

Stoughton Media Access Corporation (10/9/2025 7PM)

Good evening, Mr. Chairman and Select Board~~s~~ members. My name is Mark Linde, a resident of Bridgewater, also an elected Town Councilor, who had served in the paid capacity as the Station Manager at Stoughton Media Access Corporation (SMAC) in 2021. I was born in Stoughton. I respect the citizens of Stoughton, and I love Stoughton. I am here to share relevant and important information as a former employee with my colleague David Young (former Access Coordinator) regarding SMAC's infidelity to its contract responsibilities with the Town of Stoughton. The leadership of this Board of Directors is directly relevant to the situation that brings us here tonight. The Town of Stoughton finds itself in an untenable relationship with SMAC that has caused grave concern.

Before joining SMAC as the station manager, I read an exhaustive report by the esteemed and experienced Marc Hausmann commissioned by the Board of Directors. The findings of this report created fear with the regard to the behavior of individual and collective actions of the Board of Directors with John Stagnone as President and Stephen Bates as Treasurer. Regardless of the findings of this report I chose to accept this position assuming that the report had resulted in a change of behavior. Unfortunately, I encountered and experienced the same behavior from the leadership of the Board outlined in the Hausman report.

Through you Mr. Chairman I would like to provide factual testimony regarding my firsthand experience with SMAC which I'm certain you will find relevant to the fact that past and present Directors of SMAC not following their contractual obligations to the Town. Mr. Chairman, I've read the agenda with regards to contract compliance and have prepared my remarks consistent with the format outlined in your agenda.

There are several points that I'm certain would be of significance to Board members as you determine the appropriate actions you will take with respect to SMAC and its Board of Directors.

Point #1: During my tenure at SMAC I worked on the bylaws of the organization utilizing my 37 years in leadership roles at public access organizations. I was told by BOD President John Stagnone that it was a "board matter" and wasn't for me to be involved as Station Manager. The prior Station Manager before me, Michael Hammond was told the same thing. He was here much longer than myself and could not be here tonight due to an important work commitment.

Point #2: As Station Manager I worked on financial information to provide to the BOD. I was told it was the Treasurer's responsibility and also of Mr. Hausman who prepared financial information. My prior experience in my prior job showed my expertise in doing so. There was never a Treasurer's report prepared or presented by the actual Treasurer, Stephen Bates. All checks were signed and authorized by President John Stagnone. My access to bank statements was limited and then the statements didn't come to our mailing address. They were sent elsewhere. For a non-profit adequate checks and balances were required by law. There were none.

Point #3: An outside auditing firm (CPA) was engaged in Chelmsford, MA. I wanted a Stoughton or nearby CPA firm to do our filings and was told it was "none of their business." Both the previous station manager and I were told we didn't submit information on time for financial reviews, which was false as we both kept time/date stamps on our submissions. IRS filings were not done on a timely basis with extensions. On the last day of my job, I received an IRS notice documenting this. The state Annual reports were also filed late. I received a directive to do this a certain way by John Stagnone President, and it wasn't my role to pick the CPA firm. IRS guidelines suggest new audit and accounting firms every 6 years. This one was employed over that timeframe. The Treasurer wasn't a part of this process. It was controlled by the President.

Point #4: Equipment inventory records asked for by the Town that were never submitted to this day to the best of my knowledge were impossible to track. I tried to update them despite inadequate records. Old equipment was never properly disposed of, stored upstairs behind locked closed doors. Previous records were never available to me as Station Manager.

Any record was then created by me. I suggested inventory tags with barcodes but was told they were too expensive. There was always a veil of secrecy hovering over any records at SMAC.

Point #5: I was tasked with creating both a capital equipment and facility budget. I was told that the considerable stockpile of subscriber revenues given by the Town of Stoughton to SMAC was to be used for a "studio" reserve and we were not allowed to buy simple equipment necessary for the ~~the~~ operation of the existing SMAC studios. All expenditures were micromanaged by one director. This was the overreaching theme during my brief tenure. Secrecy and non-compliance. Under non-profit rules and IRS laws a non-profit is held to the highest possible standards. The BOD has specific roles. Policy, providing financial resources and exercising their fiduciary duties as a collective board. The day-to-day operation is left to the Station Manager.

Micro-management and surveillance were the culture at SMAC instituted by the BOD President Mr. Stagnone. Without board authorization (unless done in one of the many secretive executive sessions) a camera recording system that may have included audio recording was installed with direct view of administrative operations, nearby bathrooms, entrances and exits. The alarm codes were set by Mr. Bates and his preferred vendors to watch every move. The vendors have a close and personal relationship with Mr. Bates and Mr. Stagnone. This was a clear conflict of interest and against non-profit rules.

Another example is that we were ordered to use an out of town vendor for trash disposal. I suggested the Town vendor and was told that it was fine. The dumpster was 2 times the size we needed.

I had a binder with CONFIDENTIAL and personnel information removed from my office as BOD President Stagnone had keys to my office. Furthermore, he was the keeper of the online email accounts and the administrator. My predecessor the previous station manager's emails were controlled by the President and reluctantly shared with me.

As the station manager I was not allowed to seek competitive bids for our service providers. The trash company was from Abington not Stoughton as I suggested. The cleaners were vendors of Treasurer Bates. We have photo evidence of the large dumpster (not needed) being filled with construction and materials from a few of our board members' names on them.

As station manager I would receive and open the daily mail unless a specific name was on it. If that was the case, I put it in a file folder on my desk as the President and Treasurer had keys to my office. The treasurer was the person that could duplicate keys with his preferred vendor. On one occasion Mr. Stagnone questioned why I would open the mail. I reminded him as the station manager that was part of my job. He then told me it was't and forwarded bank statements and other mail to another address. Most mail stopped coming to our mailbox.

At this current time Mr. Chairman SMAC has most of the same problems that were present during my tenure, my predecessor's tenure and my former work colleague David Young who worked there for many years.

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With my over 35⁷ years of professional management and direct experience in PEG access stations it is and remains my observation that because I had constant objections to this micromanagement, noncompliance and improper practices my tenure came to an abrupt end only 179 days after my hiring date in June 2021. Mr. Mullen and Mr. Stagnone came to my office in early December 2021 as told me my services were no longer needed and forced me to sign paperwork. I barely had 10 minutes to retrieve my personal belongings. Because I did not succumb to the constant interference and threats to myself regarding other employees I was shown the door. I'm not here to disparage or for any type of retribution. I'm here to make clear that this organization and its past and present directors are in complete non-compliance with their charter and obligations under the contract with the Town of Stoughton.

8:50