

Appendix D:

Comments from Participants and Speakers at the Community Media Convergence

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Mr. John Traversy,
Secretary General, CRTC

Re. Review of Local and Community Television (CRTC 2015-421)

Dear Mr. Traversy,

This review of local and community television comes at a critical point in Canadian media history. While it seems society is awash in information, the information needs of Canadians at a local and community level are not being met by the current market paradigm.

In the United States, this phenomenon clearly emerged in two national commissions of review, the Knight Commission on Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy (2009), followed by the FCC's Working Group on the Information Needs of Communities report (2011). If you are engaged in the study of local media and its impact on the lives of citizens, I hope these two reports are at the top of your reading list. Both found that the class of localized media production that citizens rely on to connect as a community and participate in democratic governance are in steep decline, as fewer and larger conglomerates have come to control the communications landscape.

The FCC inquiry found that the number of U.S. cities served by local television stations fell by 40 per cent between 1980 and 2010. Regarding the consequences of this trend, the Commission referenced several studies that have documented a relationship between local media presence and key indicators of civic engagement, such as voter turnout and the number of candidates in elections. In a chapter titled "The Evolving Nonprofit Media," the Commission noted a rapid rise in foundation-supported journalism and

various forms of media co-operatives post-2008. They noted that nonprofit, community-based media had the potential to fill the gap in local media, but there were many barriers to their development, from tax structures to lack of meaningful financial support.

I expect if this panel does its homework, the same picture will emerge in Canada. Indeed, a fall-off in local accountability journalism was quantified as early as 1983 by Trim (*Canadian Journal of Communication*, 9:3, 1983), who found that an average of five City Hall stories per day in the *Winnipeg Free Press* in 1979 fell to less than two per day in 1981, one year after the closure of the Free Press's competitor, the *Winnipeg Tribune*. But the true loss was in attention brought to civic boards and commissions, where most decisions are hammered out. For example, Trim's research team found that between July 1 and Dec. 31, 1979, the Winnipeg Works and Operations Committee was the subject of 30 newspaper stories. In 1981, that number plummeted to zero. Meanwhile, in a six-month period in 1979, the *Ottawa Citizen* referred to civic boards 29 times, but only 6 times in 1981, one year after the competing *Ottawa Journal* closed (Trim, 1983).

These are examples from print media, but examples are also abundant in broadcast media, particularly since 2008. The cuts to CBC and ongoing shrinkage of newsrooms at commercial stations in Regina have been felt viscerally at the community level in Regina.

A few years ago I conducted a focus group discussion at the Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry on the subject of how media impacts people's lives. I did not expect people to raise the issue of local media cuts, but that was one of the first topics that came up. They knew all about the cutbacks to CBC and were aware that local reporters no longer had time or interest to cover activities at outreach centres, or even to do interviews with people on the street downtown. A staff person at the Anti-Poverty Ministry was able to verify these comments by looking at the organization's media logs, which showed a decline in quantity and quality of media coverage since 2001.

I was struck by how clearly the focus group participants, who were living in marginalized conditions, drew a connection between the growing lack of interest and attention in local issues that mattered to them, and their sense of worth and inclusion in society. They were also very clear that social media was no replacement for what has been lost. However, they did speak very well of community television, community radio, and a local co-op newspaper. "They tell the stories," one person said.

Regina is fortunate to have a nonprofit cable co-operative that does genuine community access programming, Access Communications, which operates the community channel Access7. I am aware, however, that this is not the case in most Canadian communities, including communities in Saskatchewan that are not covered by Access. And, as fortunate as we are to have a nonprofit option in Saskatchewan, it does not serve all media needs, particularly the need to move across platforms. An example is ReZX, a community cable show that is simultaneously a print magazine, and a website. While Access7 offers a welcome home for the TV show, the other platforms are unsupported

and struggle to keep up their operations, despite the fact that they are fully integrated and integral to each other's success.

The U.S. has had far more success in evolving community access television into multi-media hubs of citizen engagement. In Canada, community broadcasting's growth has been stunted, and indeed has undergone negative growth, with distinct community access stations being closed and consolidated across the country. In contrast, U.S. public access stations, modeled after Canada's original examples of the 1960s and 1970s, numbered 3,000 by 2012 (C. Ali, *International Journal of Communications*, Vol. 6, 2012). This included highly innovative initiatives, such as the Manhattan Neighborhood Network Youth Channel, broadcasting from MNN's El Barrio Firehouse Community Media Center.

Why the difference? I recently had the opportunity to attend the Community Media Convergence in Ottawa this past November, and it was an eye-opening experience. I met community media practitioners from Hay River to downtown Toronto, and was struck by the depth of their knowledge and experience in community-based local programming. Why, then, is community media not flourishing in Canada, a country that was originally a global pioneer of the concept? What I took away is that it is because the people best equipped to conduct community media have been cut out of the picture. Community broadcasting was never meant to be operated and controlled by BDUs, but that is what has happened in Canada, to the grave detriment of local and community media production. By their nature, the giant conglomerates that have emerged on the scene are disconnected from the local, and will always lack the gears to engage in genuine community media development. Community media is not what for-profit BDUs are equipped to deliver, nor should they be expected to do so. They should, however, be expected to support community media, as fair compensation for engulfing local media production following the 1997 deregulation of local market restrictions.

If I may give you one concrete example, I will point to Kootenay Cable in Kimberly, B.C., one of Canada's first local cable operations. Founded in 1954, it was a two-person local business that followed the principals of community access broadcasting, offering a place for citizens to come together and talk about what was happening in their town. In 1995, the original owners of Kootenay Broadcasting Systems/Kootenay Cable, Ltd., sold to Okanagan Skeena Group (OKS) but retained local hands on the station's daily operations. According to the former station manager, OKS respected the idea of local community access. But after deregulation, there was a dizzying series of sales.

You can track what happened in your own CRTC and Industry Canada records. In brief: On March 3, 1999, KBS fully folded its operations into Okanagan Skeena. On May 26, 1999, the national multi-media conglomerate Telemedia acquired OKS at \$9 per share. In 2001, the CRTC authorized transfer of all OKS shares to Monarch Cablesystems West, based in Medicine Hat. Then, in 2003, Shaw acquired Monarch at \$17.39 per share. Then the station was closed, leaving Kimberly residents bereft of local community access broadcasting for the first time since 1954.

These sales and mergers may have served many ends, including perhaps the ability to deliver a multitude of channels efficiently to cable consumers. But they did nothing to serve local and community broadcasting. Further, the establishment of a BDU-controlled levy-based fund did precious little to make up for the real loss experienced at the community level in Kimberly, and in so many other communities all across Canada.

Meanwhile, we have a broad sector of community media practitioners who could make local and community broadcasting in Canada shine again, if they had the means to do so. Can you imagine the positive impact, for example, if there were independent local media centres in Saskatchewan, where RezX could come together with community radio operators, and digital media pioneers in a supportive, decently funded environment? We would have a flowering of locally relevant, diverse, people-empowering media.

Canada does not have the equivalent of billion-dollar foundations like the Rockefeller Foundation and the Knight Foundation to support nonprofit community media. Neither, as we have seen in recent decades, can the advertising market fully support quality local media, even in urban centers, never mind in small rural, remote and northern communities. Canadians are vastly underserved by the current paradigm of local and community broadcasting, and will remain so until control of community media is placed in community hands. The \$150 million on the table for this review has only limited potential when administered by BDUs. If administered by community media producers themselves, that \$150 million could do exponentially much more, in terms of growing local media engagement and moving media across platforms to meet the digital age. I therefore urge the Commission to consider that linking community and local media production to the profits and activities of non-local, profit-seeking BDU conglomerates was a historical mistake. In a few short decades under this model, Canada has gone from leader to laggard in local and community media production.

BDUs are good at many things, but they are not good at community media and in all probability never will be, because it's not what they do. Consider it an experiment that did not deliver intended results to the expected level. Meanwhile, community media producers have come together and are offering a solution to this pressing problem, which is to let people who actually make community-based media operate the fund for the benefit of local communities.

Keep in mind that a communications deficit very quickly becomes a democratic deficit, as noted by the aforementioned U.S. inquiries. There is much at stake for our country. It is important that the expertise and enthusiasm of community media practitioners not be dismissed or overruled. The system we have now is overdue for a meaningful change.

Thank you. I understand that my comments and biographical information may be published on the record of the public review by the CRTC and its community and local TV policy (CRTC 2015-421).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Patricia W. Elliott', with a stylized, cursive script.

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December 11, 2015

Mr. John Traversy
Secretary General CRTC

**RE: Review of Local and Community Television
(CRTC 2015-421)**

Community Media in our town of 3,200 has been in existence since 1988. tvctK has come a long way since then. We were formerly called CCTV and changed our name to better suit our community and surrounding area. tvctK represents the TV Community Temiscaming Kipawa which covers all the regions within our area.

This is to acknowledge all activities, talents, academics within the community and to accommodate the French, English and surrounding nations. Since 2010 we have developed our website (tvctk.com) where videos on demand can be watched in either language. We have live programs which include a monthly bingo and an annual Christmas Lions Telethon to raise money for the needy in the area. We also created a facebook page indicating what is playing and is updated weekly.

We are a community to where most of the English understand the French and the French understand the English. We are located 4 hrs from Ottawa, Ontario.

Our community channel is committed to keeping our viewers updated with weekly news from around the area and the surrounding regions. We offer all organizations a chance to come and express their requirements for planned activities. We have come a long way from VHS, which we are digital now. We are viewed on a local channel 97 from cablevision du nord.

Bilingual staff is available to ensure all interviews are done in the language of choice and 95% of the interviews are done in both languages (with no subtitles). Our community channel is run by seven Board of Directors. We have one full

time employee at 35 hrs and one part time at 25 hrs, however both exceed their hours due to the demand of the events.

The local media is a very active member of the community. Events like hockey games, tourist visits, theatre presentations, municipal affairs etc are a huge part of how the communications are viewed. Requests come in on a regular basis from the citizens of the town to make sure TV coverage is at all the events. The elderly look forward to these events as some have difficulty getting out and this allows them to view it on TV as they are not computer friendly.

We have even gone to the point to visit other areas of interest, festivals, events, army training etc to bring in a different view of whats happening outside our vicinity.

We believe in the funding support for community media is crucial because no one can survive-- community channel or any other organization for that matter-- without funding. It is a key role in any circumstances. For most they rely on local funding but everyone needs money to survive and develop and evolve to produce and give the best quality of picture ever.

Yes the internet and social media is a huge aspect for the community and the community TV. As technology is changing we need to be on top of it to keep our clients interested and focused and in order to do this, we need to keep up with whats happening in the technology world and keep all up-to-date. Having being compatible with androids, Iphone etc helps to keep the clients interested and accebile no matter where they are.

If money were taken away from community television would be a huge impact for everyone. I think the money has to be properly distributed to benefit the viewers and keep the viewers interested and wanting to see more and receive more information. Having it put to proper use and distributed with a good plan of action.

I understand that my comments and biographical information may be published on the record of the public review by the CRTC of its community and local TV policy (CRTC 2015-421).

Sincerely,

Lisa Morin
President Board of Directors

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