

Raymond Community Television (RCTV)

A History

Article 31 of the 1980 Town report shows voters approved the awarding of a Cable Franchise agreement to Cablevision of Exeter, NH. The 1996 Town report shows a Cable Committee consisting of Stephen Keith, Mark Lagasse, Tom Carrol (SAU Superintendent), Sylvia Kimball, Donald Drew, David Dantos, & the late Selectman Richard Ladd. In 1997 the Board of Selectmen entered into an agreement with Media One of New England to provide cable television services to its residents. It was decided that a group of volunteers would run the access station and so Steve reached out to Kevin Woods & Marc Vadeboncoeur, both residents with professional television experience, to assist. Eventually the committee grew to 7.

In 1998, as part of the negotiations with Media One, the town received a capital equipment grant of \$50,000 (paid for by subscribers) and a franchise fee of 2% of the gross annual revenue. A space was located in the present town office building and equipment was acquired from state and federal surplus offices, NH Public Television, and from wherever Marc, Steve, and Kevin could get it. The town office meeting room was equipped with robotic cameras and microphones to record meetings. In 1998 The Board of Selectmen, then Richard Ladd (Chair), Harold Wood (Vice Chair), Norman Weldy Jr., William Kelley, and Ed French voted to allocate all cable related franchise fees to the operation of Raymond Community Television. Ed French was insistent that no other funds from taxpayers would be used to pay for RCTV expenses. And they NEVER HAVE.

Eventually the town outgrew the town office meeting room. The Town Manager and Superintendent of the time negotiated holding committee meetings at the High School and RCTV used their funds to equip the Media Center. Sometime later the Industrial Arts room was added as a second meeting room and equipment purchased and installed for it. All at no cost to the taxpayer.

In addition to government meetings, RCTV covers school events such as band and choral concerts as well as Raymond High school graduation, Memorial Day parades, Wreaths Across America, National Day of Prayer, Veterans Day Ceremonies, and other local events. RCTV continues to grow. The cable committee remains very frugal in its use of the franchise fees allowing it to save up for major capital purchases.

In the early years, the Cable committee would bring every item and issue before the Board of Selectmen. In time the Board instructed the Committee to handle the day-to-day operations and only bring major changes or needs before the Board. As the need grew, a part time non

benefited position of Cable Coordinator was added. Linda Jameson was hired to oversee the bulletin board and programming. In late 2001 Marc Vadeboncoeur who had come from the Manchester School of Technology took over the position and in early 2012 Kevin Woods who had been chair of the cable committee for many years stepped down as chair and assumed the role from Marc.

In 2008 RCTV added “on-demand” streaming, which meant that people anywhere could download a meeting or school event and watch it. They did not have to live in Raymond and receive Comcast programming. In 2011, this system was improved so that viewers did not have to download the entire meeting but could watch it with a web. In 2012 the cable committee approved the purchase of equipment to allow live streaming of programming. People anywhere in the world with internet access can now view government meetings live on the web. For the first time Raymond residents and others who do not pay a franchise fee reaped the benefits of RCTV.

In 2012 the committee worked with the Board of Selectmen in an attempt to purchase the former Post office building at 77 Main Street. It would have provided RCTV with a dedicated studio, office, edit rooms, control rooms and the town would have two meeting rooms equipped to broadcast meetings. However, the voters rejected the proposal. While the RCTV budget had enough funds, the building purchase would require a bond payment. All of it would have been paid for from RCTV savings.

In 2014-15 The Cable Committee received approval to upgrade all of its meeting room and studio consoles equipment. New High-definition cameras and production consoles were installed. In April of 2016 RCTV installed new digital wireless desk microphones in the media center control room for better audio pick up of meetings. A fiber optic-based system was also purchased to allow the use of the new robotic cameras in the RHS Gym. In 2018 the Committee began developing a replacement plan identifying expected life of service terms for its equipment.

Over time it became increasingly difficult to staff board and committee meetings with volunteers. It was decided that funds were available to pay for help with this. The Committee drafted a proposal for “Government Access Media Operators” who would be paid a flat rate stipend for each meeting they covered. All funds would come from the RCTV budget. The Selectmen adopted the recommendation. In June of this 2019 the committee debated the benefits of covering the community events noted earlier and voted to compensate those who recorded and edited them. This information was known by the Selectmen’s Representative to the Committee and was shared with the Finance Manager, Julie Jenks.

All RCTV purchases and expenditures are routed through the Finance Director. This ensures transparency.

The Board of Selectmen in 1998 acknowledged that the Franchise fee is only paid by subscribers and therefore Cable Subscribers should get the benefits of the fees. If the money is used for general fund or to reduce taxes, then Cable subscribers would be unfairly double taxed for these items. Once in their taxes and again in the franchise fee only they pay.

The RCTV Policy Manual was first approved by the Board in 2000. It was updated and approved in 2010 & 2012. Both were approved by the Board.

RCTV continues to follow its primary purpose, "to permit participation and awareness of governmental and educational programming and in terms of public access to act as a resource for the expression of FREE SPEECH for those in our community". The fulfillment of that primary purpose fosters the secondary purposes which are:

- A tool for communication.
- A means of entertainment and information.
- A means of education of the Townspeople of Raymond; and
- To foster the spirit of community.

Many volunteers have come and gone over the years; some as members of the Cable TV Committee and others devoting significant time to covering important town events.

Current Cable Committee members are

Kathy Masso (Chair)

Marc Vadeboncoeur

Debra Moore

Art Wolinsky

Dennis Garnham

David Washer (Vice Chair)

Kevin Woods (Cable Coordinator).