

## **WJFF Radio Catskill Facilities and Executive Committees Meeting Minutes**

**January 30, 2023 at 3:00pm**

Via Zoom

Approved by the Executive Committee 2/18/2023

**Trustees Present:** Duncan Cooper, Barbara Demarest, Kirsten Harlow Foster, Clay Smith, Sally Stuart and Michael Williams

**Non-Trustee Facilities Committee Members Present:** Kit Hult, Thane Peterson

**Absent:** NA

**Staff Present:** Tim Bruno

**Consultant Present:** Scott Fybush

**Members of the public present:** Jack Barnett, Chuck Heyn, Kevin Hoffman, Rosie Starr, Anna and Vince Gallo, and others

Kirsten welcomed everyone and spoke about the purpose of the meeting. In our 2022-27 WJFF Strategic Plan we have made a commitment to building WJFF's audience and increasing its listener base. There are a number of ways to do this and today's meeting focuses on learning about the two frequencies that we have the opportunity to take on, the costs associated with them, the coverage areas, their populations and the FCC deadline we would need to meet. She acknowledged there is both science and art that goes into understanding these opportunities and what is entailed.

Mike Williams described the work done to date by the Facilities Committee. We have met and in recent weeks have been waiting for additional information from Scott Fybush to assemble a full picture. This meeting is a chance to gather all of the facts of the potential project together. Everybody here is interested in expanding our listener base. Some of our questions: are what would give us the biggest bang for our buck and how does this play out? The Livingston Manor option seems the least attractive in terms of the number of people we would reach. There are two Hamlin, PA options which I'll let Scott explain. Mike also explained that there is some time pressure because the FCC allows a time limited window. If we are not broadcasting on the frequency/cies by the deadline of ####, then we lose the chance to use the frequency for the foreseeable future.

First, Kit Hult moved to approve the minutes of the October Facilities meeting. Thane seconded. All committee members voted in favor.

Scott Fybush introduced himself and described his experience; he has been involved with public radio for 20 years and continues to host a show on his community's station. He also does FCC



applications for stations in other areas. The last time a reallocation of frequencies for public radio was held was 20 years ago. This new filing window opened up in 2021. We filed two applications based on what was available. The way this window works is a little speculative as you don't know who you are competing with for frequencies. We did a very simple application for 90.3 that was a station trying to serve Scranton which went off the air after a brief period.

For more background and context, see the attached report from Scott Fybush.

We got lucky with our applications as no one else applied for the two locations. The FCC has issued construction permits with a 3 year hard deadline: we'd have to be built out and ready to broadcast by 1/7/2025.

Now another set of decisions need to be made. The Livingston Manor option would be a low power signal. The cost of construction would be \$35-40K plus 1100 per month including power. It would serve 3,800 people but many of them are already served by our primary frequency 90.5 from our current location. Scott verified that on Route 17 in our area there are no holes in the 90.5 signal but in some of the narrow valleys there are folks that have trouble listening to 90.5.

The more complex questions related to PA. In Hawley, Honesdale and Lake Wallenpaupack a stronger signal would increase our coverage and potential audience reach.

To pursue Option 2 in PA we would file 2 contingent applications to the FCC, we'd reduce some of our signal strength and then add transmission in a new location. We'd have 2 very closely connected signals 90.3 and 90.5 with no interference between them. It would reduce some of the listeners in 90.5 but adding a large number to 90.3 for a net gain of 28K listeners. Expected lease costs would be 1K per month and then a roughly 75K one time investment to set up broadcasting. We would have to have the PA signal on the air by Jan. 2025.

There are a couple of time frames here: it would take 4-6 months to get FCC approval of the relocation and signal change. There are significant supply chain details for getting the tower up and antennas, etc. 6 month delays are common.

Kit confirmed with Scott that option 2 doesn't help with the problems we have reaching people along the river corridor due to topography.



Scott mentioned that there might be options to improve in the field but he couldn't be sure. Also he mentioned that he expects there will be a FCC translator window in 2024. Those options could help with the river corridor and they are easier and cheaper to build.

Kit asked what, in terms of expenses, are the costs of the STL (Studio to Transmitter Link)? She also pointed out that there would be other expenses related to compliance with multiple licenses that would increase staff work and costs. She asked whether we would need to register with PA as a charitable organization.

Scott doesn't know whether these frequencies might be designated as satellite stations. If so, that would reduce some of the compliance. The City of License would have to be in PA. We put in Hamlin but if we move the tower, etc. we might want to change the City of License to Hawley, Tafton or possibly Honesdale.

Kit asked whether this might allow us to get more support from CPB. CPB does want public radio stations to expand and grow. Scott wasn't sure how this would affect us but he was skeptical given how many stations have multiple frequencies.

Rosie asked, do the potential new listeners numbers include seasonal residents as well as full time residents.

Scott explained that the numbers are based on Census data which count permanent residents, and he doesn't know where to look for seasonal residents. In his view the 90.5 is pretty much maximized. The DBU or signal strength of 90.5 cannot just be expanded, because the FCC does not allow one station's signal to interfere with other licensees. The lower end of the public radio spectrum is extremely full. There are ways to use on-channel boosters that can push just a little more signal into holes in coverage. AMC has done a crazy amount of picking up frequencies to reach more and more people in the area. Don't forget that there will be costs of promoting any new frequency.

When asked about how he thinks about digital versus broadcast, Scott said he is still bullish on broadcast over the next 5-15 years.

Thane feels the most interesting option would be Hamlin Option 2. It would net an increase in potential listeners of about 25%. Thane also suggested holding town meetings to see community levels of interest.

Clay asked about strategies and costs of expanding streaming audiences.



Scott talked about a station that is all streaming and its results. It is claiming to be college radio for adults. It might be worth talking to them about how this strategy is working. Scott said his impression has been that it has been a slow build. There is very little virgin turf for public radio. We are pretty much expanding into WVIA's area with a different service. But he pointed out that we are all looking at how streaming is expanding, particularly with younger listeners.

Option 1 and 2 are similar numbers of new listeners but different areas. Those areas are fairly similarly demographically to our current listening communities.

Barb, pointed out that Wayne County is well behind Sullivan on connectivity to the internet. So streaming isn't an option for many folks.

Kit explained that the average total annual donations by WJFF donors is approximately \$175.

Scott mentioned that when they did a project in Vermont; one wealthy donor was willing to fund it to improve her signal.

Kirsten asked for questions and comments from the public:

Chuck Heyn, as a long time listener and supporter of WJFF explained that he doesn't have the capacity to stream in his area of PA. For years he could get WJFF along the river and along Interstate 81 but the signal has gotten steadily worse. He used to go through Callicoon without losing the signal. He pledged to give \$1K to put up a new antenna. And to help raise funding for it. He said there are many people he can think of who are really craving public radio.

Tim isn't sure about the cause of the reduction in service. Possibly it happened when we had to leave the Sullivan County Antenna.

Jack Barnett, who lives just outside of Tafton explained that he can't get WJFF in his home with a metal roof but he can get it outside. He loves WJFF and thinks the station is much more local and aligned with NE PA than other public radio.

One concern was the need to reduce the strength of 90.5 in order to establish the new signal on 90.3. Scott was asked whether anyone would lose service. He has done some preliminary mapping. It looks like the border area isn't heavily populated and everyone will get one or the other signal.



Board members agreed to the following next steps:

- a. The Facilities Committee will have a follow up meeting to finalize their report to the board on this topic which will be presented and discussed at the next board meeting.
- b. The treasurer will share his high level analysis with the facilities committee.