The Case for Public Media

Seeking Adequate Funds from the Cable Franchise Fee



In the Cable Communications Act of 1984, a cable franchise fee is defined as "any tax, fee, or assessment of any kind imposed by a franchising authority or other governmental entity on a cable operator or cable subscriber, or both, solely because of their status as such". The purpose of this fee is to fulfill requirements by the franchise agreement between a municipality and a cable provider to support public, educational, and governmental (PEG) channels¹.

In Portsmouth, the access corporation tasked with the operation of the PE out of PEG is Portsmouth Public Media (PPMtv). Our mission is to act as a source of local news, views, information, arts, and entertainment to the Greater Portsmouth Area.

This document details why Portsmouth Public Media needs a greater amount of the PEG franchise fee, why the revenue from the franchise fee does not positively or negatively impact the City of Portsmouth's general fund, and why the loss of said revenue would not impact the tax rate in a meaningful or noticeable way.

1

¹ 47 U.S. Code § 542 - Franchise fees, via https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/47/542

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. FY24 PPMtv Programming & Programs	3
3. FY25 City Budget and Prior Year Budget Estimates	5
4. Fundraising	6
5. Value of the Station (and Staff)	7
6. Why Do You Need This Funding?	9
7. What Will PPMtv Do With this Funding?	10
1. Public Access, Public Good	10
Improvements	10
2. Highlighting Portsmouth & Increasing Tourism	11
Improvements	12
3. Presence at PHS	12
Improvements	13
7. In Conclusion	14
Appendix 1 - YouTube Views and Budgets	15
Appendix 2 - Franchise Fee Revenue vs. CoP's Adopted Budget	16
Appendix 3 - Local PEG Station Fundraising	17

1. Introduction

On August 3 2009, the City of Portsmouth made an agreement with PPMtv in its fledgling days to take \$360,000 off the top of the franchise fee, leaving the station to operate off any amount remaining above \$360,000.

Put frankly, the \$87,000 the City has offered for FY25 is insufficient to operate the public access station, and will result in the closure of PPMtv. Renegotiating the above agreement is a massive step in improving the visibility of Portsmouth's vibrant and flourishing artistic and cultural scene, not to mention ensuring that Portsmouth Public Media will remain.

2. FY24 PPMtv Programming & Programs

It is no understatement to say that PPMtv is a vastly successful public access station. However, media trends dictate that cable is being surpassed by streaming platforms such as Netflix, as well as online video platforms like YouTube. Streaming has become popular in recent years and video as a format has never been bigger, with YouTube as the second most-visited website and second-most used search engine, only behind Google². PPMtv has the potential to serve as a first look at Portsmouth.



While we cannot access the statistics for Channel 6, we do have YouTube statistics, which is our most popular viewing platform. Compared to any of the stations in the surrounding region, we have significantly higher views from video to video, as well as a much higher subscriber count³. View 'Appendix 1 - Views and Budgets' for more detail.

Our viewership statistics, with an audience all across the globe, indicates that PPMtv is not only successful on a statewide scale, but *nationally*.

² Via https://www.searchenginejournal.com/seo/meet-search-engines/

³ Refer to 'Appendix 1 - YouTube Views and Budgets'.

In 2023-24, we had two interns from UNH, as well as four interns from Portsmouth High School. Our graduating UNH intern went on to secure a job in video production, citing her experience with PPMtv as vital in this career choice. Similarly, two of our three high school seniors are going on to attend film programs at colleges such as Emerson and Wheaton. All have described their time with PPMtv as having a positive impact on their career choices.



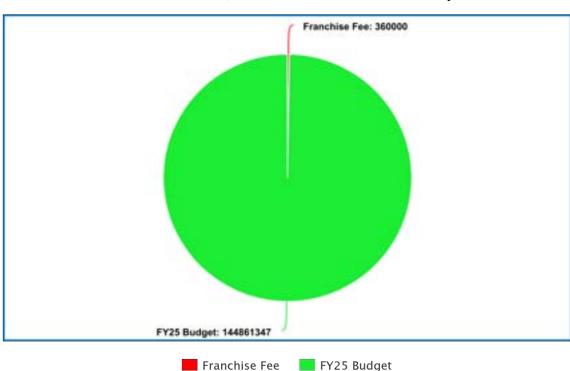
If PPMtv was funded adequately, we could improve all of these aspects of our operation - and in doing so improve the access that the citizens of Portsmouth have to advanced media education.

See our detailed plans for improvements to be made with a greater budget in Section 7.

3. FY25 City Budget and Prior Year Budget Estimates

To refresh, the agreement between the City of Portsmouth and PPMtv as made on August 3 2009 states that the city will receive the first \$360,000 out of Comcast's franchise fee for the municipality for the purpose of reducing tax rate⁴. The access corporation that operates the PEG channels (PPMtv) receives the remaining amount of the franchise fee as an operating budget.

The city's approved FY25 General Budget is \$144,861,347. Out of that, \$360,000 comes out to be 0.24% - less than a quarter of a percent of Portsmouth's entire General Budget.



For a visual aid, this is how the two numbers compare:

Pictured: CoP's FY25 budgeted revenue & the \$360,000 the City's PEG fee revenue (0.24% of total).

For those concerned about a tax increase, please note:

- Regardless of "savings" thanks to allocation from the franchise fee, Portsmouth's tax rate has consistently risen every year since 2020, by \$0.93 from FY22-FY23.
- ❖ The amount that \$360,000 saves in taxes (should they even deign to increase due to this loss) is approximately 5 cents of tax revenue per year.

The value we add to the community, as this document details, far outweighs such a minuscule cost.

5

⁴ Via https://files.cityofportsmouth.com/agendas/2009/citycouncil/cc080309m.pdf

4. Fundraising

Due to the split of the franchise fee, PPMtv has consistently been forced to lean on fundraising via donors, event income, sponsorship, pursuing grants, and more. All of these are standard for your typical nonprofit organization. However as a public access television station, Portsmouth Public Media is not a typical nonprofit, and because of its model cannot possibly raise upwards of \$75,000 annually without gutting all that works towards PPMtv's mission statement to instead focus efforts on fundraising for fundraising's sake.

Public access stations, while occasionally getting funds from grants and donations, are predominantly funded by the franchise fees from their cable provider. In this sense, PEG channels could be said to be paid for by the community's citizens.⁵ The line item on their bill states PEG Fee, after all.

While *some* stations across the country do pursue grants and large-scale fundraising campaigns, this manner of funding is not the norm for New Hampshire, not to mention New England as a whole. Predominantly, PEG station budgets come largely (if not wholesale) from their PEG fees.

For example:

- **Nashua TV:** Other than their PEG revenue, only \$1,000 in "miscellaneous" revenue, IE donations or grant contributions.
- Londonderry TV: Receives their town's entire fee, and other than a 3-year grant, does not typically raise any funds for revenue besides the franchise fee.
- ConcordTV: Raises some money (numbers unknown), but makes clear that their station finds 'the majority of funding [is] provided by a percentage of the municipal cable franchise fees' 67.

For greater details, see 'Appendix 3 - Local PEG Station Fundraising'.

⁵ Via Rutland VT PEGTV - About Us

⁶ Via FAO - ConcordTV

⁷ ConcordTV receives 33.5% of the franchise fee to manage a singular channel. Such a small percentage is manageable as their fees hover in the range of \$800-950,000, leaving ConcordTV with a substantial budget.

5. Value of the Station (and Staff)

PPMtv isn't so successful due to our gear (many years out of date), or our studio space (which is admittedly lovely but not as up-to-snuff as some stations'). We shine at a national level because of the talented people - both staff and volunteers - who offer their time here to go out into the community to create fantastic programming.



Few public access stations can say they are helmed by an Emmy-nominated film and media expert. Our executive director Chad Cordner has been nominated 7 times for projects produced in partnership with PPMtv. Furthermore, PPMtv's founding Executive Director, former board member, and longtime supporter Bill Humphreys has won two Emmys for productions that PPMtv assisted with.

Our most-viewed video, 'Priority One - Getting Started - 112', is part of a long-running workout series created by longtime supporter and

current Board President Alexis Mason. 'Getting Started' alone has 1.5 million views. We're proud that a program produced by a community resident in-house at PPMtv studios is beloved by our viewers, both in the Seacoast and globally. With fans as far as the UAE and eastern Europe (and letters written in from a few die-hards in England), Priority One is the sort of home-grown content that gives tremendous visibility to PPMtv, and through it to the New Hampshire Seacoast.

FY25 BUDGETED POSITION AND SALARY DETAIL									
	STEP	POSITION	SALARY						
INFORMATION TECH	INOLOGY								
NON GRADE 27	E .	CHEF INFORMATION OFFICER	157,639						
NON GRADE 24		IT ENGINEERING SUPERVISOR	137,840						
PMA GRADE 17	H	TECHNOLOGY DIRECTOR	101,92						
PMA GRADE 17	E	SOFTWARE SOLUTIONS AND SUPPORT DIRECTOR	97,23						
PMA GRADE 16	1	SENIOR SUPPORT TECHNICIAN	92,64						
PMA GRADE 16	60/66	SENIOR SUPPORT TECHNICIAN	90,44						
PMA GRADE 15	1A/118	SUPPORT TECHNICIAN - INSTRUCTOR	75,95						
PMA GRADE 11	C	PRODUCER	66,00						
		EDUCATION STIPEND	7,16						
		TOTAL DEPARTMENT	826,850						

Pictured: FY25 Budgeted Position/Salary Detail for the City's IT Department.

We know that the City, too, understands the value of a TV Producer role. The government channel (Comcast Channel 22) is run by the employees of the City's IT department. The Producer of Channel 22 is salaried at \$66,001 in FY25's budget. Presumably, more work goes into the operation of Channel 22 than what a single Producer is capable of. Even still - with little overhead, few gear upgrades due to the nature of the recording setup, one could estimate that running Channel 22 would likely cost beneath \$100,000 annually.

Considering PPMtv performs double the work of the government channel (providing P & E out of PEG), it's unreasonable to expect an executive director to operate on a salary lower than the lowest-paid position, with absolutely no benefits - the exact situation that PPMtv has been left in for 12 years.

PPMtv is run by a few passionate, highly skilled individuals who are here for one simple reason: they love the place, and they love this city. If the current PPMtv family leaves, it will be nigh impossible to find qualified candidates who will operate a PEG station for the current salaries.

6. Why Do You Need This Funding?

It's a very good question. "If PPMtv has been doing so well so far, why bother to increase funding? Things are fine as they are." There are a few answers as to why that will not work:

- ❖ Firstly, the City's proposed \$87,000 is insufficient to run Portsmouth Public Media at any degree of functionality, and will functionally force us to shutter our doors.
- ❖ The salaries of staff are significantly below market average a tragedy in a community with such wealth and love for the arts. The executive director position is paid 30% as compared to the NH average⁸. Similarly, the Studio Operations Manager position is paid approximately 40% of the low end of the NH average⁹. We need the fee to pay our staff adequately for the work they so passionately carry out.
- ❖ Increasing staff hours, adding a second full-time employee with the option for stipended part-time positions. Better workflow means PPMtv can operate at a higher level, producing more in-house programming as well as offering more educational opportunities for members. More detail in 'Section 7 What Will PPMtv Do With the Franchise Fee?'.
- ❖ The simple fact is that we need to pay our rent. While some public access stations are housed in municipal-owned buildings (and thus don't worry about real estate)¹⁰PPMtv is not. Our 2023 relocation to the Fox Run Mall for our Studio and to 1 Middle St. for our headquarters office has alleviated many of the expenses we incurred at our former home, but not all.

Put simply: if we're doing this well now, imagine what we could do with:

- > Staff paid adequately, encouraged to go above and beyond
- ➤ Up-to-date video equipment
- ➤ A clean, state-of-the-art multimedia studio
- > Additional stipended positions to improve workflow
- Membership and rental fees removed for the general public
- ➤ Increased educational programs for the community (courses, workshops, summer camps)

⁸ Via Salary.com - Executive Director.

⁹ Via Salary.com - Studio Operations Manager. As Studio Ops at PPMtv is currently part-time, the low average is halved.

¹⁰ For instance Goffstown TV is housed within their high school. This is a common arrangement.

7. What Will PPMtv Do With this Funding?

PPMtv is a proven resource for the community, run by gifted and passionate staff whose goal is to make the Seacoast a more vibrant place. With sufficient funding, the staff can focus efforts away from simply fundraising and towards improving Portsmouth citizens' access to locally-produced media, resources for creativity, and educational opportunities.

1. Public Access, Public Good

Under the current model of funding, PPMtv has memberships as a paid donation option. Our members have access to our studio space and rental gear for a rental fee. Our members are more than willing to pay these fees to access our resources, but as a public service in a sense funded by the citizens, we'd rather not charge at all.

If we receive adequate funding to continue to operate, **PPMtv will operate entirely free of charge - free classes, free workshops, free memberships, and free rentals for citizens/community members**. We want to reorient ourselves to operate as a public service, fully available to the community.

Improvements

At a 50-50 split of the fee, we propose:

- ❖ 2 Courses (individual or group) offered monthly: Rotating topics between videography, editing, and lighting.
- ❖ Workshops (1 per quarter): A large-scale production-based workshop that instructs on studio video production. Each workshop culminates with a live studio show, produced by the students.
- ❖ NOTE: At this budget, we are unable to operate free of cost to the user, and will be forced to continue to have paid memberships and gear rental.

At a 70-30 split of the fee, we propose:

- **❖** All PPMtv resources and memberships are made 100% free for the public.
- ❖ 2 Courses (individual or group) monthly: Topics expand to include photography/photo editing, audio engineering, and multicamera studio productions.
- ❖ Workshops (1 per quarter): A large-scale production-based workshop that instructs on studio video production. Each workshop culminates with a live studio show, produced by the students.
- ❖ Stipend for Part-time Video Editor (\$20 /hr¹¹): alleviate editing pressure and improve workflow of the full-time staff.

¹¹ Average rate for New Hampshire is \$30 /hr.

At 100% of the fee to PPMtv, we propose:

- **❖** All PPMtv resources and memberships are made 100% free for the public.
- ❖ 2 Courses (individual or group) biweekly: As in a 70-30 split of the fee.
- ❖ *PPMtv Summer Camp*: Ages 12-15, week-long program focused on basic production skills. Culminates in a live studio production, with assistance by staff instructors.
- ❖ Workshops (2 per quarter): 1 on studio video production, 1 on short filmmaking. Each workshop culminates with a live studio show, produced by the students.
- ❖ Stipend for 2 Part Time Video Editors (\$20 /hr): alleviate editing pressure and vastly improve workflow of the full-time staff.
 - > Optimized workflow allows for even more **free** educational programs.

2. Highlighting Portsmouth & Increasing Tourism

YouTube is the 2nd-most used search engine and website, only behind Google. If one were to hear about Portsmouth and want to learn more (after all, who wouldn't?), odds are they would go to YouTube and type in their query.

With our prodigious YouTube viewership¹², PPMtv has the unique opportunity to serve as a first glimpse of the City of Portsmouth. Better funding doesn't only mean better locally-produced content. It means better programming that highlights the goings-on in the Seacoast community, both for the benefit of those within the community and those looking to visit.

Many municipalities have videos highlighting their city - and despite how much there is to see and do here, we are lacking any sort of 'Welcome to Portsmouth' video content. If Portsmouth wants to be the biggest little city in the world, that sort of content is invaluable in an era dominated by video. PPMtv has the resources to produce high-quality video content that can be used by the City and others to highlight all the things that make Portsmouth wonderful, and a place worthy of visiting (and spending your tourism dollars at).

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 $^{^{\}rm 12}$ See 'Appendix 1 - YouTube Views and Budgets'.

Improvements

At a 50-50 split of the fee, we propose:

- Greater working relationship between City of Portsmouth and PPMtv.
- ❖ PPMtv continues to record and broadcast significant live events in Portsmouth.
- * 'Minute with the Mayor' program continues as planned, with Mayor McEachern recording every other week as available. Short-form content, both for social media & YouTube, focused on community-posed questions and current events.

At a 70-30 split of the fee, we propose:

- Greater working relationship between City of Portsmouth and PPMtv.
 - > Regular programming highlighting Portsmouth, produced at a higher fidelity.
- ❖ PPMtv will ensure all live events in Portsmouth that the City deems worthy are recorded and subsequently broadcasted.
- ❖ 'Minute with the Mayor' continues as above.
 - ➤ Proposed additional video program of "Seconds with the City Council" (working title): short-form content of city councilor interviews on relevant topics of their choosing/answering public-submitted questions.

At 100% of the fee to PPMtv, we propose:

- ❖ Extensive working relationship between City of Portsmouth and PPMtv.
 - ➤ Regular programming highlighting Portsmouth, produced at the highest fidelity possible.
- ❖ PPMtv will ensure all live events in Portsmouth that the City deems worthy are recorded and subsequently broadcasted.
- **♦** *'Minute with the Mayor'* continues as above.
 - ➤ Proposed additional video program of "Seconds with the City Council" (working title): short-form content of city councilor interviews on relevant topics of their choosing/answering public-submitted questions.

3. Presence at PHS

PPMtv has historically had a great presence at Portsmouth High School, starting with the Clipper News Report in 2012. When CNR became infeasible during COVID-19, PPMtv scaled back into an internship program to work with a smaller, more career-focused group of students. This program has been a resounding success, and we only want to increase its efficacy. A larger budget PPMtv staff will dedicate more time to preparing educational coursework and hands-on, experiential workshops for both the high school interns and beyond.

Additionally, PHS has repeatedly come to PPMtv in hopes of us recording and broadcasting their sports games - a task we have never had the time to do. Our new budgetary goals account for a stipend for a 'Sports Videographer'. This role would be on-site at all PHS home games, record them, and bring the footage back to the studio for editing and broadcast.

Improvements

At a 50-50 split of the fee, we propose:

- ❖ Internship Program: Students work at PPMtv Studios with support from PPMtv staff as staff hours allow. Experience on both PPMtv projects as well as individual projects using PPMtv gear.
- Clipper News Report has access to studio space and gear to produce their show.

At a 70-30 split of the fee, we propose:

- ❖ Sports Videographer Stipend (\$16 /hr): Offered first to a PHS student if interested. Working with PHS Athletic Department to ensure all home games are recorded, broadcasted, and made available on YouTube & video-on-demand ('VOD').
 - > PHS student would 'interview' for the position, build and present a demo reel, and gain valuable real-world experience as career preparation.
- ❖ Internship Program: Students work at PPMtv Studios with extensive daily support from PPMtv staff. Experience on both PPMtv projects as well as individual projects. PPMtv staff will assist in creation of a 'demo reel' for all students interested in pursuing a career in video production.
- Clipper News Report has access to studio space and gear to produce their show. An increase in staff hours allows staff members to assist CNR more directly.

At 100% of the fee to PPMty, we propose:

- Sports Videographer Stipend (\$16 /hr): Offered first to a PHS student if interested. Working with PHS Athletic Department to ensure all home games are recorded, broadcasted, and made available on YouTube & video-on-demand ('VOD').
 - > PHS student would 'interview' for the position, build and present a demo reel, and gain valuable real-world experience as career preparation.
- ❖ Internship Program: Students work at PPMtv Studios with complete support from PPMtv staff. Experience on both PPMtv projects as well as individual projects. PPMtv staff will assist in creation of a 'demo reel' for all students interested in pursuing a career in video production, as well as assist in off-site productions.
- Clipper News Report has access to studio space and gear to produce their show. Increased staff-hours allows staff members to assist CNR more directly.

7. In Conclusion

We here at PPMtv see the value in Portsmouth as an artistic community - it's our goal, in our mission statement, to bring that side of this community to light. Portsmouth Public Media, as a PEG station, *should* be a public good, accessible by all. If we receive adequate funding, PPMtv will make all memberships, gear/stage rental, and classes available to any member of the public, free of charge.

While we understand we aren't an arm of the government, we would like to operate as partners with the City. However, the City sees the arts and culture aspect of Portsmouth as a massive boon. This city is a haven for artistic expression and cultural exchange in a way that few cities in the region are. We want to be able to continue to show off the city's vibrancy and to increase its visibility. Our viewership already shows that people are interested in us from all around the world - let's keep up the good work together.

As written on the first page of Portsmouth's FY25 Budget, "Portsmouth's arts and culture are the beating heart of this vibrant community". Portsmouth Public Media couldn't agree more with this statement; we only ask that we're allowed to become a bigger, more effective part of it.

And lastly - thank you for taking the time to read this document. We appreciate the willingness of the City to work with us, and we look forward to this forthcoming discussion.

Appendix 1 - YouTube Views and Budgets

Station Name	Station Total Budget	Subscriber Count (approx.)	Total Videos (approx.)	Lifetime Views (approx.)			
PPMtv	\$87,000 (FY25)	14,200	756	4.7 million			
Portsmouth Ch. 22	Unknown (IT Dept. FY25 is \$1,691,874) ¹³	1,600	3,200	403,308			
NH PBS	H PBS Unknown*		1,669	1,173,771			
Manchester TV 1,063,000 (FY24) ¹⁴		1,400	1,000	200,000			
Exeter TV Unknown (50-50 split of fee with Exeter) ¹⁵		1,500	1,800	289,000			
Nashua TV	\$440,000 (FY25) ¹⁶	3,890	912	1.8 million			
Concord TV	312,830 (FY25) ¹⁷	2,060	2,000	401,000			
Washington DC TV	743,000 (FY23) ¹⁸	1,080	571	390,000			

Approximated numbers are drawn from YouTube, rounded to the nearest even number. In instances when exact data is available, the exact number is used.

For 'Station Total Budget', FY25 is utilized if possible for the most up-to-date statistic; where FY25 data for a station is not available, the most recent available data is used. In the case of PPMtv, the integer used is the amount beyond the \$360,000 that the City of Portsmouth first takes from the Franchise Fee.

^{*}NH PBS, while a public television organization, is structured and funded differently than PEG media. NH PBS' budget is not relevant in comparison to ours; this is simply to compare viewership.

¹³ Via <u>Portsmouth FY25 Proposed Budget</u>. Note that **we are not assessing the entire IT department's budget to fund Channel 22**; however, we have been unable to access an itemized budget for Channel 22, and simply go off the knowledge that it is funded by some amount of the IT department's share of the general fund.

¹⁴ Allocated from 1.6 million franchise fee to the Communication department: Pg 19, FY24 Budget

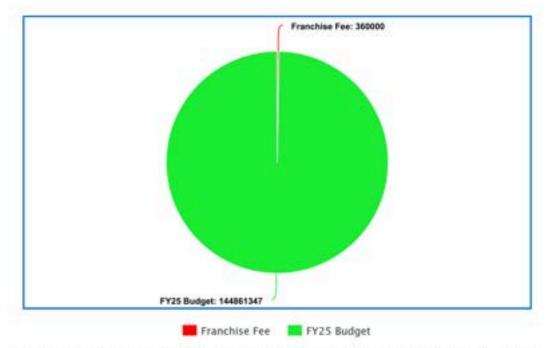
¹⁵ Via pg 9, Exeter FY24 Budget

¹⁶ Estimated from PEG monthly expense via pg 4, <u>Cable TV Advisory Board Meeting Minutes 3/08/24</u>

¹⁷ Pg. 104, Concord FY24 Adopted Budget

¹⁸ With donor restrictions, via pg. 11, DCTV Annual Report 2023

Appendix 2 - Franchise Fee Revenue vs. CoP's Adopted Budget



The amount the CoP gets from the PEG fee, as compared to the entire CoP General Budget (0.24%).

Appendix 3 - Local PEG Station Fundraising



Revenue

Name	FY2023 Adopted Budget	FY2024 Department Proposed	FY2024 Mayor Proposed	FY2024 Adopted Budget		
Revenue Source						
CABLE TV FRANCHISE FEES	\$475,000	8900,000	\$900,000	\$900,000		
MISCELLANEOUS REVENUE	\$1,000	50	80	\$0		
(INCREASE)/DECREASE IN FUND BALANCE	\$507,878	\$217,845	\$217,865	\$217,865		
Total Revenue Source:	5983,878	\$1,117,865	\$1,117,865	\$1,117,865		

Pictured: City of Nashua's FY2024 adopted budget pg 76., highlighting PEG revenue and expenses.

	Town of Londonderry, New Hampshire Fiscal Year 2024 General Fund Proposed Revenue Budget													
A	count Numbe	r Accessed Description		2019 Actual Americal		2929 Actual Assuust	292	t Actual Account		2022 Actual Amount	2603	Approved Budget	2824	Proposed Studge
Department:	28 Calle													
Mer - Mirrel	General Revision													
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		Department Total Ni - Recreation		2,346.00	-	6,009.00		1,000:00		1,766.00		1,000.00	311	.1,690
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		MORNING Ton	4	PVALUE	1	20809640		19,275,614.30	3	PURDAKUW		ILTERNOON	1	94,04,000
		Part STREET, Dark 100 - State of Part	4	PEALER	. 5	20,000,00.42		14,215,910,00	3	17,170,001,00		11,011,60.06	5	942043023
		REVENUE GRAND Totals:	-	PVALUE		17,644,546,42	1	19,235,614,36	1.	IT.ITS.WILLIW	1	15,878,945.06	1	96,014,070,0

Pictured: Town of Londonderry's FY24 budget, highlighting LACTV's standing budget of <\$500,000 yearly.