping 4 simultaneous meetings that Monday night (March 6<sup>th</sup>) are not as difficult. That said, we do need some help making it all happen; if anyone is available to volunteer that night, please let me know. On Saturday March 4<sup>th</sup>, we also have a live hybrid scheduled for the Andover Town informational meeting; we are also trying to get the Reading Town Meeting covered at the same time (10am), though we may need additional support before committing.
- ESBR- We have been working with the Expeditionary School at Black River on a few different projects. One of them is a testimonial video from Becky Wynne, as a first in what is hoped to be a series of similar videos. And two of the Board members, Pat Pullinen & Gary Blodgett, have a regular studio show that they've been doing to promote activities at the school. And then Pay & Gary are coming in this next week to do an interview show with Jake DeArruda, the recent 3-day Jeopardy! champion and Black River HS alum. There is a growing interest in partnering with the school to develop curricula around new media, particularly podcasting. Others in the community have come to us in recent years with similar inquiries and requests. I think it is time to explore how we might meet some of this growing "community needs". There might be grant funding to explore, for example, to build out our conference room into the classroom that we once envisioned; it could be combined as a sound studio for podcasting.
- Volunteer Productions- Thanks to Noah for continuing to help with meeting coverage. This has been a big help. Another volunteer, Ian Bard, who works for the Vermont Journal, has taken a project that was initiated back in the Fall by Black River Academy Museum – they brought some former BRHS teachers into the studio, where they discussed a variety of topics, all about their time at Black River. The museum has been curating old BR memorabilia, to include video installations of interviews such as these. Ian is working on creating finished pieces out of the interview discussions. He has been putting in a lot of work on it. This project is a great example of collaboration & the value of volunteer support.

### **Equipment & Service Upgrades**

- Lightcast: We have been using our Lightcast service to support the live linear (24/7) streaming of our TV channels for the past couple of months, which has worked great. The next step was getting our apps built for the streaming platforms – I am pleased to report that the first one is now complete, for Amazon Fire. So, for anyone who uses that platform, they can now download & install (for free) the Okmeo Valley TV app. At the moment, there is only a handful of shows on there to watch, but we will be adding more. And as I type this, the remaining streaming apps will soon be following (for Apple TV, Roku, Google Play, and mobile).
- Website Upgrade: Our website, which is built on the Content Management System Drupal, is in need of an update. The version of Drupal on which it runs is no longer supported. We also have an issue with our local storage capacity for our video-on-demand (the server on which all of the video on our website lives is maxed out).