



Administrative

- Staffing Update: With the onboarding of Elia, we are now nearly exactly at 3 FTE, which is a good staffing level for us with the present workload and is the level for which we budgeted this year. If and when we grow more, we will need to look at increasing that level (which could only be supported through increased revenue). For record keeping, I maintain timesheet & PTO logs for Rebekah & myself, and I have shared the updated versions with the Personnel Committee. I would like for us to establish a procedure for getting these submitted & reviewed, for checks & balances purposes, and also because it would give me the extra incentive to keep them maintained & up to date. I recommend to the Personnel Committee that they should be reviewed at least quarterly. For part time / hourly staff, I maintain those timesheets bi-weekly, in tandem with the payroll schedule.
- PTO: I will be away the week of March 18th and again for the week of June 10th. After this time off and the Memorial Day holiday, I will have used up all PTO for this year (FY2024). Rebekah has used nearly all of her days at this point. That is the other thing that the 3 FTE level of staffing affords us: we can take time off and still have ample coverage.
- Low Power FM: In January, we were notified by the FCC that our application was deemed a “singleton”, meaning we had no competition in the coverage area and would be placed on a fast track of sorts. And just last week, we received the official word that we have been granted a permit to construct the low power FM station! We now have up to 3 years. This is good news not just for us, but the entire area. There seems to be some strong support throughout the community for this. Carmine Iannace, a resident of Shrewsbury who happens to have a radio engineering and broadcasting background reached out to offer his support. I met with him last month. He has already been very helpful with offering some general technical guidance, and would like to volunteer engineering support toward the cause and be a part of the steering committee. Right now, there is a contact list of approximately 30 local people who are interested in getting involved in some way.
- Reading: We have been getting a lot of positive feedback from Reading community members, as well as Board members about our involvement and service to the Town. We provided a live stream and telecast of the Town Meeting, which was well received. I have also had conversations with one of the Selectboard members (Bob Hartnett, the new Board chair) about our proposal to work with SAPA on the Comcast designation. He is supportive of getting the Selectboard to endorse our efforts and understands that it would help us get the PEG / franchise fee funding from Comcast for our work in Town, and that we would split that with SAPA, because we need to work within the framework of what Comcast’s limitations (they cited challenges with engineering logistics & existing infrastructure). If you recall, our MOU with SAPA basically states that we will continue to do what we are doing in Reading, but that SAPA will be Comcast’s designated PEG provider / “AMO” for Reading and will then split the proceeds with us. Of course, this could very well become moot before long, if the new Statewide legislation is passed (more on that below under “VAN / Advocacy Work”).
- Comcast Upgrades: We have long awaited the upgrade of our Comcast channels from SD to HD and for the transmission of our channels to go from analog (1980s technology using RF

modulators over coax cable) to digital (fiber optic). They initiated the work a year ago by installing some hardware in our master control room, but then that got delayed. We were told the changeover would happen in the Fall, which then became by the end of the year, then the end of January, and now I am not sure. I have been told there were engineering setbacks. At this stage, in all honesty, there are likely few Comcast viewers left watching our poor quality channels in SD. I am not sure how many we will gain once the changeover / upgrade finally happens.

Production

- Town Meeting Coverage: It all went well. We covered 6 meetings in Total – 3 of them live. One was on Saturday (Reading), with 5 taking place Monday evening. That part was certainly a challenge, but we pulled it off. Go team! Thankfully, we were able to enlist Stefan (our office mate from Red Vault Productions) to help with the Cavendish meeting.
- Legislative Updates: We are once again partnering with the VT Standard to record regular (bi-weekly) updates during the legislative session with State Rep. Tesha Buss (a former Okemo Valley TV Board member). She represents Woodstock, Plymouth, & Reading. I have offered to record updates with the other State Reps. in our service area. The only response I got was from John Arrison (Weathersfield-Cavendish), but we have not yet been able to nail down a time. I am hoping to get to the State House at some point during the 2nd half of the session, and will record short in person updates then, with any that are available (State Reps. as well as Windsor Co. Senators).
- New Show: We have a new bi-weekly studio show being recorded: “Average Daves Movie & TV Talk”, which is being produced like a podcast, with a video component.
- Yoh Theatre Vlog: Claire’s short vlog (video blog) series “Yoh Theatre Players” has been a great addition to the regular rotation. The series takes a look behind the scenes at all of the productions put on this year by the Yoh Theatre program at Woodstock Union HS.
- Rotary Club Guest Speakers: Rebekah and Peter have each recorded a Ludlow Rotary guest speaker recently. It would be good to make this a more regular thing.
- Mocktails: Peter finished the pilot episode of his creation, “Mocktails with Abby”, featuring Abby Lechthaler from Downtown Grocery. It has been out there for viewing for the past month. It is a fun show and is something different.

Community Engagement

- FOLA’s “Okemo Valley Outdoors”: The Friends of Ludlow Auditorium (FOLA) held the inaugural “Okemo Valley Outdoors” film screening event on Feb. 15th. Due to some changes, the event was slightly scaled back from what was discussed in the earlier planning stages, when Scott Stearns from FOLA attended our Board meetings. The event was mostly focused on celebrating the Catamount Trail and the Catamount Trail Association (2 of the founders attended and held a Q&A, along with Ludlow-based volunteer Bob Brandt. More than 50 people attended, which was one of the larger turnouts for a FOLA event in recent history. Noah MC’d and did a great job. We recorded the event and included the “300 Miles Melting” film in our coverage, which can be viewed on our website & other platforms. We received the rights to show the film from Connor Davis, the Executive Producer.
- Membership Drive: We have received \$1,100 so far this FY; there have been a total of 9 members, 6 of which are returning and 3 are new. In the budget, we projected to receive \$2,300 in membership revenue for the year.
- Underwriting: We have received \$1,000 in revenue from 3 businesses so far. We projected \$3,500 in revenue through the budget year (year-end June 30th). So, we are off the mark at this point and need to focus on this effort. We run the underwriting program on the calendar year schedule (as

opposed to the memberships, which we run on a fiscal year calendar). With it still being only March, there is some hope that we could grow the underwriter list.

- Town Appropriations: Our requests for funding from the Towns of Ludlow, Plymouth, Cavendish, Mt. Holly, Andover were all approved during Town Meeting Day voting. The total amount approved was \$5,650, which will be received in the next budget year (FY2025). This matches what we will be receiving this year. This just made me realize that the projected amount in the budget line item for FY2024 is incorrect. It is showing \$5,800, when in fact that is \$150 too high. The Board could choose to amend the budget, to have a more accurate projection.
- Grant Writing: All grant writing efforts right now are focused on the final phase of building renovations and any new and/or expanded programmatic offerings that will be generated as a result. In November, I submitted an application to the Ludlow-based Marro Trust. Even though notifications were due to be sent out in December, I have not yet heard anything. In January, I began working with 2 consultants – one as a grant writer and the other as a researcher. The researcher completed her work for us. The grant writer and I are currently working together on the first of 3 applications. One has an April 1 deadline, another is in early May, and another is open-ended. The goal is to raise as much as we can through grants, and to thereby limit the amount we would need to finance to complete the project. Our matching funds are currently “in hand” in our Building Fund. These are funds that were left over from the campaigns to finance previous phases of construction, plus any annual allocations from the operating budget that were made. When the time comes, the Board will need to review and approve the allocation of the Building Fund money. This work can begin with a more thorough review by the Finance Committee, which can then make a recommendation to the Board. For starters the goal should be to achieve a consensus from the Board on the general financing plan for the project.

Equipment / Buildings & Grounds

- New Equipment: In the last 2 months, we have updated & upgraded some of our equipment inventory. We have added the following: 2 portable LED lights for field production, a collapsible light reflector, an additional wireless lavalier microphone, 2 additional handheld / tabletop mics, 2 additional “boundary” mics, 2 broadcast-style mics with boom arms (for podcasting & voice over work), a replacement solid state record deck (for the studio control room), and 2 used studio tripods (to replace the giant pedestals).
- Equipment Sale: I have had some old AV equipment up for sale on eBay for the last couple of years, none of which had received any activity until now. Surprisingly, someone bought one of the items recently, and we are \$60 richer for it.
- Facility Build-Out / Final Phase: As mentioned above, I have engaged with the contractor & consultant to help with fundraising. The grant applications will require more recent cost estimates than the one we have (November 2021), so we need to get going with that. I have reached out to Mark Blanchard, who is a construction management consultant and sits on the SAPA-TV Board. He acted as general contractor on their project (they purchased the building that formerly housed the Springfield Food Co-op). Mark has offered to meet with me to tour our space and go over our floor plans. SAPA’s renovation project was completed a little more than a year ago and is a great space. In fact, it is worth taking a field trip to get a sense of what is possible (and perhaps what we are lacking). I suggest getting the Building & Grounds Committee together to do that in the near future. First, we should tour our space with the full Board so that everyone can get a sense of our existing space, and how it is used, as well as the future needs.
- Update on MERP Grants / Town of Ludlow: I have a non-update update on the MERP grants (Municipal Energy Resilience Program), which is the State grant program for municipal buildings.

Regional Planning (Mount Ascutney Regional Commission) was assisting the Town with a grant, and I was trying to find out if our building was going to be on their list. As I mentioned before, I had an initial conversation early on in the process, when it sounded like it was a possibility. I was hopeful that our building would make the cut, as there are some drastic needs for energy efficiency improvements. But I never received a response or follow up from the Town. I did, however, hear from Regional Planning that the Town included the Armory proper (“Community Center”) but not our building. They are still just in the first of a multi-step process, which is energy audits (if they are successful).

- Ludlow Auditorium AV Project (old business): Though this is not an item related to our own buildings & grounds, it’s worth mentioning because it still has an impact on our operations. Unfortunately, though, this is another non-update type of update. We (Okemo Valley TV & FOLA) have submitted the proposal to the Town Manager back in the Fall. I believe the intent was that he was going to bring it to the Town’s ARPA Committee to discuss and then make a recommendation to the Selectboard. We’re still in a holding pattern on that, it seems.

VAN / Advocacy Work

- Overview: Our Statewide membership organization, Vermont Access Network (VAN) has been working on direct legislative advocacy work for the last 5 years. The primary driver behind it was the loss of cable revenue and the need to modernize the regulations to better reflect the collective work we do now and in the future. There has been a two-pronged approach: 1) to seek funding to help offset some of our losses and 2) to help change the regulations and funding structure to PEG. The results have been positive – for the last 3 years, we have been receiving State budget appropriations, which have been made as “bridge” funding while work on finding potential new sources was being done. During this legislative session, VAN has a full time presence at the State House. Lauren-Glenn Davitian, the founder and longtime Director of Burlington-based CCTV / Center for Media & Democracy / Town Meeting TV (they have lots of names!) retired from her day job last year to focus on advocacy work. Doing this work on behalf of all of us in VAN has been her job during this time. She has been working hand-in-hand with VAN’s consulting firm, Action Circles, to corral us all and getting them the inputs they need (testimonies, data, etc.) so that they can help move things along through the legislative process. It really does require a full time effort, and especially so during this legislative session, which is jam-packed.
- FY2025 Budget Request: VAN has made a \$1 million “one time” request for FY2025. It is currently before the House Appropriations Committee and the response so far has been favorable.
- Community Media Public Benefit Bill: The real light at the end of the tunnel is the modernization of the regulatory framework, and to “de-couple” ourselves from cable TV, so that the regulations and funding structure is more reflective of the work we do. This has been a few years in the making, following a legislative Summer study in 2019, and draft legislation that followed, but where we are now is there is a “Community Media Public Benefit Bill” that has been working its way through House Ways & Means and Senate Finance. The bill in its original form calls for a pole attachment fee, whereby communications providers (except for the non profit “CUDs”, or Communication Union Districts) would be an additional fee to attach to a pole and that fee would then go into a fund. PEG would be one of the beneficiaries from that fund. However, in a recent turn of events, there is a chance that this will be getting amended to instead be a tax on streaming services, rather than a pole attachment fee. There is a precedent for this set by legislation from other States. Stay tuned!

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