

## Open Work Session

### Discussion with PAC 14-Wicomico County's Public Access Channel

February 19, 2019

Mr. Thomas Taylor, Director of PAC 14, came before Council and said, as the new Director, he wanted to introduce himself, although he has known everybody for a while. He said PAC 14 is celebrating their 20<sup>th</sup> year on the air, and he is happy to see they are reaching so many people. He said the public does watch, and that is one reason why he is at the meeting. He said they enjoy what they do, and he thanked Council for their support over the two decades they have been on the air. He also thanked Council for sending Mr. Holloway as the Council representative, and said he is making an impact. He said Mr. Holloway already in his first meeting has given PAC 14 some good ideas, and they will be instilling those. He said he is a local producer, and he does Eastern Shore Veteran stories on the Shore, and they will be running those for years and years. Mr. Taylor said he also wants to make himself available to Council if there is anything they think PAC 14 should be doing or taking on, and he wants them to know PAC 14 is Council's Public Access Channel also, so, if they have any concerns they need him to address, he is willing to do so. He said, hopefully, they are doing what Council and the people want them to do.

Mr. Kilmer said they have talked about PEG fees before, and Council knew about them at one time, but he thinks they all forgot. He then asked Mr. Taylor to explain that, and whether there is a problem with that, to which Mr. Taylor responded, PAC 14 is funded in several ways. He explained, the franchise fees from Comcast, the provider, are a 5 percent fee that is placed on the cable TV subscribers. He said Comcast passes that on through their billing to their customers, so, as a franchise fee, the franchise is not paying the fee, but the subscribers are paying the 5 percent fee to the municipalities. He said then there is a PEG fee, which stands for Public Education and Government, that is charged to subscribers to help support the public access channels in the municipalities, and he believes right now that is 70 cents per subscriber per month. He said that fund can only be used for capital in whatever aspect it has to do with the public education and government channel. He then asked who the liaison is to talk to because they have a budget coming up, and he has to find out who to talk to in regards to the County PEG fees, to which Mr. Cannon responded, Mr. Weston Young, Deputy Director of Administration, would be a good start, and he is out in the hallway. Mr. Kilmer said he thinks it is 80 cents that goes to the County, and that is set aside for PAC 14's capital uses. He then asked if Mr. Taylor needs to know how much is there, to which Mr. Taylor responded, no. He clarified, the fund is in escrow. He said he asked the City if there is any administrative policy or protocol to start managing the funds in their budget. He said they have capital expenses which they are going to approach the County about, so it is just a matter of who they should see, and what policies they will go through, but he will talk to Mr. Young about that. He said he thinks they have a meeting coming up. He thanked Mr. Kilmer for bringing that up.

Mr. Taylor said they had a scare just as they were making the transition where the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) was approached by Comcast asking if they could deduct the cost of the channels they provide for public access out of the franchise fees. He explained, if Comcast put a value on their channels being a million dollars, they could deduct that from the amount of franchise fees collected before they sent them to the municipalities. He said they are monitoring that situation because it would be detrimental to all PEG channels if that was allowed to go through. He said the response to the FCC was pretty heavy in the negative. He said a lot of people feel that, if they tried to change that part of the law or the agreement, it would fail, but Comcast is always trying to get a little bit more out of what they can. He advised Council, that is just a heads up that something like that is in the works. Mr. Dodd asked, when they get scares like that, do they have an attorney to go over those issues,

to which Mr. Taylor responded, they were approached by someone who was representing others, and he said he would write a letter for them for an exorbitant amount of money. He said they only had two weeks to challenge, but, when they contacted the City, Mrs. Julia Glanz had a response ready within that time, and he thinks she shared it with the County Executive's Office, and they submitted the letter together. He said, apparently, this is a way people can manipulate agreements with the FCC, but, again, he wants to reiterate that the County and City really have control over the agreement with the franchise provider, the cable provider, and whatever means they want. He said Comcast will try and manipulate the agreement to their benefit, of course, so they have to keep an eye on something like that. He said they have to account for a little bit of legal costs just to keep an eye on it in case something like that happens again, but it appears they have it under control for the moment.

Mr. Cannon said it seems like every time they want Comcast to contribute more as far as their part is concerned, they say they will do that, but they want to increase their franchise fees, or they want to increase the subscriber fees. He said Council really does not want that, to which Mr. Taylor responded, they do not want to increase the fees to the public, and that is why, so far, from his personal opinion, they have been looking to get what they can without expense to their subscribers, which is always good.


Mr. Cannon said the concern is how they can transition to high definition (HD) because that is not happening, to which Mr. Taylor responded, just two months ago they installed the HD cable at their location, so they can make the connection, but there are some things they have to take care of here, and find access to certain things. He explained, cables have been installed, and the broadcast looks a lot better in HD, but they will work on the lighting. Mr. Cannon asked if Mr. Taylor thinks they will get there with the HD, and what the timeframe is, to which Mr. Taylor responded, they are there, but they are still not broadcasting on Comcast in HD, although they have always been recording in HD. He said the transition with the replacement of the old lines is happening, and they have a better signal, so it is getting better and better. He said they have an HD channel on Comcast, but if they watch channel 14, they are taking the 1070 in the HD realm, so they do have a signal, but it is just that everything is not switched over on this end to get there. He concluded, they are working on that.

Mr. Hastings said his neighbor watches PAC 14 all the time. He then asked if there is any kind of guidance to the public as far as new changes or new programming, or anything like that, to which Mr. Taylor responded, they are going to continue on as this is really not a significant change as he has been with PAC 14 for 12 years now, and he and Mr. Creig Twilley have similar styles. He said there are a few things administratively where he would like to be a little bit more proactive along with the County and City Councils in dealing with the franchise provider, but, as far as the service to their customers, that always comes first. He said their viewers are always their top priority, and they would like to remain relevant in the community with being there. He said he had a call from somebody who had a problem with one of the other stations, and she thought of television as being PAC 14, so she called him to handle the situation. He said he gave her the number she needed to call, but just being in the community's mind first for local television is where they want to stay, and what they want to do.

Mr. Hastings asked if they will be doing any more with the Folk Festival, to which Mr. Taylor responded, they had a very good Folk Festival presence. He said they were deemed to get more of the crowd response rather than the acts because the acts are handled in a different area of communications, but they enjoyed it. He said they were down there every day of the Festival, and their gear got a little rained on, but they got a lot of footage, and they are looking forward to covering it this year also, along with the County Fair, and Third Fridays. He said, whenever he shows up, people say "PAC 14 is here," and he is sure Mr. Twilley and Ms. Karlie Harris get the same feeling.

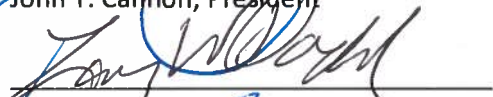
Mr. Taylor said he would also like to mention Mr. Keith Eagle, who is in the media room right now, and is also doing a wonderful job. He said he would not have thought of taking on this position if he did not know he had quality staff behind him, and the support of everybody in the County. Mr. Dodd said he remembers Mr. Taylor being back in the media room, to which Mr. Taylor responded, he was.

Mr. Taylor said he appreciates Council's time, and looks forward to working with everybody. Mr. Cannon congratulated Mr. Thomas on his appointment. Mr. Taylor congratulated Mr. Hastings on his engagement, and said he has been married nearly 29 years, and, if he had to do it again, he would. There was no further discussion.




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John T. Cannon, President




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Larry W. Dodd, Vice President, District 3



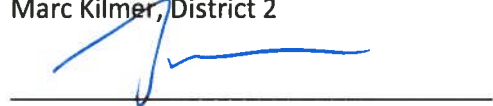
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Ernest F. Davis, District 1



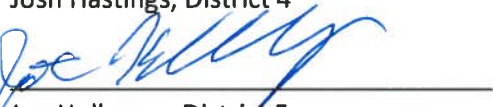
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Marc Kilmer, District 2



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Josh Hastings, District 4



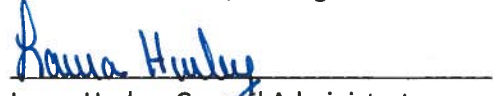
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Joe Holloway, District 5



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William R. McCain, At-Large



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Laura Hurley, Council Administrator