

## CABLE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MINUTES

May 30, 2022

Affiliations	Name	Present
Cable Director	Derek Frates	Yes
Committee Members	Barbara Acksen, Chairwoman	Yes
	Ronnie Medina	Yes
	Maria Carvalho	Yes
	John Methia	Yes
Select Board Representative	Leon E. Correy III	Yes
Recording Secretary	Stephanie Fidalgo	Yes

### Opening:

Ms. Acksen opened the meeting at 5:30 PM and read the open meeting law for the record.

### Minutes:

Ms. Acksen entertained a motion to approve the meeting minutes of the January 31, 2023, meeting minutes.

**Ms. Carvalho made the motion to approve the minutes of the January 31, 2023 meeting and was seconded by Mr. Methia. The motion passed unanimously.**

### Meeting via Zoom with Director of ORCTV, Robert Chiarito:

Ms. Acksen introduced and welcomed Robert Chiarito, director of ORCTV - Old Rochester Community Television, and Mr. Frates invited him to give an overview of the organization to the Committee.

Mr. Chiarito outlined that ORCTV serves three communities – Rochester, Marion, and Mattapoisett – as the Public, Education, and Government (PEG) access provider, maintaining a government channel for each town, one combined education channel, and a combined public access channel for five channels in total. On the education aspect, the original 2005-2006 plan of funding the school program via a grant proved to be unsustainable and was hampered by ORCTV having to move out of their school location due to a mold outbreak. The program was on hiatus until roughly 2014 when ORCTV was welcomed back in a new location. Eventually, the grant was ceased and instead ORCTV chose to teach the education program at Old Rochester Regional High School directly via the school's work-study program.

With this system, ORCTV has a direct hand in what the students are learning and allows them to learn on modern equipment and keep pace with the industry. Students are paid minimum wage for their work, and they cover games, plays, concerts, and award ceremonies. This has seen a dramatic increase in content from the schools – Mr. Chiarito specifically cited how one year prior to starting this program, they received only 7 hours of content in a year and now it is common to produce that much content in a single day.

He specifically highlighted the success of their news magazine program, Bulldog Weekly, which has been running for the past seven years. The weekly half-hour program is entirely student run and produced and features a wide variety of content such as video interviews, journalism, sports journalism, and even short film segments. The principal and athletic directors also contribute by recording announcements on

upcoming events at the school. During the height of the COVID pandemic, ORCTV brought in equipment for livestreaming and allowed the families of students to continue to have a connection to school activities and they received praise from local relatives as well as those out of state for doing so.

This school to career path program is open to all seniors and juniors from their second half of the year onward. ORCTV staff members act as the instructors for the program and students receive school credit. As one of the few technical work-study programs offered, it has proven to be a popular choice among the students.

Ms. Acksen asked if they received any workforce development funds and Mr. Chiarito cited support from the Greater New Bedford Workforce Board. They also have assisted Old Colony Vocational High School with their own work-study program, which has a slightly different setup with students cycling between two weeks of classes and then two weeks on the job. ORCTV hires one student from the Old Colony program per year and the approximately \$1,500 per month grant they received from the Workforce Board helped to cover some of their student salary costs.

Mr. Methia inquired about the permissions and logistics involved with recording school plays. Mr. Chiarito explained that the two biggest determining factors are whether the play packages include recording and broadcast rights and requesting that the music teachers obtain permission from parents for students to be recorded. But should a play or concert be eligible for recording and broadcast, ORCTV works with the teachers to provide DVD copies that can be sold as a fundraiser. He specifically cited the Mattapoisett Christmas play as raising \$500 to \$600 on average. While discussing video hosting platforms for education, Mr. Chiarito spoke to the advantages of the Vimeo platform in terms of quality, not including commercials, and having access to a lawyer to help with copyright strike issues.

Pivoting, Ms. Acksen inquired about how ORCTV, as a 501(c)(3) organization, receives its funding. Mr. Chiarito explained that while they do make use of different grants programs – noting the Eastern Bank Foundation in particular – they mostly rely on franchise fee payments from both Comcast and Verizon. While there has been a dip in subscribers, competition between the two companies and the overall rise in cable rates have kept funding relatively stable, even seeing a small increase of 1 – 2%.

Mr. Chiarito was then asked to go more into detail on the government channels. He again noted that ORCTV serves three communities – Rochester, Marion, and Mattapoisett. Mattapoisett already had an established government channel and receives a small amount of funding to help keep it running with ORCTV assisting as needed. For Marion, ORCTV covers every meeting. While discussing Rochester, they had turned down the offer for a live feed for an additional \$50,000 - \$60,000 on their contract with Comcast, but now use Zoom and hybrid meetings to broadcast live.

As for the public channel, it is mainly member driven, though ORCTV is requested to film certain town events and celebrations – either by the towns themselves or various arts and culture organizations within the towns. Graduated students from the educational program continue to produce shows such as the monthly news magazine, Tri-Town TV. Within the community at large, ORCTV has assisted with church sermon broadcasts and has community members who produce a variety of programs such as talk shows and cooking shows on a regular basis. ORCTV supports its local creators by offering help with tech and equipment and teaching editing skills.

Even during the height of the COVID pandemic, shows continued to be produced and as of 2022, the number of pieces produced has almost reached pre-pandemic numbers (900 pieces in 2022 as compared to 1000 in 2019). This included filming on-site where appropriate in order to keep producing shows.

When questioned about ORCTV’s staff, Mr. Chiarito covered how there were four full-time positions prior to the start of the pandemic but since then only he and one other member are full-time. There are four part-time staff members covering various roles and six to eight student interns as well, which gives ORCTV a certain amount of flexibility to cover events, especially in the evenings.

Ms. Acksen asked about ORCTV’s contracts with both Verizon and Comcast. Two years ago, ORCTV redid their contract with Verizon and they have three years left on it and their contract with Comcast will be up for renewal in 2024. For transparency, they receive 4.8% from Comcast and 4.5% from Verizon. He offered to give advice on law firms to work with for negotiations. He did express frustration at not having access to HD channels but hopes that will change soon. The committee agreed though that even if the picture quality was not as good as what could be seen online, delivering content to those channels was important and appreciated by the community.

After the conversation was completed, Mr. Chiarito encouraged the committee to keep in touch and send him any further questions they might have.

While reviewing the conversation, both Mr. Frates and Ms. Acksen cited ORCTV’s unique model as an interesting local case study and Ms. Acksen brought up how Plymouth had been part of a similar multi-town system. Ms. Carvalho was quite interested in the benefits of the educational work-study program and Mr. Methia noted his work with New Bedford Voc-Tec to help launch a podcast program and his hopes that something similar could be done at Fairhaven High.

Regarding Fairhaven’s educational program, coordinator Drew Furtado left earlier this year and Mike Fernadaes has since taken over his role at the High School. Mr. Frates also brought up speaking with Dartmouth High School about the work done to update their studio. Mr. Methia suggested inviting Mr. Fernadaes to speak to the committee to see about revitalizing the education program.

Mr. Frates also suggested having members of this committee speak before the School Committee to work on improving the education program and guiding it towards more consistency. He specifically cited being asked at the last minute to cover the Mr. Fairhaven event, which should not have fallen to him. Mr. Methia inquired about who manages the education media budget with Mr. Frates explaining that in the previous instance, he negotiated with the School Business Manager, Nicole Potter.

Mr. Frates again suggested speaking to the School Committee over the summer ahead of the start of the year. Ms. Acksen wished to meet with Mr. Fernadaes ahead of going before the School Committee. Mr. Frates noted that there should be two School Committee meetings in June, one in July, and one in August. To Mr. Methia’s question, he did assure that Mr. Fairhaven was covered and that the High School graduation would also be covered.

**Cable Director’s Report: Update on the Public, Educational, and Governmental (PEG) Access (Channels 18 & 95):**

Mr. Frates presented the quarterly figures for January through April for the channels to the committees:

Channel 18 Jan – Apr 2023		Channel 95 Jan – Apr 2023	
Meetings Broadcast	111	Events/Shows Produced	15
Events/PSAs Produced	9	Shows Imported	136
Original Programming Hours	194.25	Affiliated Access Stations	126
Community Views	19,292	Community Views	10,479
Facebook Followers	2,001	Facebook Followers	2,001
Average Watch Time	00:19:44	YouTube Subscribers	420

He noted that the uptick in meetings broadcast was due to the additional meetings required by the select board and finance committee to work on the budget. Mr. Frates then went over the events covered since the last meeting, starting with the Black History Month celebration, and noting Mr. Correy's role as the keynote speaker. He also covered the PSAs for the animal shelter, Rec Center's school vacation programs, the Belonging Committee and Rotary Club's joint food drive, and the community electricity aggregation program. He also made note of the impromptu Saint Patrick's Day celebration video shot with Conversation Agent, Bruce Webb.

Mr. Frates took a moment to cover the significant work that went into informing the community about the override vote to take place on June 5, 2023. He then went on to discuss the promos for Huttleston Market Place and more events such as Arbor Day and Memorial Day. He also noted the Wood School Bike Bus promoted the Bikeways Committee.

A new update to <https://www.fairhaventv.com/> is the "Find It Fast" banner which features both live meetings and the most recently recorded meetings and the video spotlight which showcases recent community videos. The Community Videos section includes both the most recent posts to the YouTube channel along with full playlists of regular shows.

For upcoming events, Mr. Frates plans to record at the Father's Day Road Race to gather footage ahead of next year's 15th anniversary. The recently filmed Memorial Day celebration was also slated to be posted soon. He is also working with Ms. Carvalho on translating videos for the Lagoa Friendship Pact Committee. Other future events include the Homecoming Festival, the Full Bloom Festival, and the Concerts Under the Stars series. The Cable Department has also recently taken on a college intern that they hope will help with getting events covered.

Mr. Frates let the board know that he had received the fourth quarter payment from Comcast and the department ended up receiving over \$18,000 more than the prior year in total. He also mentioned that he was the keynote speaker at the annual Fairhaven Improvement Association dinner and Ms. Acksen praised his speech.

#### **Alliance for Community Media Awards Update:**

Mr. Frates gave an overview of the locally produced show, The Magazine. Hosted by Charlie Murphy and produced by David Fauteux, the show has broadcast 41 episodes in just two and a half years, featuring numerous interviews. This year, the Magazine won an Alliance for Community Media award for best independently produced magazine show, fittingly. Mr. Frates will be traveling to the conference in Brooklyn at the end of June to pick up the award and Mr. Murphy is, of course, also invited to attend.

Before moving on, the board discussed how Thomas McAfee had resigned from the board and they were looking for one or two new members to join. More details will follow the Select Board appointments on June 5th. Mr. Frates also gave a reminder about all board meetings happening on June 13th. The meeting will be held only in person, but it will be recorded for any members who may not be able to attend.

#### **Brief Update on Outreach to Attorney William Solomon Re: Cable License:**

Ms. Acksen provided her update on her communications with Cable Attorney William Solomon. While noted in the last meeting that he had drafted a message for the Town Administrator, it still had not been sent as of this meeting. While Mr. Solomon is currently not signed to manage the next contract with Comcast, he worked on the previous agreement and this message was to formalize his meeting with the

Cable Advisory Board, though it would be done at no cost. He promised Ms. Acksen that the message would be sent out that evening.

Ms. Acksen expressed her frustration with the situation and both Mr. Methia and Mr. Frates agreed with the idea of reaching out to other available attorneys as well. One concern was that it had been previously indicated that the current contract with Comcast would be the last one Fairhaven would receive, but more recently, Mr. Solomon had assured that there would be another in the future. As such, Ms. Acksen would like to have an idea of what that contract might look like.

#### **Brief Update on Broadband / Municipal Light Board:**

Mr. Frates did not have any major updates on the Municipal Light Board as they had only met once since the last Cable Advisory meeting. Mr. Correy stated that the Municipal Light Board would be meeting with a consultant on the state-level Digital Equity Planning Program as the state requested edits to Fairhaven's plans. The consultant fees would be covered by a grant and thus would come at no cost to the Town.

For the time being, Mr. Medina was offered to take over Mr. McAfee's role as representing the Cable Advisory Committee at the Broadband Committee. Though, this came with the note that the Broadband Committee may soon be dissolved.

#### **Other Business:**

Mr. Methia asked if the Cable Department had made any new equipment requests for FY24. Mr. Frates did not, but noted that if he did in the future, it would probably be to upgrade the servers for storing video. The department often shoots videos in 4K but finds that 1080p resolution is sufficient for posting online. Mr. Methia suggested that a production van or truck could prove useful for moving equipment around and shooting on site more often but recognized that it might be outside of the budget.

When the topic of other municipalities to reach out to came up, Mr. Medina suggested Milford TV, which operates as a 501(c)(3). Ms. Acksen would also like to speak to Plymouth Area Community Television on their model.

**Mr. Methia made a motion to adjourn at 6:48 PM and was seconded by Ms. Carvalho. The motion passed unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,

Stephanie A. Fidalgo  
Recording Secretary,  
Cable Advisory Committee