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**Subject:** My comments for 2017.MM35.1 on December 5, 2017 City Council  
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To the City Clerk:

Please add my comments to the agenda for the December 5, 2017 City Council meeting on item 2017.MM35.1, Request to Reinstate Rogers Community Television Channel - by Councillor Anthony Perruzza, seconded by Councillor Neethan Shan

I understand that my comments and the personal information in this email will form part of the public record and that my name will be listed as a correspondent on agendas and minutes of City Council or its committees. Also, I understand that agendas and minutes are posted online and my name may be indexed by search engines like Google.

Comments:

These comments are submitted by the Canadian Association for Community Television Users and Stations (CACTUS) and the Toronto Community Media Network (TCMN).

CACTUS advocates for improved access to digital media skills training, production support and media access for Canadians. Our members include not-for-profit community TV stations, as well as individual Canadians and civil society organizations that are concerned about the democratic deficit that has opened up in the wake of widespread shutdown in cable community TV infrastructure. We advocate that community multimedia centres should be available in all Canadian towns and cities to enable Canadians to acquire the skills, training, and access to get their messages out, regardless of platform.

The Toronto Community Media Network is an umbrella organization for a group of concerned citizens and organizations within the GTA that want to acquire a broadcast community TV license and restore access to digital skills training and production support for Torontonians.

These comments are intended to provide the regulatory, technical, and policy background to the shutdown in the Rogers community TV service in Toronto, and to apprise the council of a more viable alternative than to reinstate a service that the cable company had only been grudgingly providing for some years.

#### 1) Policy Change that Has Led to Rogers Community TV Closure

Since 1997, cable companies in large urban areas have been required by the CRTC to spend 2% of gross cable revenues to provide a community TV station. Coverage of municipal council has always been considered a priority by the CRTC, as a democratic tool of open governance. The remainder of the air-time was meant to be available for citizens to express themselves, in whatever form they chose.

2% of cable gross revenues in Toronto is estimated at between \$10 and \$20 million. This is a significant resource. Across Canada, the resources earmarked for community TV have generally been about 1/2 the municipal library budget... a significant resource to support media literacy. In 2016, the CRTC reviewed its community TV policy alongside its local TV policies. The CRTC was concerned about the shrinking availability of local commercial news (e.g. City TV, Global, CTV). In large metropolitan areas (populations over 1 million), the CRTC decided to allow cable companies such as Rogers to redirect the budget formerly assigned to community TV to its local news properties (City TV, Omni). You can read this decision if you google CRTC 2016-224. This policy change went into effect in September of 2017. Cable companies had the option

whether to retain a community channel, or redirect the money to local news, or whether to split the budget. Rogers elected to redirect the whole amount to its local commercial news properties.

In small centres (populations under 1 million) the CRTC continues to expect cable companies to spend 2% of revenues on community TV.

## 2) Parallel Trends

Before this decision, however, cable community TV had been changing. There were once over 300 cable community stations across the country. In every little town that had cable, microwave signals for all the channels (Disney, TSN, ABC, Discovery, whatever) were sent out from big centres like Toronto. The signals were received at the cable 'head end' (a building with a receiving dish on the roof), and the signals went out to your house over cable co-ax buried in the street. It was easy to insert local content made by volunteers and community organizations, and send it out over the cable system alongside the retransmitted remote signals. Each local 'head end' building had a business office where you could pay your cable bill and a production studio.

Over the last 15 years, cable companies have been merging (there were once several hundred and now there are just 4 big ones: Rogers, Shaw, Cogeco and Videotron) and have been fibreoptically interconnecting systems, obviating the need for the head end buildings. Cable companies starting shutting down the business offices and production studios that were co-located with them as well.

As a result, there are fewer than 100 left across the country.

Simultaneously, cable penetration has fallen from a high of over 80% of Canadian households in the mid-90s, to about 60% today, thanks to competition from the introduction of satellite TV at the end of the 90s, and now thanks to streaming services such as Netflix and YouTube. Cable 'community TV' isn't a platform that is universally available to the whole community anymore.

## 3) Alternatives

The CRTC, perceiving these shifts, created a license class in 2001 so that not-for-profit community-based organizations could hold over-the-air licenses for TV, just like communities have always been able to apply for over-the-air licenses for radio. Once a community is broadcasting over the air, the signal is carried also on the cable system, and on satellite, and streamed, so everyone in the community can see it. A handful of such channels have launched which are members of the Canadian Association for Community Television Users and Stations (CACTUS). The closest one to Toronto is Leamington Community TV.

The challenge is that the CRTC has not provided for any method of funding for such independent community TV license holders. They don't get any of the 2% set aside for cable community TV channels, even though they have the potential for much greater reach... reaching everyone in the community. CACTUS has been lobbying that this should be the case (they should be funded from the cable revenues) since 2010. We made the case in the set of hearings before the CRTC last summer, but the CRTC did not listen.

The other change that has happened over the last two decades (ever since the introduction of satellite TV created a competitive marketplace for cable), cable companies haven't been

interested in facilitating true citizen-generated content. At most cable community channels, staff began taking over production of content in the late 90s, hoping to create a more 'slick' version of community TV that would incent subscribers to stick with cable and not switch to satellite. In many cities, they have even refused to cover municipal council. (CACTUS helped Vancouver get its council meetings back on the air after being removed by Shaw, for example.) With the help of many frustrated citizen groups across the country, CACTUS filed almost 70 complaints against cable community channels last year, because they don't fulfill their citizen-access and local reflection mandates. CRTC policy says that at least 60% of content should be local to the license area, and that at least 50% should be citizen-produced. These complaints are pending before the CRTC.

Because of this dissatisfaction, a group of individuals and civil society organizations has been meeting in Toronto over the last 18 months to take stock of the resources for an alternative to Rogers' community TV... a not-for-profit community TV station, which would have multiple production hubs around the city where the public could access training and equipment, contributing altogether to one GTA-wide community channel. These groups are clustered under the umbrella "The Toronto Community Media Network (TCMN)", led by Dahne Jobson, copied. Dahne's phone number is (647) 573-9391. Organizations that have been meeting to brainstorm under the TCMN umbrella include:

- the Canadian Media Guild (the union of the CBC)
- Regent Park Focus Community Media Arts Centre (which already produces TV, radio, video games, and online community media in Regent Park)
- the Diaspora Film Festival
- the Ontario Public Service Employees Union
- the Toronto Public Library (which is rolling out 14 'maker spaces' across the city where the public can access audio-visual production tools, but does not yet have an airing venue or outlet for the content generated)
- lots of others

Other partners that could contribute content include local colleges such as Ryerson and Centennial, film and video co-ops such as Charles Street Video and LIFT, and the many community organizations that already produce content and used to air it on Rogers—multicultural associations, church groups, sporting groups.

There's plenty of content and will to do this out there.

TCMN was waiting to see what would happen with last year's policy review (whether money would be available from Rogers), and to see whether Rogers would shut down this fall, to decide on next steps.

#### 4) Federal Political Support

Following the new community TV policy announcement last summer that has led to Rogers' shut down (and Shaw has also shut down its community TV stations in Vancouver, Calgary and Edmonton, in order to redirect money to its Global stations), MPs from all parties in over 20 ridings across the country presented petitions in Parliament in support of community TV and media centres like Regent Park Focus, which enable citizens to gain digital media skills training

on multiple media, and distribute content on all platforms available in the community. In Toronto, Julie Dabrusin—Dahne Jobson’s MP-- took the lead (she is on the Standing Committee for Canadian Heritage), and Carolyn Bennett and Bob Morneau’s ridings also presented a petition. (CACTUS can provide you with links to those petition presentations in the House if you need them.)

Finally, the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage published a study on “Media and Local Communities” this spring, which specifically recommended that the government revisit its disastrous local and community TV policy from last summer, which has led to the Toronto community channel closure. (See <https://www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/42-1/CHPC/report-6/>).

#### SUMMARY

So, on the one hand, the Rogers community TV station wasn’t optimal, so there is an opportunity now to re-imagine something better, that is more responsive to the needs of the City of Toronto and of its citizens. And there are lots of groups creating content. You need some organizational infrastructure, however, and you have a unique opportunity to ask Rogers to help fund a new model. You don’t need the full budget that Rogers had to do a good job. When volunteers and community organizations are given training and facilitation to produce content, a community media centre can produce content for 1/10th the cost of commercial and public TV. Since Rogers has been producing primarily staff-driven programming for some years (a more professional and resource-intensive production model), they weren’t making cost-effective use of the budget they had.

CACTUS and the TCMN’s recommendation is therefore for the motion is to go ahead with it, but we suggest you reword it as follows, to get a wider discussion going across the GTA with input from a wide cross-section of civil society:

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1. City Council request Rogers Communications to reverse its decision to discontinue support for community TV in Toronto.
2. City Council request the City Manager to report back to City Council at its December 6, 7 and 8, 2017 meeting on:
  - a. what changes in CRTC policy allowed for this to happen and why;
  - b. options (financial, legal and otherwise) to have the live televised broadcast of City of Toronto Council meetings restored; and
  - c. the possibility of working with TVO and the Toronto Community Media Network (TCMN), a group of concerned citizens and community organizations—to restore this important community function. (TVO could provide over the air distribution by multiplex with its own signal for a new community TV service that would be available free to air, on cable, and streamed.)
3. City Council request the CRTC to re-examine its Local and Community TV Policy (2016-224), and re-instate the requirement that cable service providers support community TV in large metropolitan areas (populations exceeding \$1 million). We note that the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage has already recommended that the CRTC re-examine this decision in its

report “**Disruption: Change and Churning in Canada's Media Landscape**”, presented in the House on June 15, 2017. We note also that current CRTC policy (2016-224) allows cable companies to provide financial support to not-for-profit community TV services in instances when the cable company no longer wishes to provide this service.

4. City Council forward its decision to the CRTC, all federal party leaders and all Toronto MPs, several of whom have already presented petitions to Parliament in support of community media, including Julie Dabrusin, Carolyn Bennett, and Bob Morneau.”

The Canadian Association for Community Television Users and Stations and the Toronto Community Media Network would be pleased to provide advice to this process moving forward.

Catherine Edwards

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