



Director Report January 2025

Administrative

- Reading Designation: Comcast has amended SAPA-TV's contract, officially designating the Town of Reading, while memorializing the MOU between SAPA and Okemo Valley TV, which states that we will share the PEG Fee funds for Reading 50/50. This means that we will start receiving some cable funding. A word of caution: the payments will be very small in the beginning. Because Comcast passes the PEG Fee onto its subscribers, it is opting to impose just a 1% fee in this first year (rather than the customary 5%). The percentage will be phased up to the full 5% over the next three years. Still, this is the outcome we were hoping for when we started having the discussions with Comcast, SAPA, and the Reading Selectboard two years ago. I appreciate the support from all involved, including Aimee Parnell at SAPA and her Board of Directors and her predecessor, Johnny Gifford as well as Melissa Pierce, Comcast's Regulatory Affairs for Vermont.
- Comcast Fund Balance: Vermont Access Network (VAN) reported having a fund balance left over from a 2019 settlement payment from Comcast. The fund balance was paid out to members proportionately; we received \$4,762, which I accounted for as "special project revenue", as it is intended to be accounted for separately from the regular cable / PEG Fee funds.
- State Appropriation: While receiving the unanticipated revenue from the fund balance was a nice surprise, our portion of VAN's State appropriation was the opposite type of surprise. Due to a change in the formula VAN used to determine this year's payments in order to make the distributions more equitable among all members, our payment went down considerably, to \$16,206 (from \$45K last year). The reason for this is because the population of the service area, based on census data, was weighted heavily. In past years, the formula was more weighted towards cable subscribers, rather than population. And when based on cable subscribers, Okemo Valley TV falls somewhere in the middle, in terms of size among our peers across the State. However, based on year-round population of the service area, we are near the bottom. Adjustments will be made in future years, in consideration of the nuanced population data in places like Ludlow & surrounding Towns.
- Legislative Advocacy: The Vermont Access Network (VAN), with the support of our consultant & lobbyist, Action Circles, has been hard at work on advocating for this year's State Appropriation request; the ask is for an increase in the FY2026 appropriation from \$1m to \$1.35m. The request is currently being considered in the House Government Operations Committee (on which local and newly-elected legislator VL Coffin sits). Initial testimony was provided by Lauren-Glenn Davitian from VAN & CCTV Center for Media & Democracy. [You can view that here.](#) (side note: all of the State legislative committees have their own YouTube channel - and all of their meetings are streamed & archived). There are still discussions about establishing a long-term funding model, with the legislature's support.
- Personnel Updates: Sarah Devereux is working just about half-time, doing production work. She works 2-3 afternoons at the station; the remainder of the work is in the evenings & weekends, covering meetings, community events, and handling some other shoots. Caroline Wade is interning with us, from River Valley Technical Center. He is here one day per week (Thursdays), and is available for picking up occasional other work as well. It has been going very well. Rebekah will be going on leave in June. We are working on an abbreviated version of her job description, in the anticipation that she will transition to working part-time in August or September. Most of that work will be remote. In anticipation of that, Elia has been getting trained to pick up some additional program scheduling work (remote). The need will be to have

someone “in house”, to help run the shop. Rebekah & I are working on what that role would look like; the plan is to have a job description ready for posting by April.

- More on Personnel: The Personnel Committee has been meeting to review the existing Personnel Policies; that work has been completed and a draft has been presented to the Board for its consideration. Next up on the to do list for the committee is to draft new policies; a short list of these policy areas (on which we do not currently have policies) has also been shared with the Board.
- Policies & Procedures: We staff began the work on revising our existing operating Policies & Procedures. At the beginning of the fiscal year (July), I presented to the Board a process for reviewing & approving policies. We have not yet made much progress. We ran out of time during the November Board meeting before we got to the policy review. Hopefully we will pick up where we left off after the previous meeting (in September). That is: 2nd reading of the first two policies (Statement of Purpose & Corporate Structure), and consider them for adoption, followed by a first reading & review of the Membership policy.
- Insurance: Back in November, I reported that our Workers’ Compensation policy was canceled due to the fact that the insurer, Star Insurance, no longer offers coverage for organizations that use volunteers. Our agent (former longtime Okemo Valley TV Board member, Sharon Bixby / Ludlow Insurance Agency) has looking for other options, and has found a comparable policy. This past Friday, she started an application on our behalf.
- Strategic Planning: Plans for this seem to have stalled; I am not sure where they were left.

Black River Radio

- Radio Committee: At the November Board meeting, the decision was made the radio steering committee an official Committee of the Okemo Valley TV Board. Carmine Iannace & I subsequently met to discuss next steps, as far as amending the FCC permit and the engineering work involved with that. Michelle Stinson will be heading up the committee as chair. There are currently 4 active members, who were members of the steering committee, plus Board members Bob & Sammy. Michelle will be providing a report for the Board and will be organizing the next meeting of the Committee for sometime in early February.
- Okemo Support: As you are aware, back in October, we received official approval from Okemo Mountain Resort for the placement of a transmitter & antenna. We need to now amend the FCC permit in relation to this; an engineering study is required. Carmine is coordinating that - this will cost approximately \$1,000 \$1,200. It is proposed that the radio start-up funds from the Town be used for this.
- Statewide Collaborations: Lots has been happening in the world of community radio. The ad hoc “Vermont Community Radio Network” has been meeting by teleconference on a monthly basis, with the support of Wendy Mays from Vermont Association of Broadcasters (VAB). Wendy & VAB have taken things a step further by organizing a community radio “summit” & legislative advocacy day at the Capitol Plaza, across from the Statehouse. That is on February 12th; VAN will also be participating in the event, as the synergy & togetherness of community radio & TV (e.g. “community media”) is really starting to take shape. As groups, we are stronger together than in our own silos. Wendy from VAB is also working on grant funding opportunities for community radio, for emergency response & preparedness. This was exciting to hear. I am all ears.

Buildings & Grounds / Equipment / Infrastructure

- Phone System: Thai finally got sorted out - I abandoned plans to switch over to TDS, which was not going to provide us with a system comparable to the one we have. Instead, I renewed the contract with Comcast, and we are now getting a much better deal (from \$256 to \$180 / month). Still, that amount is twice as much as we were expecting to be paying, based on the info. previously provided by TDS (and on which the budget for the year was based).

- Equipment Inventory: We will be spending a couple of Fridays in February taking a full inventory of all of our portable AV equipment, which will then be made available online. The eventual next step will be to integrate the inventory with a web form for signing out / reserving equipment, which will be part of the new website.
- Website: As part of his website building business (and not as Okemo Valley TV staff), Peter has begun the process of taking over the work on the build / migration of our new site. I am working with him on the preliminary stages. He is working for us as a contractor on this; the hope is by mid-Spring (late April / early May), we will have a rough draft of the site to show the Board
- Building Project: The time has come for us to make some decisions. We have a cost estimate, the bones of a plan (as detailed in the Building Program spreadsheet [here](#)), some pre-existing floor plans (which need updating), and a construction consultant able to take over the . Over the last year, we have raised \$32K in grant funds. In this year's budget, we allocated funds as a special project capital expense for the purpose of doing the work. We projected to raise another \$8,000 during this FY, while budgeting to use \$80K from our reserves, with remainder (approx. \$36K) to be financed. These numbers need some adjustments, to better reflect the factors in front of us today. A good first step, as I have suggested before, would be a field trip to SAPA-TV in Springfield. Their new home is in a building that they recently renovated. The general contractor on that job, Mark Blanchard, is also the owner of the construction management firm who provided our more recent cost estimate. I would like to engage with his firm to modify our floor plans based and to then have an artistic rendition created, which will help with fundraising (see below).

Production & Programming

- Our Production Work: We have done lots of new production work in recent months,, from all of the government meeting coverage, to holiday events, and various community events, as well as studio shows. We are keeping busy with all things production related!
- Cavendish After School Program: We continue to run the "video club" at Cavendish ASP on Thursdays. As a reminder, we are receiving financial support for this work (\$150 per session) from Two Rivers Supervisory Union.

Community Engagement

- Underwriting: After a productive Community Engagement Committee meeting in November to focus on underwriting, some momentum slid, and then the holidays hit. As such. the program got off to a slow / late start but has received a boost in recent weeks, first with VT Ski House renewing for 2025 (thanks, Lisa & Bob!), followed by Vermont Properties / William Raevis Real Estate (they doubled their contribution from 2024, to jump up to the next tier). The Community Engagement Committee has also brought in our fundraising / development consultant, Donna Lubrano, to help with a revamping of the program. Donna even had a meeting on her own last week with a prospective supporter. More to come on the progress, as it is gaining some traction.
- Fundraising for the Building: Donna is also helping the committee - and by extension the Board - to develop a plan for fundraising for matching funds for the building project.
- Membership Drive: Even though our fundraising attention has turned to underwriting and support for the building, the membership drive must be ongoing, as we have not yet hit the target for the year. The good news is that we are nearly at 100% board participation with annual membership
- Town Appropriations: All of our appropriation requests are in and will be considered by the respective Towns when their budgets are up for vote on Town Meeting Day. This includes Ludlow (\$2,700), Mount Holly (\$750), Plymouth (\$800), Cavendish (\$850), & Andover (\$850). Also, for the first time, we are requesting an appropriation from Reading (\$850). In order for the request to be included on the ballot, we needed to petition registered voters and collect at least 30 signatures. With the help of the Reading

Greenhouse & a Selectboard member, we were able to meet that requirement & get it filed with the Town Clerk in time.

- Town Fee for Service: With the updates to the Open Meeting Law (requiring Town government bodies to provide remote access to all meetings & to electronically record them), there is a new dependency on our AV services. This has initiated a discussion about a fee-for-service funding allocation that is more reflective of the evolving relationship that we have with our municipal partners, in respect to the AV / tech support and coverage of meetings. We are now receiving a \$500 fee for service stipend from Reading and starting in FY2026, we will be receiving a stipend in Mount Holly as well (\$1,000). This is a revenue stream that has potential to be further developed, provided we continue to provide reliable, quality service.