

VALLEY COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

Railroad Station, 12 Main St., Derby, CT 06418
203-735-8688

VCOG MEETING NOTICE

Wednesday, June 13, 2007

11:30 a.m. *

at VCOG Offices

AGENDA

(Pledge of Allegiance)

1. **Public Session**
2. **Acceptance of Minutes of 5/9/07 Meeting (Enc.)**
3. **Treasurer's Report (Enc.)**
 - (a) **Draft FY '08 Budget (Enc.)**
4. **Correspondence**
5. **Update re: Loss of Local Cable Access Programming under Comcast – Dan Glanville, Sharon Codeanne, Comcast Cable**
6. **Discussion and Action Re: Pass-Through Agreement between VCOG and VTD (Enc.)**
7. **Approval of Resolution Regarding the Fourth International Brownfields Conference (Enc.)**
8. **Approval of VCOG FY 2008 Holiday Schedule (Enc.)**

* Note: A light lunch will be provided at 11:30 a.m.

**MINUTES OF MEETING
VALLEY COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
Wednesday, June 13, 2007
at VCOG Offices**

Persons Present:

Mayor James Della Volpe, Ansonia
Mayor Anthony Staffieri, Derby
First Selectman Robert Koskelowski, Seymour
Mayor Mark Lauretti, Shelton
Atty. Sharon Codeanne, Comcast Cable
Daniel Glanville, Comcast Cable
State Rep. Linda Gentile
Paul Tontini, Cable Advisory Council Chairman
Atty. Thomas Clifford
Jodie Mozdzer, Waterbury Rep-Am
Elizabeth Benton, NH Register
Rick Dunne, VCOG Staff
David Elder, “
Matt Fulda, VCOG Intern

Chairman Koskelowski called the meeting to order at 11:30 a.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was said. The Chairman then asked if anyone wished to speak during the public session. No one spoke and the public session was closed.

The **Minutes** of the 5/9/07 VCOG regular meeting were accepted.

Motion: By James Della Volpe; Second: Anthony Staffieri; Vote: Unanimous

Treasurer’s Report – Rick Dunne noted that Clare Falcha is on vacation this week and he will attempt to answer any questions. He indicated that currently we are running approximately \$60,000 ahead of expenses. About \$20,000 is just float from some of our larger projects. There were no questions on this report.

Draft FY’08 Budget – The draft budget was discussed next. Rick Dunne informed the Mayors that there are two budget options. Option A is if the state passed their budget, which they did not. Option B is the one we are asking for approval on today. It is essentially a flat budget. Raises are 2%, and there is a promotion contained in there for David Elder. The overall operating budget is approximately \$430,000. Rick noted that after the State passes their budget, we intend to come back to the board and request approval of Option A which would be an increase of \$25,000 to allow for the hiring of a full-time planner rather than a part-time planner. He explained that the difference between Options A and B is a reduction in state grants on the revenue side and a reduction in the amount to be used to hire a planner on the expenses side. At the Chairman’s request, Rick then named all the individuals on the payroll.

Motion: By Anthony Staffieri – To approve the VCOG budget (Option B) for FY 07-08, as presented; Second: James Della Volpe; Vote: Unanimous

Correspondence – There was no correspondence; however, First Selectman Koskelowski took this opportunity to mention the Work Fair held recently in Seymour. He asked the other CEOs if it would be possible to do this annually and hold it in another town next year. He said there was a lot of participation and many companies were represented. The other Mayors agreed and Mayor Della Volpe suggested using the Armory in Ansonia.

Update re: Loss of Local Cable Access Programming under Comcast – Daniel Glanville and Sharon Codeanne from Comcast Cable were present. Mr. Glanville spoke, saying they were here to talk about concerns and to suggest alternatives regarding the loss of local cable access programming. He talked about PEG access programming which exists under both federal and state law and involves participation of the public with regard to public, educational and government access (PEG). PEG programming is all they are required to do under their franchise agreement's terms and conditions. Key is the involvement of the public. He noted that PEG has had tremendous success in other areas of CT and he mentioned Waterbury in particular. Local origination programming was introduced in the 1970s and had success. It was scaled back in the 90s and early in the 2000 decade. PEG has picked up from there. Some communities use PEG and others only use it for government access programming. The key is transitioning from local access to PEG access.

Mr. Glanville informed the COG that Comcast proposes creating a fund beginning in September, 2007 whereby they allocate \$15,000 for the use of third party contractors to assist with programming for one year. During that year, they would continue through PEG channels to talk about how people can be trained in PEG. The third party contractors would assist in the production of programs that had been local programming in the past. This way the public can understand and be part of the PEG. He doesn't want to send the message that it will be a continuation of local programming. It is the ability to assist with production so that programming can continue. In collaboration with the Advisory Council, they will evaluate every production that takes place in that year. At the end of the year, they would see what the impact was regarding public involvement and determine if this is something they should embrace with the budgetary process or, if there was not public involvement, work with the Advisory Council on ways to get public involvement. They stand by the principle that for public access to succeed, it does need public involvement, and they believe this injection of funds as of September 1st will help to continue to grow public access in the ways it has grown in the other parts of the state. They believe this allocation of dollars, coupled with a commitment from the VCOG and the Advisory Council, can work to enhance public access, make people more aware of it and use it to produce meaningful programming for the area.

First Selectman Koskelowski then spoke indicating there are many important things that go on in our towns. In the past, every quarter, the CEOs were asked by the cable company to speak about what is going on in their municipality. Also, during election times, debates occurred. He noted that it now sounds like we have to invest our time and energy into producing our own shows. Mr. Glanville replied that public access is successful in producing that exact programming. It involves a public access producer, and he would invite public officials in to provide insight as to what is going on. That type of programming does exist but requires a commitment by the public. The public needs to dedicate resources in order to produce the programming. Comcast is willing to assist in this one year with production costs. He said what Mr. Koskelowski explained could exist in a public access environment. This is happening in other parts of the state. Mayor Staffieri then asked if we have to find a producer for the programming. Mr. Glanville said a

producer could put together the program. Comcast does not provide a host for these. The Chairman then said he cannot believe this is being taken away from the Valley. It could be very costly to do this. Our job is not to be a producer or look for a producer.

State Rep. Linda Gentile then spoke, saying she represents Ansonia and Derby and was contacted by numerous constituents with real concerns about the lack of local programming. She said that we had very professional programs that were aired. Shut-ins look for that connection to the rest of the community through this programming. As an elected official, she is extremely concerned. The \$15,000 is a nice little gesture on Comcast's part but it is not acceptable. Where will we find local people to do productions? Possibly, we can do something in the long run but we need a longer commitment. If we do find someone, they will need more than one year. On behalf of the people she represents, she is very disappointed.

Paul Tontini, Chairman of the Advisory Council, then briefly spoke, agreeing with what Rep. Gentile said. He noted that the Valley is made up basically of working class people. The benefit to Comcast would far outweigh what they would be doing. Having that access differentiated the cable company from satellites, etc. This is a big issue for the community.

Thomas Clifford said he would like to commend VCOG and the Valley Legislators for weighing in on this important issue. He noted that Comcast is the largest cable company in the state, perhaps in the nation. Comcast is a monopoly in this service area. He is appalled by its approach. He thinks Comcast should try to transition to productions that work and are time-tested. Atty. Clifford noted that we have won awards in the past with quality local programming. He indicated that this is not personal and is not reflected against Mr. Glanville or Ms. Codeanne. As a matter of public policy, he is astounded and disappointed.

Mr. Glanville said that Comcast is not a monopoly. They compete with other video and internet providers, as well as telephone providers throughout the state. They believe PEG programming can flourish very well in blue and white collar communities. They also believe that local origination programming is not something they are in the business of doing. They clearly recognize there is a desire of the communities to have this type of programming. This money will enable the towns to continue to produce some of this programming. It will be a test to see if the public is engaged in this. They do not expect CEOs to put on this programming. Public access was designed for involvement of the public. They are not saying "our way or the highway". If they saw in a year that they were reaching a goal, they would expand it. They cannot say today they would go beyond a particular point in time. They are willing to put out the \$15,000 to assist with the hiring of the producers of the programming.

Rep. Gentile asked if Mr. Glanville had any idea what an independent contractor would cost. He does not have the specific dollar amount. They would work with the towns in the hiring of the contractors. Rep. Gentile wanted it on record that she thinks this is unjust and unfair. She has an elderly homebound family member who watches TV all day and looks forward to local programming. Mr. Koskelowski said there are public-made movies on public access all the time so you know the public is interested. Why can't Comcast commit to helping to keep this going. Mayor Staffieri said that in the programming during the debates they have had past election years, there would be two cameramen there, a mediator and sound people. All of these people have to be paid. Is there any other fee? Mr. Glanville said just the labor. The studio facility is

provided, as well as the equipment and the PEG access coordinator. He has seen debates done with two people or even one person after setup. A standard show can be done with one person.

Mayor Della Volpe said he respectfully thinks we are not getting the service we have had in the past. By offering this to us to do on our own, he doesn't think we will get the same quality we had. In answer to a question, Mr. Glanville said the studio in Seymour would stay open. Rick Dunne then said that PEG programming will not be the same to the people. The local staff has already been terminated. Comcast is only going to do for the community as much as the franchise agreement requires—keep the studio open and provide public access for PEG programming. If you could produce the same quality for \$15,000, why doesn't Comcast do that. Mr. Glanville said they are not in the business of doing local origination. They believe in the success of PEG. Rick Dunne said that part of the problem is you are next door to Cablevision which produces an all day news channel. They do it on their dime. They think it is beneficial to their franchise. Comcast doesn't. To say you will offer \$15,000 is not sufficient to satisfy the needs of the community. PEG is a free-for-all. Anyone can say or do anything—even if it is objectionable by local standards. Mr. Dunne stated that the loss of local origination was a loss of journalistic independence, that subscribers would not be able to trust PEG programming as a credible, non-partisan source of information. This is a cost-cutting measure for Comcast. Clearly, Comcast only intends to adhere to its franchise agreement, and DPUC cannot do anything about it. Frankly, it is bad PR for Comcast.

Chairman Koskelowski said he understands that Mr. Glanville is just the messenger. He doesn't believe the company is willing to negotiate this any further. Mr. Glanville said they will meet with the Advisory Council and if the choice by the Council is to implement that offer to public access programming, they will then be happy to meet with the COG again. He thanked all for the opportunity to speak and hopes he was able to provide some answers to their questions.

Discussion and Action Re: Pass-Through Agreement Between VCOG and VTD – Rick Dunne indicated that staff discovered through preparation for the FTA Triennial Review that this document was not prepared. This handles pass-through funds to the Valley Transit District from FTA.

Motion: By James Della Volpe; To authorize the Chairman to sign the Pass-Through Agreement between VCOG and VTD; Second: Anthony Staffieri; Vote: Unanimous

Approval of Resolution Regarding the Fourth International Brownfields Conference – Rick Dunne said this was discussed at the last meeting and the resolution was in their packets. Arthur Bogen was chosen to be a member of the International Scientific Advisory Committee for the Fourth International Brownfields Conference in Greece. We are asking the VCOG to endorse the effort to go out and do fundraising and to act as fiduciary. Our intention is to send Arthur Bogen, one of our CEOs, a staff person from DEP and one LEP. The budget is \$10,000 for four people. It includes transportation, hotel, conference and meals.

Motion: By Mark Lauretti; To approve the Resolution regarding the Fourth International Brownfields Conference; Second: James Della Volpe; Vote: Unanimous

Approval of VCOG FY 2008 Holiday Schedule – Rick reminded the members that we annually adopt a holiday schedule for the VCOG. He noted the floater this year would be December 26th. We will poll employees to see if they have the ability to take vacation days for the rest of that week and possibly close for the week.

Motion: By Anthony Staffieri – To approve the VCOG FY 2008 Holiday Schedule; Second: James Della Volpe; Vote: Unanimous

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark A. Lauretti,
Secretary