

The Future of Community Media in NYS April 18, 2015
Maryann Arrien Alliance for Community Media NYS [ACMNY]
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Open Stage Media Videotaped Roundtable Discussion - Summary 1 hr. 32 min

There are vast sections of New York state that have either no local channels, or an inadequate number of channels and staffing to support their operations, putting New York State residents at a disadvantage compared to other states in the North East Region when it comes to seeing their local government and school meetings, as well as local cultural programming on Community TV channels.

Panelists include

- **Philip Morris**, Proctors Executive Director,
- **Peter Lopez**, NYS Assemblyman District 102, Schoharie, Ulster,
- **Angelo Santabarbara**, NYS Assemblyman District 111
- **John A. Figliozzi**, former Chief of Municipal Assistance at NYS Public Service Commission; FSI Municipal Consultants,
- **Michael Vandow**, President Schopeg, Access Inc.
- **Mike Wassenaar**, Alliance for Community Media national organization President

Summary from ACMNY:

The panel discussed the value of PEG Access Television, why it is absent, weak or dying in some areas. They speculated on ideas of how to remedy that, took stock of

- how PEG Access TV is presently funded and how it should be funded in the future
- the changes in video distribution technology.

In addition to new funding streams, they addressed the problem of the lack of parity of video quality and channel accessibility of local community non-commercial channels with their local 'for profit' local TV channels counterparts.

Most cable providers do not provide closed captioning, a presence on the electronic programming guide necessary to record a local access TV program with a DVR, and some even relegate local PEG TV channels to a channel with sub-menus that are inconvenient to access, leading to less of a viewer share than commercial television.

My notes

Q. How do you feel PEG is important to your community?

Morris - *Proctors* PEG access is part of entertainment ecosystem: film, TV, live events. In Schenectady we webcast, we have a deep relationship with school district.

Santabarbara - Schenectady channel 16 "so much local, good information..." A world of possibilities

Lopez - is concerned that local issues are filtered by the media and by bloggers.

Figliozzi—that NYS PSC [now extinct] established baseline rules for community cable TV [1970- 1990]. NY State was active early.

Vandow - small municipalities local board meetings plus community access. Community sees what education is doing, it builds support.

Figliozi- States were once cable based; small community versus large corporation. In New York localities can demand it...

Morris: cable is now one of a dozen methods e.g. LTE. FiOS. *Changing technology*.

Maryann. Changing technology: In Connecticut the state levied fees on cable and satellite providers; \$800,000 a quarter. Franchising fees are on the wane [17:58].

We need to find new technologies to pay fees; expand beyond a single stream of funding. Maybe cable is paying too much. The responsibility should be shared. Create one stream of funding? [19.58]

View maps of CT, MA, VT, NY: shows community access, broadcast TV, noncommercial FM radio. Connecticut has state franchising. What Schenectady has is not universal.

Possible problem is small community size?

But Potsdam, Binghamton are not small; Chautauqua County has 190,000 people

Is it too late? We webcast plus have video on demand. Next round of contracting... Too late

Small communities are dealing with large corporations. In New York a framework exists. Citizens can demand it like Schoharie did.

Philip: how do we attract community when there's six options not just cable? Go to Verizon's LTE. FiOS.

Connecticut instituted a fund for technology infrastructure paid for by cable and satellite companies.

Are all states relying on franchise fees? Vermont state franchise has better system, chunk goes to PEG, they fiber network the whole state.

... Internet uses cell towers and fiber optics

Phillip—The Governor's broad band proposal: can it include support for growing public access? 21:05 Phillip likes "community access" not "public access "

Expand broadband – expand community access. Montgomery County faces some problems. They were cable deserts in cities. We can't get signal from Capital Rep; it is in a place but can't get a good signal.

25.28 Figliozi - What is a sustainable business plan? Several points of support is needed. PEG's approach is to get grants; Public TV asks for donations from subscribers? BBC model is taxing TV sets annually

28.45 Maryann: Massachusetts has non-profit model it started with an understanding that all cable franchise fees should go to pay for cable related purposes, and now is a officialy a State law that 100% must go for Community Media.

Figliozi- once a community has it, it loves it. Challenge is to get it off the ground.

30.00 Philip: we promised quality, better than satellite

Assemblyman Angelo Santabarbara: What model is best? It needs an incentive up front, the willingness to pay, some tension... if it focuses on what people like.

Maryann: keep franchise authority but State Franchising is not good for PEG. In California State Franchising destroyed half of PEG centers by cutting funding.

32:15 Philip Morris: Big hurdle: The rule you can't spend on operational support, only capital expenses, is not a rule it's a negotiation. Today HD is affordable, 3 years ago unthinkable. It needs ongoing support

Vandow: we work with Cobleskill teachers: video literate students. It is a people and a money thing. A nonprofit can raise money with creative fund raising.

Figliossi: it is great to get cable operators to partner with community. Schenectady combined arts & PEG

Why is public not asking for all three channels? Government meetings, school board meetings. Is there some fear?

38:19 Mike Wassenaar: Is there a fear of government channels?
If there is you have to ask why and build solid connection.
In theory you get better informed policy makers;

You can use meetings to manage public complaints. Politicians and media live their life in the open.
Why resistance? 42.25

It's not a blog it's direct communication. You can see delivery not just content. Is he a bully, a facilitator? It's a great way for community to be informed. 43.27

44.49 Gavel- to- gavel coverage.

Figliozzi – lesson from NYSPAN 30 years – capital cable vision. What happened is people cared only about their interest, but hey were keenly interested! Legislators got good feedback.
All of us have some interest in other governmental issues. 45:52

48:14 Wassenaar gives 1950s Trempealeau, Wisconsin example of the popularity of Saturday night polka dancing on television: “better than junk beamed down from NY or LA.”

It is an example of culture that unifies; it allows community individuals to express themselves;
Other examples oral history, documenting community history.

STOP AT 51.00

Figliozzi- There is no fear now; all the scary video content has broken through. People like reality TV.
“Pigs break fee!”¹ Before it was only professionals on TV and amateurs on access; the issue now is “why have it on TV if we can get it on phone, I-pad?”

Assembly member: local newspapers rely less on nationally syndicated AP pieces in favor of local submissions.

¹ It would have been a thrill to see those buffalo cross the Hudson and the Thruway!

Maryann: Massachusetts public access is run by staff. ... how many more paid jobs would we have in NY if we had more TV access?

Video interviews with NYers that work on access TV in other states.

Jennifer Evans West Hartford Connecticut a New Yorker at heart gives examples about getting local news out e.g., Commemorating 9-11 event

Erica Jones from Troy, does video, production, community outreach, event coordination. Massachusetts is rich in community media; New York State does not support community network. She wants to return. Describes New York local access= "1980 version of community bulletin board"

PSC Figliozzi: "community media" is better nomenclature than PEG; a community media center.

1:01 Philip it ties in with eat local and buy local.

Figliozzi- true as world gets bigger there's a parallel interest in the local news; local food etc.

Two Mentors:

Nancy Richard Exec director Plymouth community access TV serves 110,000 pop.

October 2014 Mass. state law = municipalities' cable franchise fees must go into cable related purposes mostly for PEG access TV;

Mass has access in most of state; Some parts of western Mass do not have cable.

Older settled homeowners subscribe to cable. People bounce back between Comcast and Verizon.

These giants are spending millions of dollars to have a merger; they foresee future of community access TV.

Her mother is 86 and *will not watch TV on a computer,*

1:04:04 Karen Hayden Exec Director of Methuen Community TV, Massachusetts; Chair of ACM NE region [New Eng + NYS]. Youth have grown in their studios now working in media.

New York has large spaces between communities but so does VT and VT has progressed further. What does New York care about? ACM is putting together an archive of material to help other states. 1:06:

Figliozzi: linchpin: franchise fees required for community TV in New York goes into the general fund. Will the legislature change that?

Assembly member: It's worthy of discussion. Learn how other states succeeded. Getting info to people is crucial. High-speed broadband initiative is as important as telephone lines once were. Find a state model. New York needs combine discussion of access with high-speed broadband.

1:09 Assemblyman Kevin Cahill Ulster: The demise of local community newspaper and news radio is a big loss; causes community to fragment. The glue is access media. Ensure its growth and perpetuation. We need to bring access to level of professionalism; it can't be left to volunteers. We need to start with legislation to provide fiscal infrastructure and minimum standards of community access.

Q. Do you think the channel placement and speed of accessibility should be equal to commercial TV?

A. Absolutely. The franchise we give to cable TV or to satellite systems or the ability to change the landscape of our neighborhoods should come at a price. Support and access fiscal infrastructure at least to the same extent as shopping networks and unique channels.

We can't put all our chips in cable basket. To ensure a funding stream is around in 5-10 years we have to make sure we are in touch with changing technology and changing tastes of the general public. To start get spirit of community involved.

1.11

Assembly member Sandy Galef (95th Assembly District) – big promoter since 1981...

Two shows. "Speak out with Sandy". Bring pro and con. We need a minimum standard. New York used to be the state that started everything. We're trying now with legislation we passed. Massachusetts was taping the legislature in mid 1990s. It took New York many years plodding and prodding. Our laws are old fashion.

1.14 Representative Chris Gibson 19th District US Congress: essential to revitalizing democracy. We work with local leaders; community broadcasting is essential to our future.

Maryann adds: Gibson offered to cosponsor Cap Act which isn't happening on the national level. It's interfered with States rights, and the question is back in the court of each state to solve the funding of PEG.

Q. Is there a chance for digital parity? We are at a disadvantage in quality and equal accessibility with commercial. We don't have video parity. It is not accepting the data for the Electronic Program Guide.

Figliozi C: bottom line ***impetus must come from community***. 1.19. 02

Maryann: we are left in the dust. What can we do at state level? How do we have parity?

Michael Wassenaar President of Alliance for Community Media - fear is that alienation with how things work at the local government level risks community disintegration

Make the decision-making process transparent or risk alienation.
People don't believe in government... Open government is essential

Show people the power of using technology for social purposes.

Philip: The social contract we live by is built on printed word.

In electronic age it requires electronic response.

It is built on power of news.

We represent electronic response

Also, there are videotaped comments from:

-NYS Assemblywoman Sandy Galef (District 95),

-NYS Assemblyman Kevin A. Cahill (District 103),

-US Congressman Chris Gibson (NY-19) of Columbia/Greene County,

- Present and past Chairpersons of the Alliance for Community Media North East Region Karen Hayden and Nancy Richard. In addition there were videotaped comments former NY State residents Executive Director
- Jennifer Evans of West Hartford Community Television in Connecticut and Membership & Outreach Coordinator
- Erica Jones of Somerville Community Access Television in Massachusetts.