



Director Report February 2025

Administrative

- Legislative Advocacy: The VAN (Vermont Access Network) Advocacy team has been working hard in the outreach to legislators on the House Government Operations & Military Affairs Committee, advocating for the passage of the \$1.35 million request, which was (mostly) included in the Governor's proposed budget. Due to a clerical error, the allocation was reduced to \$1.3m, but there is an effort underway to get this increased back to the \$1.35m. One of our new local legislators, VL Coffin (Weathersfield-Cavendish-Baltimore) sits on that committee and has indicated his support. I met with VL at the State House on a recent trip to Montpelier (where I attended the Vermont Association of Broadcasters assembly) and recorded a short update from him. I also met & recorded with Senator Becca White. She told me that she will be introducing a bill in the Senate Government Operations Committee proposing a streaming-based fee to fund PEG / community access TV. A similar bill was going through the House & Senate Chambers last year, but got assigned to the wrong committee, where it was not taken up before time ran out.
- Cable Funding: As we have known for a long time, the cable funding is dwindling. Our most recent quarterly payment from Comcast was down about 10% from the same period last year; the VTel payment was about the same. Over the past year (the point at which we started seeing noticeable decline), the overall decline from cable funding is down about 2%, in line with what we were projecting. But those estimates were just wild guesses. To help get us more useful projections, Wendell has done some research on Comcast's cable revenue forecasts, which will help with our annual budgeting.
- Personnel Policies: Picking up from where last year's Personnel Committee left off, this year's committee convened in December & January to review & revise our existing Personnel Policies. This work was presented to the Board in January, for review & consideration. We need the Board to act on these policies so that they can officially be adopted (the document can be found [here](#)). The next step is for the committee to work on drafts for new policies.
- Operating Policies & Procedures: During the August 2024 Board meeting, the Board started the work of reviewing & considering revisions to the existing Operating Policies & Procedures. There was a 1st reading & discussion of the first 2 policies: "Statement of Purpose" & "Corporate Structure". The next step was to be a 2nd reading & consideration of adoption, and a 1st reading of the third policy ("Membership"), but this agenda item keeps getting tabled. It will once again be on the agenda for the upcoming meeting. The draft document can be found [here](#).
- Insurance: As reported last month, our insurance agent (Sharon Bixby, Ludlow iNsurance Agency) confirmed that the Directors & Officers' insurance policy had been reinstated by Travelers. She was also working on getting us a quote for a new Workers' Compensation policy. I am waiting to hear back about that.

- Strategic Planning: Wendell & I have discussed different ideas for resurrecting this effort. When the Board kicked off a strategic planning process back in Spring 2023, the timing was right for addressing some of the existential questions and to develop a plan for the future. The previous 5-year plan was written 7 years prior (now 9 years ago). We are now at a point where we are in a transitional period considering some impactful projects that could reshape the future and the core nature of the organization (radio, building, collaborations, etc.). A strategic plan should help us go through things like this, by serving as a guide. We may have allowed it to slip. But it's never too late to re-engage.
- Remembering Mark Huntley: A local legend has left us; former Board member of the station, show host, musician, business owner, Cavendish Selectboard member, State legislator, and all-around good guy, Mark Huntley, has passed away. He served on the Board of the station in the "before times", from 2007-2010; his ex-wife, Sharon, also served on the Board (from 2021-2022).

WLUD-LP

- Radio Committee: The "Black River Radio" committee is now an official committee of the Board of Directors. Michelle Stinson is chairing the committee. Sammy, Bob, & Newt have volunteered to be on the committee. There was a meeting last week to review notes from some of the members' field trip to WOOL-FM in Bellows Falls, and my notes from the Feb. 12th community radio assembly in Montpelier. Sammy and Wendell attended the meeting. Newt was mistakenly left off of the distribution list for the communications from the committee (an error in the relaying of information from me to Michelle). Some more time has been spent putting together budget numbers for the Board to review. A committee report will be provided by Michelle at the Board meeting.
- VAB's Community Radio Assembly: As mentioned above, the Vermont Association of Broadcasters (VAB) hosted an assembly for community radio in Montpelier on Feb. 12th., which I attended. It was part of a larger day-long event for all broadcasters (public / non-commercial as well as commercial). The day began with a workshop on procedural changes to EAS (Emergency Alert System), which was helpful. I spent most of the afternoon in a community radio meeting, where we discussed a variety of topics, from capacity building and volunteer recruitment, to collaboration with VAN (Vermont Access Network) & community partners, to fundraising.
- Legislative Advocacy & Fundraising: Following the approach of VAN, and with the help of VAB, community radio leaders are advocating for legislative support. The work is starting with the House Government Operations & Military Affairs Committee (the same committee where VAN's work has been focused). House Bill H.307 is to establish a VT Community Radio Network Grant Program. There is clear synergy and overlapping goals between the support being sought for community TV (through VAN) and community radio (through VAB). My personal feeling is that a coming together is inevitable; for now though, the approach is to collaborate between community TV & radio on smaller projects to start, and on the local level.
- Vermont Community Radio Network Meetings: These are taking place once per month, over video conference. Each meeting is focused on a particular topic. And as a way to

foster and encourage more collaboration, the plan is for each of us to take turns facilitating the meetings and leading the discussions.

Buildings & Grounds / Equipment / Infrastructure

- Equipment Repairs: During the January Board meeting, one of our cameras fell off a tripod (it was accidentally not secured). This was because there was some other equipment that I was trying to use for the feed to Zoom for the remote participants of the meeting that was not working. I quickly went to a Plan B without realizing the tripod had the wrong mounting on it. The camera fell to the ground, which broke some little plastic pieces on the focus ring and the attachment to the lens hood. The total cost of the camera repair is \$440. I am providing the details here only to demonstrate something that is partially a result of the limitations within our facility. We only have one completed room: the studio. It doubles as a meeting space, quiet working area, a room for conference calls, and sometimes a dining room. Since we routinely are holding / hosting hybrid meetings (and not just Board meetings, but often other meetings as well), we should have dedicated space & equipment for this. The less moving things around, “jerry-rigging”, etc., the less headache and repair expenses we incur.
- Building Project: I have recommended to the Building Committee and will state it here for the Board to consider: we should allocate some funds (up to \$5,000) to engage with VIS Construction Consultants to A) consult with us on the phasing of the project, and B) provide an updated architectural drawing (“floor plan”) , based on our existing floor plan (from 2011) and [“Building Program” spreadsheet](#). A graphic timeline of our journey can be found on the [About page of our website](#).
- Website: Peter is starting the first steps of the website. We should be able to launch on the new platform by June. Some on the Board requested an opportunity to view the site in draft form. I am thinking this could be a good agenda item for the Annual Meeting in June (though it’s possible we might be ready for a “show & tell” by the May Board meeting.

Production & Programming

- Town Meeting: Town Meeting Day is next Tuesday. Most Towns these days do not hold their meeting on Tuesday, and most only hold informational meetings, with voting by Australian ballot rather from the floor. We cover Town Meeting for each of the 6 Towns that we are designated to serve: Ludlow, Cavendish, Mount Holly, Plymouth, Reading, & Andover. We will be live streaming all of them and live broadcasting the ones where it will be possible. This year, the meetings are all spread out among the 6 Towns to the point where it is very manageable. The fun all starts Saturday morning - I will be at Reading. Sarah will then pick up the equipment from me in Reading and take it to Cavendish, where she will cover that Town Meeting at 2pm. Then on Monday, we have Andover at 5pm, followed by Mount Holly at 6pm, with Ludlow & Plymouth, both at 7pm.
- Legislative Updates: The partnership with Vermont Standard continues, with weekly interviews with State Rep. Charlie Kimbell. During Town Meeting week (next week), we are starting a new partnership with The Chester Telegraph, kicking off a new series of legislative updates with State Rep. VL Coffin, and possibly others.

- Pro Bono Community Productions: Sarah D. & Caroline (intern) teamed up to cover the concert at Ludlow Town Hall auditorium this past weekend. Gypsy Reel and Rick Redington & Tuff Luv performed. Earlier the same day, Sarah provided coverage of a hybrid presentation from the Black River Action Team & VT River Conservancy on protecting native plants. Last month, Sarah & Caroline provided event coverage of the Fire & Ice fundraiser event for the Ludlow Firefighters' Association (hosted & sponsored by William Raevis / Vermont Properties), top tier underwriters of Okemo Valley TV.

Community Engagement

- Focus on Fundraising: As cable funds decline, there has been a need to transition some of the focus of our organization to having more emphasis on fundraising and generating revenue. We are fortunate to have State & Town support, line items that can hopefully be further developed, but there is a need to dramatically increase our other revenue streams - underwriting, memberships, grants, and fee-for-service. In part, this is why we have hired Donna Lubrano to consult with us. So far, her efforts have been focused in the Community Engagement Committee, but the work has much wider impacts.
- Underwriting: Thank you to Stefan & Wendy for enrolling Red Vault Productions as new underwriters. And to The Killarney for signing up as a "Patron" level underwriter. Before we turn our attention away from underwriting for 2025, there is still some work to do. I am waiting to hear back from a couple of other businesses I have asked. Meanwhile, the Community Engagement Committee is also working on overhauling & modernizing the underwriting program in general. As part of this effort, Lisa drafted an updated one pager for us to consider. There has been some discussion of new tiers as well, but I think this is a little premature to do this before the launch of the radio station, as I believe that synergizing the TV & radio will generate more interest & lead to more opportunities, rather than focusing on just underwriting for TV. It makes the most sense to do this underwriting "reboot" in tandem with the launch of the radio station. And in the meantime, we should focus whatever time & energy we have to give now on the 2025 campaign. I will be meeting with Donna this week to flesh this idea out.
- Fundraising for the Building: Donna is helping us to get organized with a local fundraising plan, for raising \$50K towards the final phase of the building project, which will be a critical piece to the financing plan (along with the \$36K in grants, plus matching funds from our Building Fund).
- Membership Drive: We can use the opportunity of the Board's updating of the Membership policy as a means of conducting a new, abbreviated membership drive.
- 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.
- Collaborative Project: We look forward to the next steps with the youth media project, working in Collaboration with Black River Area Community Coalition (BRACC) & the Chester Teen Center. We are helping support the production of teen podcasts. We have a new partner in the project: WOOL-FM. Together, we'll be working with Lauren & Andrew at the Teen Center.

