

MEMORANDUM

May 24, 2011

To: City Council Finance Committee

From: Lauren Bradley, Administrative Services Director

CC: Gary W. Jackson, City Manager

Subject: Public access services and next steps

The City of Asheville had an agreement with the Western North Carolina Community Media Center (WNCCMC, formerly URTV) in the amount of \$60,000 for public access management services from April 2010 through April 2011. In March 2011, the City received a funding request from WNCCMC for \$115,680 for continued services in FY 11-12.

In response to the WNCCMC funding request, the City sent on April 15 a request to WNCCMC for a revised proposal that reflected the anticipated PEG collections from the City and County as revenue sources. The City communicated that it was open to considering other creative and less costly models for providing community media services and training opportunities. WNCCMC responded that due to fixed expenses, other financial obligations and limited opportunities to secure other revenue it was unable to submit an alternative proposal.

Since that time, the City's agreement with WNCCMC has expired. In addition, WNCCMC has vacated its studio space and maintains no staffing. While media reports indicate that the board is seeking alternatives to continue operations, the City has received no official word from WNCCMC about its future intentions.

Next Steps

In the FY 11-12 budget, the City has allocated \$30,000 for community media services. These funds were originally budgeted to continue public access management services. Given the current condition of WNCCMC, staff recommends that the City: (1) send official notification to the WNCCMC board of its intent not to renew or extend the expired management agreement, (2) direct staff to collect the equipment located at the former studio that belongs to the City of Asheville and (3) begin to develop a Request for Proposals from organizations for community media development services.

As the Finance Committee has previously discussed, the media world has significantly changed since public access was pursued in our community. The expansion of traditional and non-traditional distribution channels as well as community-based initiatives supporting the arts, economic development and education makes this an optimal time to seek proposals for new types of services. The days of a limited number of channels for distribution of programming for a limited audience utilizing capital-intensive studios, production facilities and staff are gone.

While there are many specific details to be worked out, staff would envision an RFP that emphasizes the following components:

- **Community development:** Creating a vision of a County and a City that is ahead of other communities in building a media network and resources that are progressive, green, and place the power of new media in the hands of local citizens;
- **Economic and workforce development:** Creating a strategy that connects government, education, community, and business in a proactive economic and workforce development movement;
- **Industry development:** Further developing the media arts industry in Asheville and Buncombe County such that it creates new jobs and opportunities for the community; and
- **Training and education:** Training for the 21st Century media world where a small investment can buy you a studio, post production resources and a door to a career.

The production equipment collected from the facility could be included within the context of the RFP. In addition, Buncombe County has expressed preliminary interest in pursuing a joint RFP initiative.

Staff is seeking the Finance Committee's initial approval of the RFP concept as well as suggestions for what it should entail in order to further develop the necessary documentation and timeline, as well as a more defined partnership with Buncombe County. The finalized RFP would move forward to the full Council for consideration once complete.