

Austin Community Technology and Telecommunications Commission
Regular Meeting – February 14, 2007
<http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/telcommission/>

Minutes

All items are for discussion and possible action

1. Call to order.

Commission Chair Chad Williams called the meeting to order at 7:47 p.m. Commissioners in attendance were Chad Williams, Chip Rosenthal, Wendell Ramsey, Jim Howerton, John Green, Kedron Touvell and Pilar Sanchez. Commissioners Arthur Sampson and John Montgomery were absent. Staff in attendance was Rondella Hawkins, Sheena Harden and Jane Reina.

2. Adoption of agenda.

Motion to adopt the agenda was made by Commissioner Green; seconded by Commissioner Rosenthal. Vote 7-0. (Commissioners Sampson and Montgomery absent)

3. General citizen communications. (3 minutes to speak)

Don Bennett stated that he has concerns with the administration of Public Access Community Television (PACT). These concerns include the ability of Public Access Producers to produce quality television shows. The public access channels have more than the usual community service announcements and adds for training, and schedules for shows. He stated that some of the producers would rather stop producing shows instead of undergoing some of PACT's policies and restrictions. Mr. Bennett stated that it appears that PACT's main function is to make money. He requested the Commission's help by looking into these concerns.

Sueann Campbell asked the Commission to not rush in to passing the resolution on the PACT mobile production van. She asked if she could work with the Commission to discover other ways to get funding. She stated that this public access television station is becoming less a public access and more a corporate access television station. The producers Council would like the opportunity to address this Commission before the final decision is made on the resolution to request the purchase of the mobile production van.

George Wooley's written comments were read into record and stated: After decades of having everything its way, Austin Community Television (ACTV) was finally forced to compete but it was too late. Producers dissatisfied with lack of services and non-customer friendly policies finally succeeded in deciphering the secret reason for the nonsense. Management was pocketing as much money as it could get away with instead of serving the people as they were contracted to do. The bad news is that ACTV's replacement, PACT brought in the same "You're lucky to have us as your service provider" attitude while phasing out most of their best employees. PACT has enforced a

barrier of rules and more regulations and still more policies that they have sadistically placed in the producer's path. It is time to speak to PACT's supervisor and the Board of Directors. Many suspect that this will be ineffective because it has been packed with management's cronies so we may need to move up the complaint to the Telecom Commission and then City Council. One thing we cannot ever do is to accept abusive or lousy service from civil servants or those contracted by our government to serve the citizenry.

4. Approval of minutes from the January 10, 2007 Commission regular meeting.

Motion to approve the minutes from the January 10, 2007 Commission regular meeting was made by Commissioner Rosenthal ; seconded by Commissioner Sanchez . Vote 7-0. (Commissioners Sampson and Montgomery absent)

5. Presentation on Bar Camp Austin II. (wp4)

William (whurley) Hurley stated that a Bar Camp is an ad-hoc un-conference born from the desire for people to share and learn in an open environment. It is an intense event with discussions, demos and interaction from attendees. Anyone with something to contribute or with the desire to learn is welcome and invited to join. When you come, be prepared to share with barcampers. When you leave, be prepared to share it with the world. It's all about building community. For more information please visit <http://barcamp.org/BarCampAustin>

Commissioner Williams feels this is economic development and would like to see Bar Camp give their presentation to the Council Committee for Emerging Technology and Telecommunications.

6. Presentation from Public Access Community Television (PACT). (workplan 3) (*Handout*)

Linda Litowsky, Executive Director and Garry Wilkerson, General Manager of PACT presented a two minute promotional video of the resources of PACT.

Ms. Litowsky reported on some of PACT's accomplishment from the past year. The facilities had new paint and space redesign for better work flow. As community outreach, PACT filmed first night Austin and East by Southeast Music. They also gave a producers' reunion in mid August and included in that was a free speech forum with Gary Chapman from LBJ School. They presented the impact awards in October to honor the producers' programming and producers. February 12, 2007 PACT reconnected with their national organizations that represent all of PEG access with a Southwest Regional Conference. She also stated they had an increase in enrollment in training.

Mr. Wilkerson reported they had a dramatic increase in the use of equipment. PACT spent over \$80,000 getting equipment repaired and are hoping to replace some of the equipment that can't be repaired. They received extra funding for new equipment which includes seven new cameras, seven non-linear edit systems, and microphones. Their playback system went live December 13, 2006. They are hoping to go streaming full time but this involves additional expenditures. The wireless mesh is supposed to move to

the PACT facilities as a hub for the East side of town. Mr. Wilkerson also provided the Commission with a vendor breakdown of what the production truck would be about.

Ms. Litowsky sent out a special thanks to the City of Austin's Communications & Technology Management, and Telecommunications & Regulatory Affairs Office for helping to make the playback system happen. For the first time in 33 years public access is doing its own playback.

Ms. Litowsky stated that PACT has been working with disability groups to help them get programming made for none profits. PACT has also partnered with St. Edwards University Capstone Program and Masters in Business students are going to present PACT with a business/marketing plan and a financial statement. These students are also developing a survey for producers that PACT hopes to get out by May.

Ms. Litowsky also stated PACT has done some work for hire that includes a bid awarded for City of Austin's Music in the Plaza for six months. PACT was chosen for a studio shoot for the Friday Night Lights TV series. In lieu of a location fee the TV producers of Friday Night Lights made a donation to PACT. A Texas Lottery commercial was shot at PACT. For PACT's annual fundraiser they will hold a Bizarre Bazaar. Ms. Litowsky stated that in 2011 public access funding will go away so if the studios want to stay in operations at the same level they are today they would need to raise \$50,000 a month. The Denver public access studio funds have been completely taken away so they are developing some open source software to be able to do everything online.

Don Bennett stated that PACT is more interested in making money instead of the needs of the producers.

Gary Johnson stated that the performance of PACT is unsatisfactory. PACT management has made it harder for producers to produce their television shows. The rules have grown from 19 pages to 38 pages. PACT management and board routinely ignore their own policies and procedures. PACT enforces proposed rules before they have been adopted. The City of Austin should not automatically renew the contract with PACT instead the City should issue a request for proposals (RFP) and open the process to competitive bidding as soon as possible. Even if PACT is the only bidder there needs to be a review of its performance.

7. Telecommunications & Regulatory Affairs Office Report. (Rondella Hawkins)

a. Legislative update on Cable TV/Video franchising/telecommunications.(wp5)

Rondella Hawkins, Manager of Telecommunications & Regulatory Affairs (TARA) Office, reported that the City is still awaiting the release of the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) video franchising order. There was a video franchise order issued that pertains to how municipalities or local franchising authorities, franchise their local cable TV or video operators. The rules were more stringent and had disadvantages to what the Texas video franchising laws included. We are now waiting to get the text released of this order to determine if, in fact, it does preempt state franchising laws.

b. Grant for Technology Opportunities Program (GTOPs) update. (wp2)

Sheena Harden, Program Coordinator for TARA, reported the review process is currently going for the 2007 grants. There are 29 applicants. The preliminary scores for the first elimination round are due Friday, February 16th by the reviewers. The second round will include oral presentations that are schedule for March 2nd.

Ms. Harden stated she had a site visit to LifeWorks, a 2006 GTOPs recipient and was very impressed by their facility and programs.

8. Task Force on New Sources of Funding for Access Television update and discussion and possible recommendation on Public Access production van resolution. (Williams) (wp3)

Commissioner Williams presented a draft resolution on the public access mobile production van. He feels that this van will catapult PACT into another level of providing public access television to the Austin community and be a revenue generator. He stated that Dallas Community Television has a mobile production van and describes it as a cash cow.

Commissioner Howerton does not have a good understanding of what the cost would be for the van. He would like to have some time to digest the information provided. In the resolution he wants to see a better understanding of how the producer community is going to be involved in the utilization of the production van.

Commissioner Sanchez asked for information on the cost to maintain the van and equipment in the van.

Commissioner Williams's feels the resolution does not need to address the cost of maintenance or the producer's use of the van but the Commission does need to be informed before they pass this resolution.

Commissioner Rosenthal stated that it would be helpful to know if there is anything in the PACT contract that stipulates what kind of revenue generating activities would be appropriate.

Rondella Hawkins stated that the current contract does identify revenue generating activities however she would need to refer back to the contract before she could give specifics.

Commissioner Ramsey stated the way we might approach this resolution is if we don't put financial amounts for the cost of the van, insurance and general maintenance in the resolution that at some point we would need to provide a reference to an information packet. He would also like to know how the producer community will be involved in the use of the van. If the funds are not used for a van then are those funds still available to help enhance the quality of the equipment and maintenance.

Commissioner Williams stated the City has not heard back from Time Warner Cable on the PEG capital equipment fund that the City has requested from them.

Ms. Hawkins stated she submitted the PEG budget to Time Warner in August of 2006 as prescribed under their franchise.

Commissioner Williams requested this item on a resolution for a mobile production van be tabled until this Commission's March 14, 2007 meeting.

Don Bennett stated he is not in objection to the production van. He stated there needs to be some priorities set regarding repair of equipment instead of buying a van.

Gary Johnson stated he would like to see the vendor package on the mobile production van. He does believe the producer community will not be using this van. It is important that the Commission look at the van's maintenance cost. He thinks the Commission is looking at spending money that the City does not have.

Sueann Campbell stated that it seems the model that PACT management and board are using is not working and does not include producers.

David Griffin, Equipment Manager for PACT stated, as a private citizen, that the production van is a training tool for producers. The statement that the producers will not have access to the production van is nonsense. Every thing that PACT does is for the producers. PACT is changing things for the better and people don't like change.

Pam Thompson stated that she is looking forward to a mobile production van. The van would help in doing out reach to the community.

Stefan Wray stated that he feels some of the critics of the van don't understand so there needs to be more communications with management. Section 10 of PACT's contract with the City of Austin states "the contractor may use the facilities and resource to generate revenue so long as it does not interfere with producer's air time". The contract also states "Contractor shall generate revenue and shall pursue other means of generating revenue".

9. Task Force Technology Ascertainment Study and Possible Co-sponsoring Partners update. (Rosenthal) (wp 1)

This item was pulled.

10. Update reports on networking relationships with other boards/commissions and groups, citywide and Austin Community Technology and Telecommunications Commission information items.

Commissioner Williams stated he attended the ACM Regional Conference at PACT Monday, February 12, 2007. There were access studio representatives throughout the state of Texas and Oklahoma sharing information.

Commissioner Sanchez stated that Councilmember Kim gathered her commission appointees to share information and ideas. One thing brought up was that City commissions don't share information among themselves to know if they are working toward the same goals. Commissioner Sanchez reported that this commission was looking at the City's website to see how it could be used to communicate to the citizens on all the City's commission work plans.

11. Council Committee for Emerging Technology and Telecommunications report.

Commissioner Williams reported that the last Council Committee meeting was a press conference at the Austin Film Studio. Proposition 4, that passed at the last election, proposed 5 million dollars in bond money for promoting the film industry in Austin. The majority of this funding will go to Austin Film Studio as a part of their capital improvements.

12. Future agenda items for the Austin Community Technology & Telecommunications Commission regular meeting scheduled for March 14, 2007.

- ? Task Force on New Sources of Funding for Access Television update and discussion and possible recommendation on Public Access production van resolution. (Williams) (wp3)
- ? Resolutions on budget priorities. (this includes PACT, GTOPs, etc...)
- ? Presentation from the Austin Housing Authority on the population they serve, the kinds of technology they provide to them and their needs. (10 minutes)
- ? Public Access Producers Council update. (10 minutes)
- ? Broadband Over Power lines project update. (Pete Collins)
- ? Discussion and possible action on Austin Community Technology and Telecommunication Commission Bylaws concerning state time of Commission regular meeting.
- ? Presentation on South by Southwest Interactive. (April / May meeting)

13. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 10:30 p.m.