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WTTW Community Advisory Board (CAB) Meeting Report for Regular Meeting Tuesday, December 13, 2005

Attending: Bruce Beckman, Thom Clark, Greg Clemons, Barb Cragan, Howard Denton, Gary Durochik, Redd Griffin, Elizabeth Forkins Harano, David Nelson, Norma Sutton, Lorenzo Vazquez, and WTTW Board of Trustees liaison Barbara Procter.

Guests from WTTW: Dan Schmidt, VJ McAleer, & Yvonne Davis

Call to Order: Thom Clark called the meeting to order at 6:05 pm

Approval for Minutes for October, 2005: Moved by Harano, 2nd Beckman Approved

Additions to the Agenda: None

Reports of the Officers and Committees

Membership Committee: The following resignations from the CAB were recognized: Janet Joyce Nelson, Cathlin Poronsky

David Nelson reminded the CAB that he is starting to collect names for new members to be nominated at April meeting. He is developing an "application form" for new members. Please send him ideas for questions that should be included. There was also a brief discussion about whether we should list CAB member names (plus a biographical note) on the website. No conclusion on bios, but names are on new WTTW website.

Vice-Chairman: Will be asked to draft a bylaws revision to establish an Outreach Committee for the CAB.

Secretary: Nothing to report

Programming Committee: Elizabeth Harano's report on November 8 regular meeting and December 1st special meeting with members of WTTW's Trustees Community Outreach meeting was deferred until later to allow time for Dan Schmidt presentation.

Management Feedback

At this point in the meeting, Clark introduced WTTW CEO Dan Schmidt for his long-awaited presentation the CAB, which along with extensive Q+A, devoted almost 90 minutes of our meeting, summarized below:

Mr. Schmidt began his presentation by thanking the volunteer members of the CAB for taking the time to support WTTW: "It is important for us to keep in touch with the community."

Schmidt then outlined the challenges facing public television in the new digital age as multiplying cable channels and satellite television chisel away at the former programming domain of public TV, along with huge demographic shifts in how much people get information and entertainment online and via video games. Even the past few months have seen breathtaking change with the introduction of video iPods and downloadable podcasts of last night's popular shows.

The days of lineal programming are shifting to video on demand, and WTTW is pleased to have begun a partnership with cable supplier Comcast to begin offering Chicago Tonight and other programs originating at the station via its on demand distribution. "Wireless portable access to video is here and is radically changing the [membership-based] business model we and commercial stations operate under." With monthly cable charges of \$80 for digital signal, there's an increasing disconnect over why viewers pay someone for content. "Millions of dollars of membership support have melted away."

Yet public support for public television remains very high, as the recent outcry over proposed federal budgets cuts shows. PBS continues to enjoy one of the highest positive brands in customers' eyes. Parents in particular continue to value highly the daytime programming their children view.

Young adults might pay for downloads on demand, or buy a concert video, but don't pay attention when the membership renewal notice arrives in the mail.

Schmidt reviewed the investments made by WTTW to be ready for the HDTV age, but is still exploring how this investment can be sustained beyond traditional linear programming. "We're looking at podcasting because it's a platform for delivering television content."

When the digital age is fully realized in 4-5 years, Schmidt hopes the federal government's auctioning of current analog frequencies might result in more permanent funding of public television, perhaps as a trust fund, so that the modest financing provided by the feds isn't subjected to periodic legislative budget battles.

When asked about how broadcast competition and the ongoing consolidation of media outlet ownership impacts WTTW's future, Schmidt believes the station's survival will hinge on "hyper local content" which increasingly nationally-determined niche programming can't provide. He intends to build on the Chicago Tonight model, getting out in the neighborhoods more to build a magazine format that blankets Chicagoland.

One member asked What can we do as a Community Advisory Board, suggesting that some of us would like to be asked? Another asked about the conundrum of seeking underwriting to support more community programming when some neighborhoods may not be as attractive to potential underwriters.

Schmidt's response entailed a breakdown of how little money comes from governmental sources – 94 cents of every dollar in WTTW's budget comes from nongovernmental sources – and how their research of what viewers want showed that in addition to public policy discussions, what to do and where to go were cited. That's why Check Please was developed [and is successfully bringing in younger viewers] and why Chicago Tonight will look at sports and other lifestyle issues. To the query, What if we end up looking like everyone else on the dial, Schmidt declared "Then I'll stipulate we failed."

Another CAB member asked about the institutional memory of the station. Schmidt responded that the core values have not changed, that even as Chicago Tonight was expanded to one hour a few years ago, and the Network Chicago concept was unveiled, the station is committed to: covering cultural life, demonstrating its responsiveness to Chicago voices, and being a safe haven for children. But how those 1955 values are acted on will change.

The remaining time with Dan Schmidt was taken up with back-n-forth comments and queries covering: the need for WTTW to encourage critical thinking and not just reflect community values, but sometimes challenge them; the success of River Town special in generating viewer traffic over Lawrence Welk reruns done in other markets; grass roots mobilization to support public television; the role of the CAB in generating new programming ideas and identifying service gaps; the need for a management decision-making chart so CAB understands where its ideas can be heard; review of market research generated by viewer mail, capturing e-mails for listserv marketing, and the public file; the role of the CAB as a buffer for community comments; captioning bi-lingually in recognition of growing Latino audience especially daytimes; and a frank discussion about Network Chicago.

In conclusion, Schmidt said: "We could be doing a better job [especially with Chicago Tonight]. We probably shouldn't interview as many DJs as we have the past two years." And he made clear that he's committed to giving data back to the CAB, to take questions from the program committee or suggestions at least on a quarterly basis.

New Business: Elizabeth Harano reported on the successful meeting with members of the trustees Community outreach committee, chaired by Barbara Procter and attended by chair Sandra Guthman. She's interested in regular meetings between the CAB and Board committees, and agreed to meet with the CAB herself at a future meeting [now scheduled for April]. The Board committee heard about the CAB's analysis of the critical Chicago Media Watch study, and listened with great interest about our national survey of other CABs' operations. Guthman agreed to write a letter to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting seeking a web presence for CAB dialogue and best practices. Many thanks to Barbara Procter for making this joint meeting possible.

Public Comment: None

The meeting was adjourned at 7:55.

Respectfully submitted by Thom Clark.