

URBANA PUBLIC TELEVISION COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

Date: March 10, 2017

Place: Urbana City Council Chambers
400 S. Vine Street, Urbana, IL

Members Present: Peter Folk; Dale Sinder; Dana Mancuso; Carol Inskeep; Chris Fuller; Marie Polk; Andrew Wadsworth

Staff Present: Jason Liggett; Jake Schumacher; Sanford Hess

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Folk called the meeting to order at 12:00pm.

II. ROLL CALL

Attendance was noted.

III. MODIFICATIONS TO AND APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Agenda was approved as it stood.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the December 11, 2015 meeting were unanimously approved.

V. CORRESPONDENCE

There was no correspondence to the Commission the past quarter.

VI. STAFF REPORT

Nearly two dozen people attended the December member meeting and open house.

Program highlights from the past quarter included: holiday specials from Travis Wayne Hurt and Joey Wright; UI Extension gardening webinars; the Martin Luther King Jr. countywide celebration (co-produced with CGTV); multiple hours of live coverage of the presidential inauguration and the Women's March on Washington the following day; and two live and rebroadcast mayoral candidate forums, with another in the offing. Paul Mueth produced a program on the impact of court fines and fees; Carletta Donaldson continues to produce programs of the weekly Friday Forum at the University YMCA, and Chuck Simpson returned

to producing East West. Staff productions included: law enforcement PSAs, including one with all of the police chiefs of the area; PSAs for the Urbana Free Library Foundation and Market at the Square; and continuing staff productions Market Menu, All About U, Art Now! and Cop's Corner.

UPTV will again be recognized for the third straight year at the Alliance for Community Media's "Best of the Midwest" video awards celebration for Jason Liggett's work on Art Now! and intern Jacob Bernard, who won "Best of Show" in the Youth category for his UPTV promo spot. Jason and Jake will be attending the ACM's national conference this summer in Minnesota, which will concentrate, among other things, on fundraising.

Jason spoke about work with a local Boy Scout troop, who produced their own newscast. He also just concluded an eight-week "course" with UMS kids in the SPLASH after-school program "Wanna Be On TV?". Linda Gibbens of the Urbana School District was present and spoke about the grant-based SPLASH program, and showed some of the video that the youngsters produced about CU Adventures. Jason was highly lauded by Linda and Jake for his work with the students.

Jason added a new component to the Staff Report with a brief presentation on UPTV's social media activity, including our top two Facebook posts, top two tweets, and top two YouTube videos. In response to a question from Chair Folk, Jason explained which UPTV content appears on which vehicles. As of last week, new meeting videos on the City website will now be mobile-friendly.

A clips reel of highlights from the last quarter was show.

VII. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

There was none.

VIII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

The final staff iteration of the revised Policies and Procedures document was submitted to the Legal Division, and several changes (mostly of wording) were made at their suggestion. The final item to be resolved concerns copyright clearances; when that has been settled, the document will be ready for publication and to be put into effect.

IX. NEW BUSINESS

Staff have been charged with finding ways to address what will soon become a negative cash-flow for UPTV, at a time

when the financial future of the City of Urbana as a whole is in question. As part of a multi-pronged approach to this problem, including soliciting underwriting and individual donations, an additional avenue being proposed by staff is a new membership fee schedule, as the deadline for any changes to the City's fee schedule is near. The revenue collected would in some small way offset the costs that individual members incur. UPTV originally had membership fees, which were suspended in 2006 in an effort to increase community participation, which it has to the extent that now current staffing is often swamped. If the reinstitution of fees were to slightly diminish the amount of individual local productions, it might at this moment not be a bad thing, in staff's opinion. Jake presented a list of membership fees at comparable PEG stations in such similar communities as Madison, Wisconsin and Columbia, Missouri, as well as at local community media outlets WEFT and the IMC. Staff recommends that the service would continue to always be free to Urbana residents, who already support it through taxes and cable fees. Non-resident membership was proposed to be \$5 a month, with an additional category of institutional membership to enable groups to provide training to several of their people. Reaction from the Commission was solicited.

Commissioner Mancuso thought a membership fee would give UPTV services an added value in people's minds. Commissioner Wadsworth asked about the makeup of member residencies, and how many current people or organizations might not wish to continue as members. There are more non-Urbana residents than residents currently producing programs, but there is no way to predict what effect a membership fee would have on participation.

Chair Folk said that without numbers it was hard to gauge the proposal, but he had a negative reaction to the idea of using the fee to reduce the amount of content produced. Jake responded that the fee was not intended to reduce the amount of content; his comments were meant to indicate that should some reduction of productions be an outcome, there might be an upside to it as well as a downside. Chair Folk said he did not wish to penalize people who were giving content to the community. He asked for more concrete budget numbers. Sanford said that declining cable revenues and increasing UPTV expenses were vectors that had already crossed to the tune of several thousand dollars, and that that situation would only get worse. In light of that, he

thought it incumbent on staff to explore any and all avenues to address the problem. Chair Folk asked what the worst-case scenario would be in the absence of any revenues; Jason responded that UPTV expenses are currently about \$180,000 a year. Sanford added that the shortfall is currently being offset by the General Fund, so whatever is needed to make UPTV self-sufficient needs to be done. Commissioner Inskeep asked if there existed any prioritization as to what kind of productions were undertaken, noting she believed that there were real limits in how much staff were able to do and still maintain a commitment to high quality productions. She said that she believed staff had a right to make the call on where that line was; perhaps prioritizing on a basis other than cost of membership could achieve that balance. Jake noted that content-based decisions on which programs to undertake would be an editorial position not well-suited to a free-speech enterprise. Commissioner Inskeep was thinking more in terms of categories of programs, rather than specific viewpoints. Commissioner Mancuso believes the need to fulfill a PEG station's educational and governmental access requirements also have an effect on how much public access can be achieved.

Commissioner Sinder asked about the specific sources of cable fees and what the reasons for the decrease were; Jake thinks that it is primarily technology-driven. Sanford added that it is a national problem, and UPTV is not alone in trying to overcome it. Jake mentioned also the current national climate regarding arts, humanities and public broadcasting funding was not positive. Sanford believes from personal experience that it is the beginning producers who require the most time/service. Commissioner Sinder suggested using experienced producers to train new producers. Sanford mentioned the difficulty of scheduling volunteers to do so.

Jake mused on the differences between charging the producers for making the content (as a membership fee would do) and charging the viewers (as "public" television does). It is possible a special meeting could be set up to discuss strategizing fundraising. He thinks the proposed membership fees are in line with other community-access media outlets. Simplicity in record-keeping was a guiding factor in structuring the membership fees.

Chair Folk said he does not support the proposed schedule of fees at this time. He would prefer something along the lines of a new member fee (a "lifetime" membership), rather than a membership fee. Public sponsorships would be even more preferable. Commissioner Inskeep asked about the possibility of a voluntary membership fee, and outlined how that might look. Jake acknowledged the excellence of both of those suggestions. He said that staff have figured the cost of UPTV productions at roughly \$80 an hour. He also said that he was heartened by the response of the Council as he believes in an ideal world free speech should be free. Chair Folk said he would support a voluntary membership fee. Commissioner Mancuso liked the idea of a special meeting to discuss fundraising, and noting fundraising was a profession and a whole new set of responsibilities and tasks for which there may not be sufficient staff time. Jake concurred. Commissioner Polk added she would like to see a discussion of best practices included in a possible special meeting. Chair Folk asked about the timing of the decision. Commissioner Wadsworth asked about reworking the "donate" button to accommodate the concept of a voluntary fee. Jake pointed out there is already an out-of-state membership fee.

Commissioner Sinder moved to initiate a new member training fee of \$60 for all new members, including Urbana residents, and that we ask for a voluntary membership contribution from local members, and that out-of-state memberships be raised to \$250 a year. Chair Folk added a friendly amendment to include income-based or "place in life"-based fee waivers, and that we develop an idea of the actual cost for a new member. The motion was seconded. Jake talked about the costs involved in various kinds of productions, and that income-determination was not something he felt staff could undertake.

Commissioner Inskeep said simply offering support for some kind of membership fee structure, and trusting the staff to determine what is most appropriate based on their experience and interactions with community producers, was her gut reaction. Chair Folk felt there was not enough information to make a decision. Sanford said he thought the motion as on the table would cause too much burden for City staff given the relatively small amount of revenue, and that he would be more comfortable to forego any new membership fees at the present and reconsider the topic in the coming year. Chair Folk defended his proposal for

waivers based on "place in life" but said he would support a motion that did not include them. Commissioner Fuller wanted to clarify whether the "student" classification would include Urbana students. Jason pointed out that the fees would only be for public-access productions, not such educational access productions as SPLASH. The motion on the table failed by unanimous voice vote. Commissioner Sinder moved the same but without the friendly amendment. A roll call vote was taken by the clerk, and it failed 4-3. It was clarified that the directive was to maintain the status quo.

Equipment purchases included blocks for a new background wall in the UPTV studio.

X. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

XI. SET THE NEXT MEETING DATE AND ADJOURNMENT

The next regular meeting was announced for June 9 at 12 noon in the Urbana City Council Chambers. The meeting was adjourned by unanimous vote at 1:34pm.