



To: General Purposes Committee **Date:** January 10, 2010
From: Mike Kirk **File:**
Deputy Chief Administrative Officer
Re: **RESOLUTION ON COMMUNITY CABLE CHANNEL**

Staff Recommendation

1. That the submission by Metro Vancouver to the Canadian Radio-Television Commission (CRTC) on the community channel hearing be endorsed through the following resolution:

“THAT WHEREAS the community channel is of vital importance to local government for communicating with residents:

AND WHEREAS, the community channel fosters public discourse and helps build a civil society;


AND WHEREAS, engaging citizens is a part of forming a sustainable community;

AND WHEREAS, the Community Channel is not just a cornerstone of the Canadian broadcasting system; the community channels adds to the fabric of a democratic society;

AND WHEREAS, the principles laid out in the Broadcast Act and subsequent policies which envision a community channel that involves the community in the community channel production with citizen participation supported by training programs, and community advisory boards that encourage a balance of different views and reflect the cross-cultural expression of the community and provides opportunities for feedback from viewers, should continue to stand as the foundation of the community channel;

THEREFORE, be it resolved that the City Council of Richmond, British Columbia endorses Metro Vancouver’s submission to the Canadian Radio-Television Commission (CRTC) on the community channel hearing.”

2. That the resolution be forwarded to the Metro Vancouver for inclusion in its submission to the CRTC.


Mike Kirk
Deputy Chief Administrative Officer
(604-276-4142)

FOR ORIGINATING DEPARTMENT USE ONLY		
CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER		
<i>[Signature]</i>		
REVIEWED BY TAG	YES	NO
<i>JK</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
REVIEWED BY CAO	YES	NO
<i>DEPUTY JK</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Staff Report

Origin

In the spring of 2010, the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) will conduct a policy review and consultation on the community channel cable service, which is currently provided by Shaw TV within the Vancouver region. Metro Vancouver's board has developed a submission to the CRTC and is requesting support for its submission from members municipalities via a Council resolution. Metro Vancouver is concerned about the erosion of community control, input and participation in the programming offered on the community channel.

Analysis

Metro Vancouver has provided a lengthy analysis of the current community channel service and its reasons for requesting the CRTC to intercede to ensure greater community input and control of the community channel system. That information is attached, along with a letter from Shaw Communications offering their response to the Metro Vancouver position.

In addition to the attached information, Staff have a number of observations. The community channel was originally established with the principle of providing direct community access to the broadcasting system. In its origin, this was represented by a network of community channel studios located in municipalities throughout Metro Vancouver, including Richmond. The programming originating out of these studios were primarily produced in cooperation with volunteers from the community who, worked with professional production staff, to create and broadcast a diverse array of community programming. In addition to coverage of City Council events, many community events and important civic affairs meetings and events were broadcast in their entirety.

Over the past decade, there has been a significant erosion of the services offered by the community channel. Community studios, included the one in Richmond, were closed. Locally-produced volunteer and community access programming has been greatly reduced and replaced by centrally-produced regional programming. Extended coverage of major community events and civic affairs at the local level has been generally replaced by regionalized programming.

While Shaw TV maintains it continues to provide hundreds of hours of coverage to community and civic events, much of this programming tends to be regionally rather than locally-focussed, and scheduling preference is given to Shaw's own internally-produced programming.

For example, Shaw cites its continued coverage of municipal council meetings as an example of its commitment to community programming. The City appreciates this coverage and the service provided by the assigned staff. However, over the past several years, the live broadcast of Council meetings has been increasingly pre-empted to make way for other Shaw programming. There is no provision for live broadcast of Council meetings which occur outside of the normal 7 p.m. Monday timeslot. The number of repeat broadcasts of Council meetings has been reduced. Finally, last year introduction of new digital box technology meant that many Richmond residents lost the ability to receive the Richmond Council broadcasts. Many residents now have

to request installation of special technology in order to receive the coverage of Richmond residents.

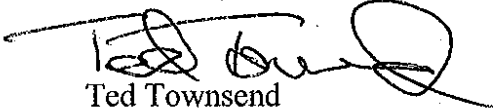
Given these considerations, support of the Metro Vancouver submission is justified.

Financial Impact

There is no financial impact.

Conclusion

Metro Vancouver will be making a submission to the CRTC expressing concern about the erosion of community input and control in the operation of the community cable channel system. Metro Vancouver has requested a resolution from member municipalities in support of its submission. Richmond has also experienced an erosion of local community coverage and input in the service provided by the local community channel provider, both in coverage of general community events and civic affairs and in the coverage of City Council meetings.



Ted Townsend
Senior Manager, Corporate Communications
(604-276-4399)

TT:tt

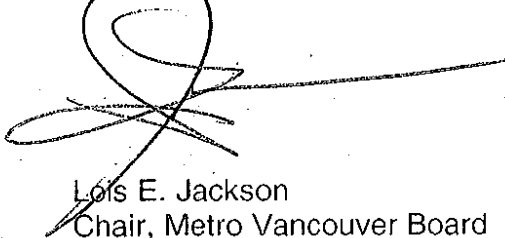
Request for resolution in council for Metro Vancouver Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) submission

Chair Lois E. Jackson to Metro Vancouver Member Municipality Clerks

Page 2 of 2

Please return municipal resolutions supporting the submission to Marianne Pengelly by email (marianne.pengelly@metrovancover.org) or fax (604-436-6399). If you have any questions or require additional information, Ms. Pengelly can be reached at 604-451-6027.

Yours truly,



Lois E. Jackson
Chair, Metro Vancouver Board
LEJ/hs/mp

Attachments:

1. Metro Vancouver submission to the CRTC (2294971)
2. Draft Resolution (2294126)
3. Draft letter to the CRTC (2296359)
4. Backgrounder (2294984)
5. Broadcasting Notice of Consultation CRTC 2009-661 (2296360)

Broadcasting Notice of Consultation CRTC 2009-661

REVIEW OF COMMUNITY TELEVISION POLICY FRAMEWORK

SUBMISSION

ON BEHALF OF METRO VANCOUVER

January 29, 2010

I. SUMMARY

1. Metro Vancouver files this submission in response to Public Hearing Notice 2009-661, **Review of community television policy framework** (the "**Public Hearing Notice**").
2. In 2007, Metro Vancouver made a submission to the Canadian Radio-Television and telecommunications Commission (CRTC) ("**the Commission**") outlining why the community channel needs to remain part of basic service. Its removal would have had a detrimental impact on the way Metro Vancouver communicates with its citizens and would limit political discourse.
3. In 2010, Metro Vancouver maintains the position that the community channel as part of the basic tier plays a key role for municipal and regional government to communicate with residents. Metro submits that there are no other options to a channel easily found on the TV (not buried in the plethora of channels) and that the space allocated for the community channel is a cornerstone for the local political discourse.
4. Metro Vancouver affirms the principles creating the community channel:
 - The community channel is not just a cornerstone of the Canadian broadcasting system; the community channel adds to the fabric of a democratic society.
 - The principles laid out in the Broadcast Act and subsequent policies which envision a community channel that involves the community in the community channel production with citizen participation supported by training programs, and community advisory boards that encourages a balance of different views and reflects the cross-cultural expression of the community, and provides opportunities for feedback from viewers, remain as the foundation of the community channel.¹

¹ 2002 community television framework

Actions

5. Metro Vancouver recommends that to help meet the objectives of the community channel, the Commission consider the following actions to strengthen the community channel:
 - a) Conduct community dialogues to determine barriers and re-envision the community channel to meet community goals;
 - b) Strengthen the community channel grassroots network, through promotion and advocacy other than relying on the Broadcast Distribution Undertakings (BDUs);
 - c) Create community advisory boards to oversee that community channel with members selected from a wide range of community interests to establish guidelines, measurable deliverables and a feedback and review process;
 - d) Continue and increase coverage of local government council and public meetings on the community channel;
 - e) In the Lower Mainland, re-brand the channel as a Community Channel and solicit citizen participation;
 - f) Consider establishing community media centres, as proposed by Canadian Association of Community TV Users and Stations (CACTUS), which might assist citizens regain access to cover community events and train residents. The closure of the production studios around the region has reduced the opportunities for residents of the municipalities to develop media skills and work with other members of the community to tell their stories.

6. Metro Vancouver requests the opportunity to send a representative to the public hearing to address the importance of the community channel to local government.

II. INTRODUCTION

7. Metro Vancouver is a political body and corporate entity operating under provincial legislation as a 'regional district' and 'greater boards' that delivers regional services, planning and political leadership on behalf of 24 local authorities. Metro Vancouver has a population of 2.3 million and comprises of 22 municipalities, one electoral area, and one treaty First Nation.

8. Local and regional government rely on the community channel to express the goals and aspirations its citizens. The community channel is a vital conduit to inform and educate residents about the matters affecting the region and to engage citizens in solutions to create and maintain a sustainable society.

III. ISSUES

9. In response to the questions posed by in the CRTC's review of the community channel policy framework, Metro Vancouver's submission addresses the following two issues:
 - whether or not the current form of the community channel remains as a foundation of democratic discourse and avenue for citizen expression and participation in line with the principles laid out in the Broadcasting Act and subsequent CRTC policies;
 - whether or not, in an evolving communications environment with new media, the community channel as operated by cable licensees continues to fulfill the mandate laid out in the policy framework.

IV. FACTS AND ARGUMENTS

10. Facts

11. The following facts are provided to assist the Commission in understanding the importance of the community channel to local and regional governments.
12. In the 1970's when cable operators provided community studios – a dozen of them across the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, citizens had the opportunity to learn the skills for producing programming, the opportunity to create stories about their community from many perspectives, and a place and common purpose for building community.
13. In 1998 the GVRD began using television programming as a way to interact with the community. There was a lack of in-depth television programming that dealt with the issues citizens and decision makers of the Lower Mainland were grappling with. Rogers'

cable provided equipment and volunteers for *Greater Vancouver* and *People and Policies Town Hall*.

14. Community stations closed in both 2002 and 2004, as the community channel cable provider switched from Rogers' to Shaw Cablesystems G.P. ("**Shaw**"). As a result, volunteers who had previously provided programming for the community channel were reduced in number and the staff of the cable operator took over producing the main programming. The community studios were closed and all community channel operations were moved to the Shaw headquarters.
15. In 2004, the GVRD launched its own show entitled *The Liveable Region* (which later became *The Sustainable Region* in 2005). *The Sustainable Region* has won many awards, competing against other government programming (PEG) in the United States.² While the show's title suggests a regional focus, the show includes stories from each of the Lower Mainland's 22 municipalities as well as a unified vision of the region. The Sustainable Region is a way Metro Vancouver can reflect the larger vision and the interconnectedness of the municipalities to the residents.
16. Metro Vancouver also broadcasts shows based on community forums, and sustainability dialogues. Metro Vancouver's interest in producing these shows is to ensure that special meetings where the community discuss regional issues are broadcast and in a regular time slot. Citizens have provided positive feedback and, through the use of the community channel, enlarged the discussion and provided a way for yet more citizens to become involved in the consultation process. These productions are local and regional governments' commitment to the governance of the region.
17. Metro Vancouver fully supports the overall objectives of the community TV framework:
 - *to ensure the creation and exhibition of more locally-produced, locally-reflective community programming; and*
 - *to foster a greater diversity of voices and alternative choices by facilitating the entrance of new participants at the local level.*³

² The community channel in the United States covers public, educational and government programming.

³ CRTC 2002 community television framework

Arguments

Examples from Metro Vancouver that illustrate ways an independent producer is marginalized.

18. **The disappearing community channel.** The community channel as a vehicle for citizen access and self-expression in the Lower Mainland has gradually disappeared. Just as the community stations disappeared in 2004, the community channel identity disappeared. What has appeared in its place is "Shaw TV".

"We are Local TV" proclaims a Shaw newspaper ad., part of its ongoing branding campaign.⁴ This branding creates the impression of a "Shaw" channel and that it is Shaw that represents "your" community. Nothing on the Shaw website indicates anything about this being the community channel. Currently, the cable levy money in Greater Vancouver amounts to about five million dollars annually. This money is used by Shaw who has re-branded the community channel for their own purposes and is cutting the community out of the process of producing community programs. The cable operator has effectively made the channel its own.

19. **Lack of consultation.** Metro Vancouver was notified December 2008, that the time slot for The Sustainable Region was changing on February 2, 2009. There was no consultation before the decision and no discussion after. Metro Vancouver was informed it was because other independent producers needed the time so it was surprising to see the time slot we had negotiated for and held for three years preempted by one of Shaw's programs.⁵

20. **BDU keeps the best for themselves.** Metro was given a list of ten time slots that The Sustainable Region would air in – eight of the ten were in the middle of the night and the two "prime time" spots were both on the same day. The cable operator has the power and discretion to program what best suits their needs, keeping the most desirable time for themselves and least desirable time for the community producers. There is no avenue to address this issue.⁶

21. **Are volunteer training and requests to cover community events adequately addressed?** The Sustainable Region has been approached by people asking to

⁴ Vancouver Sun, November 14, 2009

⁵ Email correspondence with Shaw

⁶ Email correspondence with Shaw

volunteer. Metro Vancouver has received repeated requests from community groups to cover their events. These enquiries are referred back to Shaw. Since The Sustainable Region is only a monthly half-hour show, with two weekly day-time time slots it raises concerns as to whether the cable broadcaster is reaching out to the community enough.⁷

22. Who will fight for the commons? The airwaves designated for the community- "a commons"- have undergone the fate of other commons- usurped by powerful private interests. A community advisory board might have been an advocate but instituting a board has met with resistance from Shaw for years.

23. BDU's may create well-produced local programming, creating the impression of a community channel. But the community they present is "screened" through the lens of the private company. More importantly, the community is cut out of the process of working together to create community programming from the grassroots level.

24. Is it realistic to expect that the cable operator who controls the means of producing programming and distributing it, as laid out by the CRTC in the 2002 community TV framework; to-

... give the community the widest opportunity for self-expression by actively encouraging groups and individuals to present program ideas, produce their own programs with or without the help of the licensee's staff, and submit videotapes and films produced by them for broadcast by the licensee."

There is an inherent imbalance of power between the BDU and community groups and no way to redress it in the current framework.

25. Metro Vancouver echoes the concerns raised community groups and reported by David Keeble in his study for the CRTC commissioned study: The Impact of New Technology on Community Television, 2008

... Several community groups noted that the community channel originated as a tool not simply to reflect community, but, through the process of creation, to develop stronger community ties, self-awareness and cohesion. This objective supports the objective of alternative choices and new

⁷ Email volunteer and community requests

participants, and also corresponds closely with the wording of the Act, in the sense that national identity may be built on local identities.

26. The community coming together to produce material for the community channel is as important as the product. In sustainability parlance, which requires consideration of economic, environmental and social factors, the community channel creates a social space for community and capacity building.⁸
27. **The community channel plays a critical role in promoting sustainability throughout the region.** The vision of Metro Vancouver is to create a sustainable region now and in the future. This vision cannot be realized if the residents of the region are not provided with information about local communities and ideas and innovations for creating a better future and if they are not engaged in the community and in political dialogue. The community channel is a critical component for making Metro Vancouver's visions a reality.
28. Metro Vancouver's research demonstrates the dominance of television as a means for the public to obtain information. For example, 95% of residents get their information through television. Thus, the community channel plays a pivotal role in helping local governments communicate with their residents.
29. The study conducted for the CRTC by David Keeble confirms this view.

... the community channel is likely to achieve better audiences within the more limited offering of cable than it could in the infinite offering of the Internet. Therefore, Internet distribution is not seen as a replacement for BDU distribution.

⁸ In the 2002 community TV framework, the Commission noted that access by citizens to the community channel has always been a cornerstone of the Commission's policy. To underscore this principle, the Commission quoted Public Notice 1991-59, in which it stated: "The factor that most distinguishes the content of community programming from conventional television services is the ability of community programming to turn the passive viewer of television into an active participant. From this participation flows programming of a nature that is as varied as the imagination and skills of the participants."

... The Internet is not seen as a replacement for the community channel....does not attract an audience or allow the programming to attract a community's focus in the same way that television does. It is seen as a useful complement.⁹

IV. CONCLUSIONS

- 30. The community channel plays two vital roles: maintaining public discourse at the local level, and capacity building in the community.** It serves as a focus for citizens to become engaged in developing the skills to tell their stories in a 21st century mode. It is crucial for the community channel to carry local, community-based programming that is not driven by the rationale of high ratings, selling products and generating revenue. The community channel must act as an outlet for the stories and expressions that would otherwise not find a home on television.
- 31. The community channel is an important tool used to foster democratic discourse.** As society becomes more complex, government has to work harder to engage citizens in solving challenges and decision-making. Metro Vancouver views the opportunity to review the purpose of the community channel as a chance to find ways to bring citizens back into the discussions about how we govern ourselves. A key aspect of re-involvement is the development of citizen media skills. This is important as journalists become increasingly scarce as the traditional news sources such as mass newspapers and traditional television struggle to reinvent themselves.
- 32. Communities must develop local solutions.** Metro Vancouver believes that the role of the community channel in the community dialogue is now more important than ever. Residents of the Metro Vancouver region, like Canadians across the country, are now being challenged like never before to contribute to the sustainable development of the planet. The slogan "Think Globally, Act Locally" resonates in this regard. Metro Vancouver submits that the community channel can play an important role in this growing discourse by educating and informing residents about sustainability and by endeavouring to change the behaviour of Metro Vancouver residents.

⁹ The Impact of New Technology on Community Television, David Keeble, 2008

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Actions

Metro Vancouver recommends that to help meet the objectives of the community channel, the Commission consider the following actions to strengthen the community channel:

- a) Conduct community dialogues to determine barriers and re-envision the community channel to meet community goals;
- b) Strengthen the community channel grassroots network, through promotion and advocacy other than relying on the BDUs;
- c) Create community advisory boards to oversee that community channel with members selected from a wide range of community interests to establish guidelines, measurable deliverables and a feedback and review process;
- d) Continue and increase coverage of local government council and public meetings on the community channel;
- e) In the Lower Mainland, remove the Shaw TV brand from the community channel and the re-branding of the channel as a Community Channel and solicit citizen participation;
- f) Consider establishing community media centres, as proposed by Canadian Association of Community TV Users and Stations (CACTUS) which might assist citizens regain access to cover community events and train residents. The closure of the production studios around the region has reduced the opportunities for residents of the municipalities to develop media skills and work with other members of the community to tell their stories.

VI. FURTHER COMMUNICATION

Please direct all communications and inquiries regarding this submission to:

Marianne Pengelly
Executive Producer, *The Sustainable Region TV*

Metro Vancouver
4330 Kingsway,
Vancouver, B.C. V5H 4G8

T: (604) 451-6027
F: (604) 432-6399
Email: Marianne.Pengelly@metrovancover.org

DRAFT RESOLUTION

Be it resolved that:

_____ municipal council endorses the submission by Metro Vancouver to the CRTC on the community channel hearing:

Metro Vancouver recommends the following to the Canadian Radio-Television Telecommunications Commission:

THAT WHEREAS, the community channel is of vital importance to local government for communicating with residents;

AND WHEREAS, the community channel fosters public discourse and helps builds a civil society;

AND WHEREAS, engaging citizens is a part of forming a sustainable community;

AND WHEREAS, the community channel is not just a cornerstone of in the Canadian broadcasting system; the community channel adds to the fabric of a democratic society; and

AND WHEREAS, the principles laid out in the Broadcast Act and subsequent policies which envision a community channel that involves the community in the community channel production with citizen participation supported by training programs, and community advisory boards that encourages a balance of different views and reflects the cross-cultural expression of the community, and provides opportunities for feedback from viewers, should continue to stand as the foundation of the community channel;

THEREFORE, be it resolved that the City Council of _____, British Columbia endorse Metro Vancouver's submission to the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission's (CRTC's) public hearing regarding the community channel.

Dated: _____, 2009.



Mayor and Council
City of Richmond
6911 No. 3 Rd
Richmond, B.C. V6Y 2C1

December 16, 2009

Dear Mayor and Council

Recently, the Metro Vancouver Board endorsed a submission to the CRTC that was critical of Shaw TV. We are taking this opportunity to share with you some of our Shaw TV accomplishments, and our concerns with the Metro Vancouver submission.

At Shaw, we take our community channel responsibilities very seriously. To be clear, Shaw not only fully meets all CRTC requirements for community access and local content, we exceed them. The CRTC rules and policies governing community channels require that not less than 60% of the programming aired each week are devoted to local community television programming, defined as programming that is reflective of the community and that is produced by the licensee in the licensed areas or by members of the community of the licensed area.

Further, the community channel must also devote at least 30% to 50% to access programming, defined as programming produced by members of the community served by the cable operator, either assisted or unassisted by the licensee. As you will know from watching the channel, Shaw TV broadcasts over 90% local community programming content, and on average approximately 40% local access programming.

In addition, Shaw TV broadcasts the meetings of 18 Councils (including the City of Richmond) and 3 Boards of Education. Of note, this type of programming does not qualify as access programming, but we consider that this coverage is important to the communities we serve. Broadcasting this programming may be increasingly more challenging in the context of managing new and competing demands for higher levels of community access and demands for the diversion of funding.

We are totally committed to working with all of our access producers and citizens to ensure we balance the demands for airtime and meet their objectives with regards to participation and scheduling. Sometimes the demands and enthusiasm of the community access groups and producers are greater than the time and resource limits of the channel, but we strive to minimize these situations and accommodate everyone.

We note that in the first 9 months of 2009, Shaw TV and the community produced over 1,100 hours of local stories, 400 hours of access programming, and 1,500 hours of public affairs programming within Metro Vancouver. This is a tremendous amount of programming and local reflection of which we are all proud.

We are completely dedicated to the customers we serve and the communities in which they live. We continue to make significant investments in equipment, develop staff, trainees and volunteers, and increase customer satisfaction with the channel. These investments have allowed Shaw to produce high quality local programming throughout the region. We have seen our viewership grow steadily as more people look to Shaw for local information on the arts, people and events in the region.

We do not believe that the Metro Vancouver submission has fairly or adequately reflected the tremendous value of Shaw TV to the communities we serve, or fully responded to the wide number of issues that are raised in the CRTC's recent Broadcasting notice of Consultation (BPN 2009-661). Shaw looks forward to participating in the upcoming CRTC review of community television. We have attached for your interest some programming statistics and information concerning Shaw TV.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alex Park", written over a horizontal line.

Alex Park
Vice-President,
Programming/Educational Services

Shaw TV Vancouver Region 2009 Programming Summary

Total amount of local, community produced programming; **40%**

Total amount of local content; **90%**

Local Community Access Programming Produced by Access TV corporations

- After Hours (ICTV)
- Community TV in Motion (ICTV)
- Fearless TV (ACCESS)
- One World (VCTA)
- Pasifik.ca (Nowpolling/Community Media)
- Rockinitis (ICTV)
- Tri-Cities Magazine (Tri-Cities Community TV)
- Working TV (Slim Evans Society)

Local Community Access Programming Produced by Independent Producers

- BCIT Magazine (produced by BCIT students)
- Crimestoppers (weekly segment on The Express)
- GVTV (produced by the City of Vancouver)
- Jai Fiji (Vincent Prakesh)
- Langara Dialogues
- Mixed Nutz (children's series; Big Bad Boo Productions))
- Moj Svet (Mihailo Djoric)
- Our Ground (TV Korea)
- Out Of This World (partnership with H.R. MacMillan Space Centre; weekly segments on The Express)
- Shifting Gears (Veeno Dewan)
- The Sustainable Region (produced by Metro Vancouver)
- Vancouver Board of Trade (speaker' series)
- Vancouver Foundation Presents
- Vancouver Masala (Sneha Studios)
- Vancouver Nights (Majid Mahichi)
- Weekly News Forum (Canada TV Productions Ltd.)
- WorkSafeBC
- Your Education Matters (produced by Simon Fraser University Faculty of Education)
- Canadian International Council: CIC Student Debate on International Affairs
- Community Legal Assistance Society/Disability Advisory Committee: Forum on Disability Issues
- Downtown Surrey Business Improvement Association: Provincial A/I Candidate Forum-Surrey
- Justice Education Society: Gang Wars: Justice In Our Times
- Langara College: Langara Dialogues (60minutes weekly; January-August)
- New Westminster Hyack Festival Parade
- 2009 B.C. High School Track + Field Championships (Steppin Out Productions)

Local content Produced by Shaw

- A World of Smiles Telethon (BC Children's Hospital Foundation)
- CKNW Orphans' Fund Pledge Day
- Constituency Report (MLA, MP)
- Making It Happen Auction (in support of Canadian athletes)
- Municipal Council Coverage (18 councils and 3 school boards)
- Powered To Win (Olympic themed newsmagazine)
- WHL Hockey/CIS University Football/Vancouver Whitecaps Soccer/BC Curling Championships
- Studio 4 (weekdays; talk show)
- The Express (daily newsmagazine: 700 stories produced per year)
- Urban Rush (weekdays; entertainment talk show)
- Voice of BC (weekly; public affairs)

Volunteer Activity

- 28 volunteer training sessions
- 260 TOTAL volunteer trainees
- 102 active volunteers working with Shaw

Background information on the history and role of the community channel and the cable industry

The Canadian Broadcasting Act defines three tiers in the broadcasting system:

- public (CBC and provincial channels)
- private (specialty channels like Discovery and over-the-air channels like CTV)
- community (available on local basic cable tier)

The CRTC policy framework for community-based media" (2002), described its objectives:

- *to ensure the creation and exhibition of more locally-produced, locally-reflective community programming.*
- *to foster a greater diversity of voices and alternative choices by facilitating the entrance of new participants at the local level.*

The community channel is mandated as the platform that the public can use to express itself, learn about television production, and acquire media literacy skills.

The community channel broadcasts to groups not served by the mainstream (such as ethnic minorities, sexual or political minorities.)

Government required cable operators to spend 10% of gross revenues on a local platform for community expression and as compensation for the use of public rights of way to lay cable. The 10% of gross revenues has been reduced to 2% and carrying community channels has become optional.

Until about 1997, Canadians could go to their local cable operator, take free workshops, borrow equipment, and produce their own TV shows.

Cable companies had a monopoly when they started out and now they experience competition from satellite providers and telephone companies.

To maintain a competitive advantage, cable operators closed community offices, use their own staff to produce community programming and developed formats that fill up most of a local channel's schedule reducing airtime available for community groups.

If cable operators operate a community channel they get to keep the revenues that would otherwise have to go to the Canadian Television fund. In the Lower Mainland that amounts to about \$5 million dollars annually.

One might argue that times have changed and perhaps with the internet we don't need the community channel. However:

- the majority of citizens still get their news from TV;
- the community channel provides one point focus on the community;
- citizens facing time constraints and will choose "need-to-know" local information over "nice-to-know" regional or national or world information;
- local content is disappearing as traditional TV and other broadcasters experience challenges and make their news more regional in nature;
- High-speed internet not as widespread as cable; and the Internet offers a fragmented view point

How to Participate in the CRTC Hearings:

The public notice of consultation for the community sector review is posted at:

<http://www.crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/2009/2009-661.htm>

The Commission asks 32 questions. You do not have to reply to any specific question. The terminology can be confusing if you are intervening for the first time.

You can remit your comments:

- Using the CRTC web site. Scroll to the bottom of 2009-661. Click: Broadcasting interventions/comments form.
- You can either type your comments into a form or click "Send", or you can upload attachments.
- By mail to CRTC, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0N2.
- By fax at 819-994-0218.

In all three cases, you must identify yourself, identify the hearing (2009-661), and say whether you want to appear in person. You can appear at any CRTC office in Vancouver by videoconference, on April 26, 2010.

It is worth while appearing. The six Commissioners who will rule on these issues often do not read all the written comments. It's an opportunity to share your experiences of the value of community TV with them directly.

2294984