

## Mike Ferrant

---

**From:** N. Rice <hope247@sover.net>  
**Sent:** Thursday, October 24, 2019 2:59 PM  
**To:** Mike Ferrant  
**Subject:** [External] RE: funding for community access TV

[External]

Dear Mr. Ferrant,

I want to express my support for wanting funding to continue for community access television stations such as ORCA. I understand there was a hearing recently on the topic, but I was unable to attend it and do not have specific information about it. I am assuming the topic was continued funding for Community Access TV. If it was something different, please let me know. If it was that, I just want to let someone there know that I feel that coverage of local government meetings is important, both to keep local people informed and to protect our democracy on a town and state level. Television access to things like public hearings is a way to be informed and I feel also a way to keep public officials accountable.

I used to go to my sister's house in Massachusetts and would see topics like select Board meetings, etc., listed on her local channel and I thought, "How boring, Who would want to watch those?" However, more recently, there was a very important Development Review Board hearing in my town which I had been unaware of, so I looked it up on ORCA Media and it was most interesting – because it was about the happenings in MY TOWN. So I revised my thinking on what is boring and what is not.

I also feel it is very important to be able to access local programs such as the one on Oct. 1 in Montpelier which informed the public about the possible transport of high level nuclear waste across our nation's highways, railways and waterways over the next several decades if a bill in Congress is passed authorizing that. It appears that keeping that very dangerous waste where it was produced at closed nuclear plants is the safer way to proceed. Most people would not physically attend such a program on that topic, but if they can watch it on TV or even stumble upon it in the listing, that is one more better informed citizen.

These are reasons I fully support community access television, and I hope the legislature will keep on funding it.

(If you are not the person to whom this should be addressed, would you please forward this on to the whoever is attending to this?).

Thank you.

Sincerely,  
Nancy Rice

Randolph Ctr., VT



Scanned by McAfee and confirmed virus-free.

This message has originated from an **External Source**. Please use caution when opening attachments, clicking links, or responding to this email.

Testimony for PEG Access Study Committee

Public Hearing Monday, October 21, 2019

Elaine Haney, Chair, Town of Essex Selectboard and Chair, Channel 17/Town Meeting  
Television Board of Trustees

Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today, and for exploring sustainable funding options for Vermont's PEG access organizations.

My name is Elaine Haney, and I am the chair of the Town of Essex Selectboard. The Town of Essex includes the incorporated Village of Essex Junction, and we are the second largest municipality in Vermont, with a combined population of over 21,000.

I have been the chair of the board of Channel 17 Town Meeting Television for 4 years, and have represented both Essex and Essex Junction on that board for the last 7 years. I am also an employee of the Agency of Commerce and Community Development, but I am not here in that capacity today.

We rely heavily on Channel 17 as an essential part of comprehensive community outreach for multiple controversial topics our residents care about. Live streaming of public meetings conveniently connects people with the Selectboard and Village Trustees, but more importantly our residents are watching our meetings after the fact, online, multiple times. The videos about our recent firearms discharge ordinance amendments were viewed and shared hundreds of times. The lone reporter who covers our community for our local newspaper seems to write about most of our meetings--guess how he manages to do that: by watching Channel 17 recordings. Residents refer to planning commission meeting videos to maintain accountability, as they watch buildings go up in their neighborhoods and want to ensure that what is agreed to at a planning commission meeting actually happens. Essex and Essex Junction are once again preparing to vote on merger. Channel 17 is a crucial part of educating residents on how merger might impact them.

We simply cannot do the business of governing without our PEG access station. The current precarious state of funding for PEG stations statewide concerns municipalities deeply and we urge the Legislature to consider alternative funding models that will sustain and strengthen them.

Channel 17's coverage area is comprised of Essex, Essex Junction, Burlington, South Burlington, Williston, Winooski, and parts of Colchester--over 200,000 people have access to our services. Each municipality pays annually for meeting coverage.

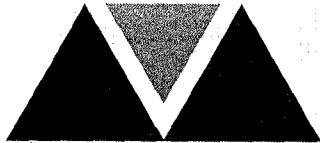
However, the cost of recording, editing, and broadcasting these meetings far exceeds the funding the municipalities can provide. The balance currently made up by funding from local cable providers is in jeopardy, and our member municipalities will not be able to replace it.

In the past 4 years, we have twice asked our member municipalities to double their annual appropriation to Channel 17. I think you will agree that requesting a doubling of appropriations on a regular basis is not a sustainable funding model. We will soon propose a small annual increase that we hope our member municipalities will be able to absorb. But the potential gap in funding we face could not be made up unless we asked each municipality to increase their appropriation over 400%. Our member municipalities are willing to cover part of the cost of providing public access to local government but are unable to carry the whole burden of declining revenue.

We must identify sustainable sources of revenue that will not only allow PEG stations to continue providing Vermonters access to government, but that will also enable them to keep up with changing technology and the challenge of reaching the citizens who depend upon that access wherever they are, be it online, on their phones, or in front of their tvs.

We are encouraged by the Legislature's willingness to explore the possibilities of how to sustainably fund the essential service PEG stations provide their communities. We support the exploration of revenue alternatives like allowing municipalities to establish public right of way use fees to cover the use of highway and street rights of way by providers of telecommunication services. We look forward to uncovering more alternatives as the explorations into potential funding models continue. We urge you to prioritize this discussion so that potential solutions can be developed and implemented before it becomes an emergency.

Thank you again for working with us to ensure access to local government for Vermonters by protecting and strengthening our PEG stations.



**OKEMO VALLEY TV**

37C Main St.  
Ludlow, VT 05149  
(802) 228-8808  
www.okemovalley.tv

October 21, 2019

PEG Access Study Committee  
Vermont State House  
ATTN: Mike Ferrant  
Re: PEG Access Television Comment

Mr. Ferrant and Members of the Study Committee:

I write to you from Okemo Valley TV, a small non profit community ("PEG") access television station based in Ludlow and serving the small, rural region around it. Last year, the unexpected loss of funding from cable TV franchise fees, due to the GAAP changes implemented by Comcast, resulted in a 7% budget shortfall for our organization. On top of that, with the anticipation of the FCC's franchise fee rule change, we cut our operating budget by an additional 10% this year (FY2020).

The budget reductions have translated into cuts to staffing and other expenses. For several years, we have been working towards developing our other revenue streams, which include municipal & business support, memberships, small grants, and fee-for-service projects. We have seen some very modest increases in these areas over recent years, but the bottom line is that those funding sources will never amount to a replacement for what is being lost through various cuts to the franchise fee model. It is particularly challenging to make up for these losses while we are operating under reduced staffing. In short, we are attempting to do more with less. One of the ways we are adapting is to work with some of our neighboring colleagues (such as with SAPA-TV in Springfield, Woodstock Community TV, CATV, Windsor-on-Air, GNAT) to find ways we can collaborate and pool resources. Despite the small gains we might be able to make through economic efficiencies and local fundraising, the work that we do and the role we play in our communities are in jeopardy.

PEG Access organizations no longer solely operate cable television channels (which is a full-time job on its own); we are embracing and engaging our communities with other delivery methods and with other forms of electronic media, as the demand for those things rises. PEG Access has evolved, and will continue to do so. As such, the funding model(s) must too evolve. Increasingly, the work we do involves broadband as much as it does "traditional" cable television. In consideration of this, coupled with the fact that cable TV franchise fees are under threat, I applaud the committee's efforts to evaluate and identify new funding sources. Your work shows a recognition that community access stations such as ours are valued and relied-upon community-based media resources. I appreciate the support shown to this point and hope that, together, we can help independent, non profit community media thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Regards,

Patrick Cody, Executive Director

## Tammie M. Reilly Testimony for PEG Access Study Committee 10-21-2019

Thank you for the opportunity to present my comments on the issue of funding Community Media in Vermont. Solutions for creating and distributing local content are under threat, this is why the work of this committee is vitally important for the people of Vermont.

Greater Northshire Access Television (GNAT-TV) serves eleven towns in Southwestern Vermont. Our service area population is about 15,000 people, and our cable channels reach 6000 plus homes. Many years ago we recognized the need to offer programs and services that were relevant to people's 21<sup>st</sup> century lives. We built up our government coverage. We launched new youth education and training programs. We acknowledged that our local information needs were not being met by commercial television. Yes, we have access to commercial television located in Albany, NY, and Burlington, VT, but coverage of issues that affect the Southwest corner of Vermont is negligible. Frankly, coverage exists primarily when something terrible happens.

To address this news and information desert, we launched The News Project in 2016. The program is a mechanism to provide pertinent local information to the people in our eleven distinct communities. Since 2016 GNAT-TV produced 716 pieces of local news content. While the cable provider does not provide us with viewer data, we are able to capture online statistics. Between 2016 and 2017 our online video views rose by 56%. Between 2017 and 2018 our online video views rose by 176%. This increase in online community engagement reflects both, the relevance of information offered by The News Project, and our ability to leverage online distribution platforms. GNAT-TV plays a vital role in providing television coverage of our community, our government process, our culture, history and important local issues that impact the daily lives of citizens. As franchise fees decline, programs such as The News Project will certainly disappear.

Several years ago, we also recognized that the cable industry is evolving and regulatory structures may change. We began thinking strategically about development and fundraising and embarked on changing the culture of our organization to support our fundraising and development efforts. We built a modest list of donors and underwriters and, each town meeting day, we ask voters in each town for a small appropriation of \$2000 to offset the costs of our

government coverage. In light of recent events (the loss of subscribers, the FCC ruling, and revenue decline due to the GAAP accounting changes), our organization is exploring all options to secure our future.

We are making many operational changes to address the funding shortfalls and we continue to develop our fundraising plans. Unfortunately, after offering services free of charge for nearly twenty-five years, we are compelled to charge fees to our constituents for many of our services. We are reviewing our programs and service policies. We are developing fee-for-service programs for nonprofit organizations and schools. We have instituted modest fees for training programs. We have held off on purchasing new technology and our staff will not receive cost of living increases.

Despite these strategies, 92% of our funding is still derived from cable subscribers. Austerity measures and modest revenue generating strategies will not be enough to sustain our organization. Our organizational capacity is challenged as we try to build a development structure while delivering essential programs and services for our community. Experienced fundraisers know it takes focus and dedicated staff to be successful. As such, endeavors to build out development capacity comes at the cost of delivering essential programs for our community. This reality must be recognized.

As regulatory structures and market transformations force our sector to define our value and relevancy, it also provides us an opportunity to be resilient and innovative. I am hopeful that the legislature will find a solution to support community media and the needs of Vermonters by requiring communications providers to contribute to the public good for use of the rights of way. Community Media is a public asset worth protecting to ensure the vitality of Vermonters. At the of the day we are talking about people.