



Director Report May 10, 2024

Administrative

- Staffing Update: We are ending the year with just a shade under 3 FTE. Sarah Bennett, who had been holding the part-time “fill-in” position, left at the end of April. Gavin Greenawalt is coming back to work part-time for the next few months, beginning next week.
- PTO: Just a reminder that I will be away June 10-18 and that will bring me to a 0 balance of PTO for the FY, which was the goal. It’s been a good year in that regard.
- Reading: The Reading Selectboard provided a letter in support of our partnership & MOU with SAPA, re: the Comcast designation. This whole convoluted regulatory scenario has now finally progressed to the next stage. SAPA submitted their request and the supporting materials to Comcast, who has requested more specific documentation. Suffice it to say this is still a work in progress, but at least progress is being made (albeit slowly).
- Comcast Upgrades: The more straightforward request that has been made of Comcast is the upgrade to HD channels and upgrade from coaxial cable (analog) transmission equipment & infrastructure to fiber optic (digital). This has been a work in progress for a few years now, and there seem to be continued delays. However, it is starting to sound like this will be finally be happening, though we do not yet have a date. However, we will be getting an “X1 box” for our Comcast Xfinity cable TV reception, on our courtesy customer account, which will replace our old little analog boxes (2 of which have recently failed). Slowly but surely, we are joining the 21st Century with Comcast. Baby steps.
- VAN Meeting: The VAN Annual Meeting was last Friday in Middlebury. Rebekah attended that on our behalf, carpooling with SAPA staff. I ended up not being able to attend, taking advantage instead of a quiet day at the office to focus on a grant application with a quickly approaching deadline.
- VAN Advocacy Work: The Legislature has adjourned as of this weekend. The advocacy work by VAN, which began 5 years ago, all came to a head during this legislative session, with two key pieces: 1) continued State support and 2) establishing a new funding source, apart from cable TV. Not only was this work instrumental by codifying the strong support of community media / TV in the legislature, but it culminated with a \$1m annual “base funding” appropriation in the State budget, This means that this should be ongoing, without the need of VAN having to go back each year to request it. However, in the end, the bill that I previously mentioned – S.181, the Senate “streaming tax bill” – was not taken up by the House. So the work towards a new regulated funding stream continues. Overall, some important strides were made, thanks to the Statewide & legislative advocacy work of the VAN leadership, VAN members, and Action Circles.
- Nominating & Elections: Our Nominating & Elections Committee met on March 29th and has engaged in some follow-up discussion. A recommendation was made to reduce the size of the Board for FY25, from 8 seats to 7 seats, in light of Noah’s resignation. The Board had a special meeting on May 2nd, and voted to accept this recommendation. That means there are 3 seats to be elected this year. The Nominating & Elections Committee did some recruiting, which yielded at least 3 candidates, possibly more. We also know that Newt is running for re-election. A public notice, calling for nominations, is required by our By Laws. As of today (May 10th), that has been

submitted to the local papers and is posted to our website and in our e-news & social media. We may very well end up with 8 –10 candidates for the 3 seats. Candidates are asked to provide a short (102 paragraph) biographical statement for the ballot and are also encouraged to come into the studio to record a short (up to 5 min.) video statement.

- Board Election & Voting: Voting will once again take place electronically (using Survey Monkey), with the option of receiving a paper ballot by request. The ballot will be posted on June 20th, one week prior to the Annual Meeting, The results will be tabulated & verified by the Nominating & Elections Committee members.
- Outgoing Board Members: This year we are losing 3 Board members: George, Zachary, & Noah. George is ending a 19-year tenure on the Board. The only other person who served longer than that was founding member Sharon Bixby, who served for 20. Incredible run. Thank you, George, for all you have brought to the organization! I was really glad to have Zach on the Board, having known him for years prior in different capacities and collaborating with him in different ways through his role at RVTTC. We have him to thank for Rebekah (and also Sarah). His 3-year term may be up, but I know we'll continue to work together, and I look forward to the continued partnership. And Noah is off to bigger things, having recently joined the Ludlow Selectboard, right after launching his own business. But it's great to know we have him as an ally. He came onto the Board right after her graduated from college, and stayed on for 8 years (half of that time as Pres.), which is amazing.
- Annual Meeting: During the May 2 special meeting, the date for the Annual Meeting was set for Thursday, June 27th. We will have an open house starting at 6pm, followed by the Annual Meeting at 6:30. The Annual Meeting will include the election, awards ceremony, and vote on the FY2025 budget.

Finance

- Budget Planning: The Finance Committee met this past week to review the 1st draft of the FY25 budget , along with this year's year-end projections. Of note, the cable franchise / PEG fees have been in decline for 2 consecutive years. We budgeted for an operating loss this year of approx.. \$27K, but will end up approx.. \$20K better than that due to receiving \$45K through the State appropriation, as opposed to the \$25K that was projected when the budget was adopted. All other areas of this year's budget are on track. This coming year (FY25) things will get slightly more complicated with the building project, but we can keep the accounting manageable by including the project (both its revenue & expenses) within the annual capital budget.

Production

- Legislative Updates: We have continued the partnership with the Vermont Standard during this legislative session, recording regular updates through interviews with State Rep. Tesha Buss.
- Other New Shows: Brendan McNamara, Ludlow's Municipal Manager, has begun a new series in our studio, called "Municipal Update", which has gained some traction. Divided Sky Foundation came into the studio to record a promo for the upcoming Fun(d) Run which generated a lot of engagement. The Average Daves TV & Movie Talk is a new bi-weekly studio show that has also been generating quite a bit of interest.
- Rotary Club Guest Speakers: Thanks to a combination of George volunteering to record these with his phone and us being able to send a staff person once in a while, several recent guest speakers have been recorded. Last week, George recorded the Club's presentation about Rotarians helping with the Ukrainian war relief effort. This week I will be recording the presentation from Meg Gonzales from The Windham Foundation / Grafton Cheese.

Community Engagement / Fundraising

- Low Power FM: We had our “listening session” earlier this week, which was attended by 6 members from the public, 4 Board members, and 2 staff for a total of 12 of us. 4 were remote and the rest of us were in the studio. All of the members from the public were enthusiastic about getting involved and agreed to form an ad hoc advisory committee. They have a request for the Board to consider. One of them, Michelle Stinson, plans to attend the Board meeting on the 14th to discuss it.
- Underwriting: We are well behind in projected revenue for underwriting. It’s an area that needs some focus; there is also the opportunity to expand it to include fundraising for the build-out.
- Social Media: Rebekah & I have been making workflow improvements for our work with Avery (who has been handling our Facebook & Instagram posts). And with that, some of the more recent posts have been seeing increased levels of engagement. It is important for us to decide what we want to use for metrics as far as budgeting for this expense. That will be helpful in guiding the discussion on the FY25 budget.
- Producer Awards: Each year over the last several years, we have given out 4 awards at our Annual Meeting: Producer of the Year, Youth Producer (or Youth Programming), Community Impact (or “Community Service”), & Outstanding Achievement. For this year’s awards, staff will make some recommendations for the Board to consider & discuss.
- Grant Writing / Fundraising: The fundraising for the final phase of the build-out continues. We recently submitted the Cultural Facilities grant application, with a request of \$30K. We are currently working on another one for The Windham Foundation and have yet another request in progress with VT Community Foundation. AS previously reported, we did receive a \$2,500 grant from the Marro Trust. Our development & fundraising consultant (Donna Lubrano) is also helping me establish a business sponsorship program tied in with underwriting (mentioned above). AS part of the marketing for the building project & fundraising, I have been working with Abby Childs on a timeline graphic, to help tell the story of the long history behind the build-out of our facility. I am also working on a web page for the project & accompanying fundraising efforts. The new graphic will be used for this as well. Before any of this goes public & is launched, I will share it with the Board for review.

Equipment / Buildings & Grounds

- Facility Build-Out / Final Phase: We needed an updated cost estimate for grant applications (as mentioned before, we had one done in late 2021 for the same purpose). I hired VISCC to do this work – it is a construction management company owned by Mark Blanchard of Springfield, who is on the SAPA-TV Board and acted as a volunteer General Contractor for their build-out & renovation project. The total cost for the cost estimation work was \$1500. VISCC has also submitted a proposal for Construction Management services and to serve us as Owner’s Representative for the build-out project. That work would include but not be limited to: design & architectural work, assisting with budgeting, overseeing any bidding process, selecting contracts, managing the construction work, & serving as our point of contact. The Buildings & Grounds Committee has had some informal discussions about possible modifications to our existing design & floor plans. Before getting too far down that path, however, my hope is that the committee, along with any other Board members, can get together to review our existing plans & “Building Program” and also tour a couple of the other sites in our region, including SAPA and perhaps Rutland PEG TV.

- Equipment Sale: I started putting up some pieces of our older, no-longer-used equipment on eBay. Over the past month, I have sold 3 items, netting us about \$600. A local person who has been using 2 of our older cameras on long-term loan (for the purposes of recording youth sports) is buying them for a total of \$500.
- Ludlow Auditorium AV System: Over the last month, there have been 2 meetings on the use of ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funds that the Town & Village received. We have recorded these meetings. There is at least 1 meeting left, and then each Board (the Village Trustees & Selectboard) will be making decisions. They are considering the \$25K request to fix & finish the AV system that was installed. There may be another request being submitted that would also affect us & the build out, as it applies to the radio system. To be discussed.