

WVTF Friends Council Meeting Thursday, April 28, 2022 -- 1:00pm
Tele-meeting via Zoom hosted by WVTF Development Director Bruce Marquis

WVTF staff in attendance: Roger Duvall, Bruce Marquis

Friends Council members in attendance: Anna Lawson, Dana Martin, Margaret Grayson, Joe Bowser, Wes Spruill, Lauren Ellerman, Lucas Thornton

Community Members in attendance: Michael Bentley

1:05 pm Bruce Marquis welcomed attendees and introduced Anna Lawson, President of the Friends Council.

Anna Lawson called the meeting to order. She called for a motion to approve the minutes of the November 10 meeting. Dana Martin presented the motion. The motion was approved and the members voted to approve the November minutes.

General Manager's Report

Roger Duvall noted that WVTF Music freshened its program schedule in January. So far, feedback has been mixed on the new programming. We will have more changes to our programming this summer. One example, On Being, is changing to a podcast. As such, we'll be looking at options for that Sunday morning slot. He also noted that WVTF is facing another steep increase in annual NPR programming fees. In the past 4 years, program fees have risen 25% to \$800,000 a year.

Radio IQ's Civil Discussion Series has a new acronym – our Civic Engagement Series. Recording for program #2 has been delayed until June. The topic is voting rights and voting access. Partial funding for the coming programs will be coming from VA Tech. WVTF will need to seek funds to match. Roger noted they are still looking at the schedule for future programs in 2022.

He noted that WVTF is experiencing several staffing changes. Long-time Business Manager Mary Grace Bilancia left last month. Roger thanked Brian Black and Danielle Bonds for helping to keep WVTF's financial functions moving – and noted that Danielle will be part of the search for a new Business Mgr.

Also, our chief engineer, Paxton Durham is ending his invaluable 35 year tenure with us tomorrow. We are on the cusp of announcing his replacement who will hopefully join us in June. Our current Assistant Engineer Sturlen Vaughn is doing excellent work keeping things moving forward.

A new reporter is joining us to cover the New River Valley. Roxy Todd comes to Radio IQ from West Virginia Public Broadcasting. We'll be introducing her at our reception next week.

Finally, starting this Tuesday, WVTF will be 1 of 20 stations participating in an 8 month Digital Transformation Program provided by The Poynter Institute and the CPB. 5 staff (Dave Seidel, Roger Duvall, Brian Black, Anne Adams and our incoming Community Engagement Coordinator) will take part in an effort to reposition our station to better use and design social media, website, smart speakers and our portable app.

Old Business

Roanoke Transmitter Project: Roger Duvall noted that construction is still ongoing and that we're still assembling funding to cover rising costs. We're currently using station reserves to cover the increases.

The rising cost of steel primarily prompted the price hikes. He related that one element – the ice shield – jumped from \$80,000 to \$180,000. Roger noted, in total, the project is \$190,000 over budget.

In response to a question by Anna Lawson, Roger noted WVTF's financial reserve had been \$500,000. The unexpected overruns had reduced it to \$100,000.

In response to a question by Anna L., Bruce Marquis noted that WVTF still needed approximately \$200,000 for the transmitter project and the station is currently in efforts to identify gifts and replenish our reserves.

Public Engagement: Bruce Marquis noted that WVTF is increasingly engaged at public events, including recent and upcoming events at the Moss Arts Center, University of Richmond and The Academy for the Arts in Lynchburg. We're also hosting a reception at the Shenandoah Club next week. Nearly 50 people have RSVP'd to date. Roger Duvall related that WVTF has a new arts partnership with the Studio School, which is hanging a new exhibit at WVTF. We're planning our first art reception of 2022 in May.

50th Anniversary planning: Roger Duvall told the Council that planning for WVTF's 50th Anniversary is already underway. We have tentative plans to kick off the anniversary year with an evening featuring Mary Louise Kelly in August 2023 at the Jefferson Center. The evening would include a meet and greet as well as a donor dinner. Beyond public events, Roger noted he's hoping to complete other projects for our anniversary year – including updating WVTF's building, signage and landscaping.

New Friends Council Members: Bruce Marquis related that the Friends Council had experienced attrition over the past several years which has decreased its number and its regional diversity. He also noted that WVTF's host institution, Virginia Tech, is focusing on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and that WVTF seeks to align itself with VA Tech's initiatives.

Bruce referred Council members to the information sheet he'd distributed regarding membership expansion, noting our Council's current size and diversity, potential expansion and the sizes of other similar bodies. He noted other organizations have larger advisory boards, so potentially adding 9-12 seats would still be within the range of similar bodies.

He invited the Council's input in revisiting the roles and functions of the Friends Council – as well as Council priorities in selecting new members and the mechanisms we wish to use in recruiting a large number of new members. He noted a desire to have a selection process that is equitable and defensible. Bruce also reminded the body that the Friends Council is an advisory vs. a governing body.

There was discussion of whether nominees needed to be annual donors to apply. Bruce felt as long as nominees are donors by the time they are seated, that should be sufficient.

Dana Martin felt it's more important that a candidate have an interest in public radio. He asked, in addition to our donor list, can we track people who have called in?

Margaret Grayson felt our priorities should be: #1 geographic diversity, #2 age diversity, #3 ethnic diversity. She recommended Marisa Sifontes, a clergy member at St. John's Episcopal Church in Roanoke, for consideration.

Lauren Ellerman felt that foremost, we need people who care. She suggested recruitment start with WVTF's donor list.

Lucas Thornton felt we should determine what skills we're looking to add to the Council and what we will expect from council members.

Joe Bowser felt that if WVTF isn't in various communities – people from them might not invest in us. WVTF should host public events in communities across our broadcast area.

Bruce Marquis thanked Joe and noted that other organizations utilize Board members from different communities as “ambassadors” helping them make local connections and plan local events.

Roger Duvall echoed the idea of hosting events and Friends Council meetings in various communities. He discussed defining the roles of Council members, including advising and raising funds. He felt we should define 3 to 4 things we want each member to do for us.

Bruce Marquis interjected that this discussion brings to mind – who can be / should be a candidate? Also, what is our process? Do Council members invite people to serve or do interested people self-nominate? He observed that, unlike museums and theaters, public radio doesn't have weekly public activities where we meet and talk to our audience. As such, we haven't met many of our listeners.

Dana Martin felt that self-nomination could produce “unintended consequences” and could attract people with their own personal agendas. Anna Lawson felt that self-nomination is tricky. She noted that WVTF has e-mail addresses and zip codes of donors and suggested we target our invitations.

Bruce noted that it appears the Council is wary of blanket e-mail invitations. He is happy to research recruitment processes other stations use.

Lauren E. suggested we send e-mails asking donors to nominate someone else.

Roger Duvall thanked everyone and noted this is an information gathering meeting.

Bruce Marquis asked the Council to think about what information we can and should ask of Council applicants. Demographic info? How long a listener? He noted that he has reached out to VA Tech's Diversity office for their counsel.

Bruce Marquis also asked Council members to think about how we will screen incoming applications? Via a nominating committee? Then, following screening, who are the final voters? All donors? Only the current Council? He also noted, as this will be the first time the Council has added a large class of new members, it would be useful to offer them a formal orientation.

Roger Duvall suggested that an annual orientation for the full Council could also be useful.

Anna Lawson suggested the Council needs guidelines. Bruce replied that we had previously introduced this idea and he'd be happy to re-activate discussions.

Bruce thanked everyone for their thoughts. He hopes we can complete this process and seat new members at the Council's fall meeting.

New business:

Bruce noted that engineer Paxton Durham's retirement party is tomorrow at the station – and invited everyone to attend.

Open Discussion:

Bruce Marquis thanked community member Michael Bentley for fellow Plowshares member, Brent Riley's, memo.

Michael asked about the establishment of formal bylaws for the Friends Council. Bruce noted that the Council had discussed the matter at its' April 2021 meeting. No formal action had been taken. Michael felt the Council should have formal by-laws and reiterated his desire to have WVTF broadcast "Democracy Now".

Bruce thanked Michael for his thoughts.

Anna Lawson noted that Bruce will get back to the Friends Council with recommendations for guidelines. She noted that public broadcasting advisory boards elsewhere are likely to offer a variety of models.

2:20 pm – the meeting adjourned.