

**SMAC Evaluation findings commissioned  
by the SMAC Board of Directors**

**July 14, 2020**

During the weeks of June 28 and July 5, 2020 nine individuals were interviewed as part of a review of the SMAC Station Manager, Michael Hammond, as commissioned by the Board. The interviews were conducted by Mark Hausamann. Those interviewed included all members of the Board (Stephen Bates, John Malley, Alan Mills, Robert Mullen and John Stagnone) along with each of the station's staff (Craig Mullen, Rob Rotella and Dave Young.) Michael Hammond was also interviewed.

The interviews were wide ranging, with a primary focus on the performance of the Station Manager, but also included thoughts and ideas on how to improve the operations of the station more broadly. Along with observing the work of the Station Manager, the consultant reviewed source documents including the by-laws of the Stoughton Media Access Corporation (SMAC), SMAC Member Policies and Procedures, Personnel Policies and Procedures and financial statements. Performance appraisals for the Station Manager were also reviewed. Themes from the interviews, the consultant's observation of the work along with learnings from the document review are included in this report. In the interest of confidentiality, no attribution is attached to what was said.

#### *Evaluation of the Station Manager*

All of the staff who report to the manager speak highly of him and say that they are both satisfied with his performance and his management style. It should be noted that staff members are long term employees and report they are fully cross- trained on all aspects of cable show production.

Board members interviewed, with few exceptions, see the value the Station Manager brings to the station. Each Board member, however, provided ideas for improving the Station Manager's effectiveness. Some, for example, cite the manager's timeliness as an area for improvement. The budget, while prepared and approved, was not submitted in a timely fashion. Similarly, the absence of identifying additional sources of revenue for the station was also noted: (That said, the Station Manager observes that his earlier suggestions on revenue generation were not accepted or acted upon by the Board.) Others believe the manager performs too much of the day-to-day activities for the station and should delegate more to his team. The notion of "too many shows" also came up in the interviews with the Board members.

Along with the interviews and a document review it would be an omission not to include other observations, some witnessed by the consultant and others gleaned from "shadowing" the Station Manager's work. About the former, the consultant watched the Station Manager prepare for a scheduled Purchasing meeting. That involved the manager setting up the film, ensuring that timing of the film would be up to speed and closely collaborating with the town's Technology Officer. The consultant also viewed the remote Town Meeting, hosted by a SMAC Board member and Town Moderator, which included 300+ representatives from around the town. Through the shadowing effort, it was clear the town's Technology Officer values the Station Manager's contributions.

While working with the Station Manager others acknowledged him for the quality of the high school's 2020 graduation and observed that the SMAC staff stepped in to ensure the event was filmed, edited and broadcast to mark this important and as a result of COVID-19, this unique event.

A review of the Station Manager's position description shows that some designated duties are not being performed as described in the document. Those areas include serving as staff to Board committees, the development/coordination of a volunteer program and the establishment of a public access training program (both of which were also noted in the Board interviews.)

While each of these areas are included in the Station Manager's job description, it should be noted that there is not a committee process, volunteer program or training program in place.

Consequently, the Board should determine if these dimensions remain priorities for the Station Manager in the current environment. One should also observe that all performance appraisals conducted by the Board for the Station Manager have been satisfactory to date.

The Station Manager appears in the eyes of those interviewed, including his staff and a number of members of the Board, to be producing worthwhile deliverables. There seems, though, to be a misalignment in expectations about the role of the manager. To the extent that the Board expects higher level or different activities from the manager, those areas should be named and clarified. Given the positive nature of his performance appraisals, the Board should determine if its members' individual expectations for the Station Manager are shared by all Board members and that his job description meets SMAC's current needs or if they represent a calcified notion of what the job demands. Going forward reviews of the manager's performance should reflect both a shared understanding of the job by all parties and the job description on file.

#### ***By-Law and Document Review***

To understand the context in which both the Board and Station Manager work, a review of the station's governance documents was completed. The consultant recommends updating the by-laws, developed as of October 23, 2018, to determine if they continue to fit the needs of the station and the concomitant implications for the Station Manager and others.

More specifically, by-laws which need updating include:

**Article II - Membership** is extremely limited and serves an inconsequential function in the operations of the cable station.

**Article III - Update terms of office for the Board of Directors;** the Board is not subject to replacement and the appointments process for other individuals does not allow for new/different members.

**Article IV - The duties of officers** should be updated since the President has taken over from the Treasurer the financial responsibility of funding the operating account. (More on this later in this

document.) While the responsibilities of the Executive Director are covered in other SMAC governance documents, the role is neither assigned nor defined in the by-laws.

**Article V** - Despite the article's inclusion of committees, none has been established. Adoption of committees would enable the Board to focus more generally on long term and emerging issues and reduce the Board's focus both on day-to-day operations and the Station Manager. If the Board is reluctant to establish some or all committees, mention of them should be eliminated from the by-laws.

#### ***SMAC Member Policies and Procedures***

The Policies and Procedure document calls for an additional section on member voting on representation of the Board. If the Board chooses to implement sponsored committees as defined by the by-laws, member participation on the committees should also be added.

#### ***SMAC Personnel Policies and Procedures***

**Policy VI** - Allowances should be reviewed and updated on a scheduled basis to ensure employee reimbursements are approved by the Board.

**Policy VII 7.02** - The schedule of holidays should be reviewed and updated by the Board on a regular basis.

#### ***SMAC Station Job Descriptions***

Each of the job descriptions (Station Manager, Access Coordinator, Program Director, Associate Video Producer, Production Assistant) should be updated and reviewed to ensure staff members understand the requirements for satisfactory performance of their jobs. Information on the probationary period and benefits should be removed from job descriptions. This material should be included in the Personnel Policies and Procedures document to ensure equal treatment for all employees.

#### ***Conclusion and Recommendations***

Notwithstanding the contributions the Station Manager makes to SMAC there is clearly the desire by some Board members that he work in different ways and in some cases on different tasks. As mentioned earlier in this document, the Station Manager is viewed as a contributor to the station which is necessary but insufficient in the minds of some Board members. This suggests that the Board – and the Station Manager – would be well served to define more precisely what the role of the Station Manager is today in a way that reflects the current reality of a cable station and today's expectations.

As of now, one could argue that the Station Manager performs the following:

- o Ensures that the station delivers quality programming; adapts type and frequency of programs, as appropriate, given the pandemic
- o Selects/hires/manages staff based on required skills; cross-trains staff to ensure smooth operation of the station
- o Delivers/oversees the technical capability of the station; edits programming as appropriate
- o Procures/maintains appropriate equipment
- o Oversees financial operations

It has already been mentioned that the Board would like the Station Manager to be involved in other areas, some of which have not been implemented by the station (e.g. a volunteer program, public access program, revenue generation efforts.) Along with clarifying the role of the Station Manager, SMAC may be well served by clarifying the role of the Board. The following recommendations are suggested for the Board's consideration.

Today the Board appears quite involved in the day-to-day running of the station and less involved in the long-term issues of the station or the future of cable more broadly. Some purely operational roles (e.g. funding the operating account to meet payroll) may be better done by the Station Manager. To the extent that risk management plays into that activity, dual control could be put in place with the addition of a part-time administrator (more on that later in this document.) In the meanwhile, strategic issues associated with the future and viability of cable programming appear to be largely unaddressed by the Board. One could suggest that development/fund raising efforts better belong with Board members who are freed from the daily tasks of ensuring programming meets the town's needs and expectations.

More specific recommendations follow:

- o Establish (or amend/eliminate from the by-laws) the various committees outlined in the by-laws (i.e. Finance, Personnel, Development, Membership, Nominating, Equipment and Facilities, Advisory, By-law and Policy, Governance Documents Review); add a new Planning committee to prepare a 10-year plan as Verizon has requested.
- o Conduct outreach by the Board to SMAC's stakeholders (e.g. Select Board, School Committee) to determine desired cable coverage; guide Station Manager in implementation of stakeholders' plans.
- o Shore up financial operations and weekly scheduling with the addition of a part time administrator; update the QuickBooks version and provide financial statements (i.e. Income statement and balance sheet) to the Board on a regular basis.

The crux of these recommendations is to align the efforts of the various personnel, including that of the Board's, to ensure roles are appropriately defined for each entity and are supported by by-laws which match the current operations of SMAC. The recommendations are also intended to mitigate

the tension that exists between the Board and the Station Manager. In the view of the consultant that tension relates, at least in part, to the Board's focus on the responsibilities of the Station Manager that do not appear to be clearly understood and agreed to by all parties. Once there is alignment on roles and responsibilities, the Board should provide guidance on the "what" of the Station Manager's role but is better served to leave the "how" to the incumbent. As of now, there is a near total reliance on the Station Manager to handle both daily responsibilities and higher-level its aspirations for SMAC. Similarly, additional assistance of a part-time staff member to maintain QuickBooks, asset management and to develop a weekly work schedule will ameliorate a concern on the Board's part about the Station Manager's performance.

I look forward to discussing these findings with the Board.

Submitted by:

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