



November 24, 2016

Re: "Canadian Content in a Digital World" Consultation

Dear Mme. Joly and Staff,

Please accept these comments on behalf of St. Andrews Community Channel in response to the questions and Consultation Paper posted as part of the "Canadian Content in a Digital World" consultation.

In 2005, the TV volunteers at the Saint Andrews cable access channel decided to obtain an over-the-air licence. St. Andrews Community Channel had been established in 1993 on cable, but Rogers was threatening imminent closure due to the interconnection of their cable systems. Our Charlotte County community was told that town-specific channels would be replaced with a Rogers 'community channel' from the City of Saint John.

Today CHCO-TV, as an independent community channel, local programming is created by New Brunswickers for New Brunswickers without any corporate influence or agenda from any telecom giant. We have been able to maintain local content such news, public affairs, fund raisers, sports and events that has all but disappeared in most other parts of rural New Brunswick. Furthermore, we are able to share this same content on social media platforms.

For twenty-three years we have been producing content without access to regular funding that other private-sector broadcasters and cable community channels have enjoyed. A recent CRTC decision details that all BDU subscriptions will support an independent news programming fund – so New Brunswickers are (and always have been) supporting a such fund that is not accessible to be used for NB content.

Even obtaining equitable distribution on cable has been a challenge as our channel has been blocked from being received outside our town while other local channels from across Canada are readily available on cable. Bell does distribute our content across New Brunswick but Rogers refuses to, in comparison it would be like censoring a community website.

We have found the cost-effectiveness of community media makes it possible to provide local programming where public and private-sector media can not. This would likely be true for

any small market, if the local organization is operated cooperatively and locally it is bound to be more successful than a small organization operated and managed from outside the community or province. However, we could do so much more if we had access to funding and unrestricted access to the New Brunswick TV audience.

Support for Creators:

Over the years our volunteer team has been made up partly by those who once worked in private and public media or have been schooled in broadcasting and journalism and of course community members who are genuinely interested in media. Working as a team with a common facility provides both professionals and 'emerging' talents needs to develop new skills and test-drive new ideas.

Though social media is a powerful tool not everyone that has a great story to tell or knowledge to share is not technically savvy. Having facilities to accommodate group discussions with multiple cameras to share live and be interactively is not commonplace in many communities.

Digital Media Literacy Skills

Community media's mandate has always meant to create a more democratic and inclusive media environment supporting ordinary citizens to be creators. Anyone can access a pen and paper but that does not mean they know how to articulate and share their ideas using those tools. As well the mere existence of the Internet alone, a more complicated tool, also does not ensure that everyone can be 'creators'. Ordinary citizens not only need journalistic and technical skills to create digital content but also proper "digital grammar"; skills in framing, lighting, writing and editing, interviewing, and graphics, all allow digital content to be better understood.

Local Media

At one time accessible programming did exist on cable in the 1970-80's but today's cable-community channel is restricted by audience share as its programming is proprietary to the cable company and not shared by everyone. Independent community channels do not have restrictions except those imposed (wrongfully) by the cable company who ironically is typically the internet provider.

Internet is getting a lot of attention for being a new choice to access media which has affected television subscription numbers. One has to keep in mind and not lose sight that television content is still a strong medium; subscribers are still consuming TV and paying a subscription service to the same companies but instead we call it the internet. The "chord" is really not being cut!

Wireless services, both WiFi and cellular data plan use is growing, due to the consumption of large media files (typically TV content). Ironically this wireless technology is using the same radio-waves that TV used to deliver FREE local content to Canadians “over-the-air”.

It is also the same radio-waves CHCO is licensed to use to distribute local content on. It seems “over-the-air broadcasting” is just an old-fashioned term, maybe CHCO is actually a licensed FREE wireless video stream of local content straight to your smart phone – and should not every community be able to do that?

Government needs to remember that the use of limited wireless resources commercially in any community is a privilege and telecommunication giants must respect and contribute back to the community with public service- just as they always have. This model has been around for decades in Canada and many countries in the form of local programming on radio, TV and cable. This simply needs to be adapted to the business model of distributing internet services which provides access the same audiovisual content (including print) to paying subscribers.

Now more than ever Canada should adapt a more independent community media approach, a hybrid of the internet and American public-access TV which is most always controlled by non-profit community groups but funded by cable.

Social media groups and accessibility to smartphone cameras doesn't generate journalistic coverage of local democratic institutions such as town council and school boards, nor does it ensure the coverage of local cultural events, and cultural expression. But this is accomplished by organizations like ours. Though Facebook vows to help filter-out fake news, more than ever community media is needed to provide journalistic standards to create the news and other content to be shared on the internet.

Smaller communities will never be able to attract large private-sector news organizations, but they can support community media as CHCO has proven this for 23 years. We could have done more and been a stronger example but we have watched our intended funding being streamed into programming outside our community and province by the telecoms!

For more than a decade we, a group of volunteer citizens in rural New Brunswick, have struggled for equitable funding and distribution as it was intended within the CRTC regulations. We were assured by CRTC staff that the 40 year-old rules riddled with loopholes around ever changing technology would be corrected in a review hearing of local and community television.

In that most recent CRTC decision (2016-224), almost the entire national funding for community TV was allowed to be redirected to produce news commercially – at the request of the same telecoms who own the commercial stations! Still no access to funding for

independent community media for the CRTC fears that funding would “destabilize” the Canadian broadcast system.

We are appalled that for 10 years we were lead to believe that change could take place in such a policy review. To instead watch Canada's media giants gain more power to the loss of community and citizen-based content. The concept of the CRTC is needed but from our perspective the Commission has lost its way. There are no Commissioners, Ombudspersons, or even permanent staff positions with expertise in community media, despite it being one of the three 'elements' that underscore our broadcasting system. The recent CRTC decision seems opposite to the forward-looking agenda that Minister Joly wants.

A recent example of our local programming came when our larger neighbouring town, St. Stephen, requested CHCO-TV to broadcast their Santa Claus Parade because Rogers declined after 3 years of doing TV coverage. (Rogers cut 1/3 of its production staff in NB just the week prior.) Keep in mind much of St Stephen can not watch our channel because Rogers refuses to carry us there but Rogers maintains access to community TV funding by promising local content. CHCO gladly did cover the parade and shared the program on-line through social media while local programming funds continue to funnel back to Ontario!

We thank Minister Joly for initiating this consultation, and would like to extend full support in seeking to modernize our communications policies, and make them more reflective of the digital environment, more democratic and inclusive.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Peter Webb".

Operations Manager
CHCO-TV
24 Reed Avenue
Saint Andrews, NB
E5B 1A1