

COTTAGE GROVE CITY COUNCIL

12800 RAVINE PARKWAY SOUTH

COTTAGE GROVE, MN 55016

TRAINING ROOM - 6:15 P.M

May 21, 2025

1. CALL TO ORDER

The City Council of the City of Cottage Grove, Washington County, Minnesota, held a Special Meeting on May 21, 2025, at Cottage Grove City Hall, 12800 Ravine Parkway. Mayor Bailey called the meeting to order at 6:15 p.m.

2. AGENDA

A. Cable Commission Presentation

Staff Recommendation: Receive a presentation from the South Washington County Telecommunications Commission and offer feedback.

Mayor Bailey said Ann Schweisguth and Lonnie Garland are here to kick it off, and we'd like to welcome you.

Ann replied thank you, Mayor, Council, and staff members. Well, we have an update from our organization and of course we brought a video; so, we're going to play the video and then we're happy to answer any questions you may have. Video highlights:

- After a rebranding process in 2024, we are excited to have a new name and brand identity: TrueLens Community Media.
- No matter what we are called, though, we will still provide the same reliable services to our member cities of Woodbury, Cottage Grove, St. Paul Park, Newport, and Grey Cloud Island Township.
- In 2024, we aired on cable TV and streamed online 153 City Meetings, completed 217 video productions, and those videos received almost 300,000 views.
- Our talented team of multimedia producers received eight (8) National Awards, including a Regional Emmy for a video called "A Friendly Wave." This was the highest-viewed video of the year with over 116,000 views across YouTube and social media.
- Our technical team, along with providing maintenance for A-V equipment in various municipal buildings, also experienced several A-V projects: The City of Woodbury received new microphones in their Public Safety Roll Call room, new video-conferencing cameras at Public Works, an A-V remodel at Eagle Valley Golf Course, first installment investment into new A-V at Central Park, and an engineering design for their Water Treatment Plant. The City of Cottage Grove received A-V for the new Glacial Valley Park and Utility and Engineering Buildings, as well as updated equipment in the Public Safety Roll Call room and conference rooms.
- TrueLens Community Media is funded primarily through cable franchise and paid public education and government fees. The Commission renewed the cable franchise with Comcast in February 2024, and changed the paid fee to 2%; this resulted in a significant increase of \$266,534 from paid revenue. Franchise revenue, however, decreased by \$108,735. Our expenses were down 1.1%, and we brought in almost \$50,000 from outside sources like studio rental and video production services.
- The Board of Directors added more than \$500,000 to our Relocation Fund to pay for our upcoming facility move to Woodbury Central Park. We have been working with Kraus-Anderson, Wold Architects and Engineers to create and plan for our relocation in late 2025/early 2026 to this community facility.

- The new location will feature a slightly-larger studio, additional office space, building amenities, and a new radio podcast room, which will be where we will launch our new low-power FM radio stations: WWBY and WGRO. We will hit the air waves in 2026 and feature music, local podcasts and talk shows, and possibly local sports.
- As we continue to focus on creating quality video and audio content and provide information to the public, we also need to take time to look at potential future budget shortfalls. We continue to see a decline in franchise revenue and have concerns with broadband companies using the City Rights-of-Way. During the 2025 legislative session, we have been supporting two Bills to help community media funding: Equal Access to Broadband Act and a one-time request for funding from the Cultural Heritage Fund.
- Thank you to our incredible employees of talented producers and technical staff, and thank you to the dedicated Commission directors, who represent our member cities and provide us equal feedback and direction.
- To learn more about us, go to truelensmedia.org.

Ann said we kept it nice and concise this year, just an update: Those two pieces of legislation did not pass this session; Mayor Bailey said nothing really did. Ann said so, we'll continue that, probably next year on looking at those sources. So, we're happy to answer any questions.

Mayor Bailey asked so what is your take with the franchise fee thing happening, or you said it's decreasing going forward?

Ann replied the franchise fee, you know, we saw maybe a \$108,000 decrease. It goes up and down, which is interesting: The first quarter of this year, we saw a 6% increase in the franchise fee. So, where it goes at the end of the year, we'll talk about that next year, but yeah, if it continues to keep going down at that rate, obviously that's a significant problem. So, we continue to look at all other options.

Council Member Olsen asked are you looking at subscriber count? Ann replied yes. Council Member Olsen asked and what does the subscriber count look like in relation to the fee, is it greater than or less than in terms of an overall percentage drop?

Ann replied I'd have to look at that again to give you an exact, but the subscriber is going down.

Council Member Olsen said right, and the reason I ask is my recollection from the time on the commission is that, too, kind of did a little bit of this, right? And it almost seems like when there's some sort of special opportunity for tapping into the cable network for internet access and combining that at a special rate with cable television, we see a little blip, and then it goes back down. Because I think as we continue to add residents, I mean people are still getting cable and using cable, it's just a question of how do you marry the two together so that the fee structure would at least level out. It's too bad those Bills didn't pass, I know Mike worked really hard on it.

Ann said yeah, that was the second year we went for the Equal Access to Broadband Act, but we got more traction this year than we got the year before, and we'll keep going.

Council Member Olsen said well, it was a terrible year legislatively up there, so keep plugging away for sure.

Council Member Thiede said I know the subscriber rate, obviously, like you say, there might be special deals and people may sign up, then they see something else and say well, I'm going to cut the cable, and then they find out that they're spending more than they were before.

Council Member Olsen said well, the streaming costs are not saving anybody any money, it's not.

Ann replied well, 2020 when the pandemic came, we saw things go up quite a bit, and you know, they came back down. Now we're having other ISP providers come into town and that might change that, so.

Council Member Olsen said and we're trying to help with some broadband access and different things, too, but yeah.

Lonnie said I think the positive is the communities are still growing, and that's a plus for us. So, again, we're definitely looking at other government sources to help fund things.

Council Member Thiede said the broadband won't actually help TruLens at all; it'll hurt it, it's cheaper broadband.

Council Member Olsen replied oh, you're right. I thought about that backwards.

Ann said if the Equal Access to Broadband was to happen, that could really significantly help the city and the community.

Council Member Thiede said and that's why over the years I've been trying to get more things like corporate business and things like that as long as it doesn't degrade the activity for the cities, right?

Mayor Bailey said it's interesting you bring that up, as that was kind of going to be my question. So, let's say put aside even the cable thing, so, let's say next year you're going to launch these radio stations, right? Will you have the option and be able to do advertising?

Ann replied it falls under that underwriting, a PBS kind of model.

Mayor Bailey said I kind of figured that, because I know even nationally right now, there's that thing with like PBS and all that stuff, right? But I was just thinking if there's an option to do some additional or if somebody paid for a particular program, I don't know if you can.

Ann replied well, we're definitely looking at sponsorship.

Council Member Thiede replied yeah, so that's more of a sponsorship type deal.

Ann said yeah, and I think that that might be very useful. We're just starting those discussions internally, and we'll be at Strawberry Fest this year and at a bunch of different events, and we'll be asking people, what do you want to see from our organization? What do you want to watch here, really, and we're hoping to kind of flush that out.

Council Member Olsen said I think that's super exciting, though. I know it's something that you guys have been working on for a couple of years, and it's going to be nice to finally bring that to fruition. I mean you have endless opportunities, especially with the new location and some dedicated space for that. Will your larger studio give you any sort of leg up, as it relates to any sort of outside work that you may want to do?

Lonnie replied yeah, we've looked at maybe adding a video mall and those kind of things. There will be a cost, but we can maybe talk with Andersen Windows, they still rent our space, and it's not like they're going to come with us, they will still rent the space. There might be some opportunities to partner with them on getting some new equipment in the studio; we're still looking into that, and I am not sure how you want to really do that with an outside entity, but I think that being in that location with the library there and the County and the school, it gives you opportunities to do all kinds of things. So, I think there's a lot of opportunities, we just have to find out what those are once we get in there and have been there for a while.

Council Member Olsen asked are you guys still thinking about doing any kind of internships for young people that are trying to get into the business?

Ann replied yep, we have an intern starting next week, Sydney Baxter; she goes to the University of St. Thomas and she grew up in Woodbury. So, we're excited to have a local come back.

Council Member Olsen said good, that'll be awesome. I think that's another way to sort of keep that spirit of community programming alive and kind of move the ball down the field, maybe it's slowly, but you're still making progress. So, that's great to hear. Ann replied absolutely.

Mayor Bailey said I know in the past you guys have done certain events, like hockey games or a lot of times, obviously, it's kind of cool when you guys do like the Woodbury vs. Park or East Ridge vs. Park, or whatever. Do you have any idea what kind of viewership you're getting on any of that? Is there any way to tell?

Ann replied we can always tell how many views we got on YouTube, but we couldn't tell you how many people watched it on the channel. Because we don't have the production truck and the infrastructure for that, it's pretty costly for us to even do one game, which is what we were doing for a while. We kind of see the radio station as an opportunity to do audio for the games, which is very cost effective, and I think that people would really enjoy that.

Mayor Bailey replied yeah, I don't disagree, and that's what I'm thinking, if there's more opportunities to do like sporting events or not that we want these, but let's say we have some type of a major event; when I say major event, I'm not even talking Strawberry, let's say a big storm goes through and Woodbury's got something going on, can the Mayor or people from Woodbury go and do like a live thing on the radio station? You see how I threw Woodbury in there, they'll have the storm, not us, we already had ours. But anyway, the point I'm making is if

there was some type of an event or something was happening that we could get messages out quickly; I know we have our own avenues, but you know, people want to hear, they want to know what's going on, so.

Ann replied we want to be able to get that out in multiple ways to people. So, we have a new live system where we can go live anywhere at any moment that you need us to be there for. It can go on our cable channel, it can go on YouTube, it can go on the radio station, all at the same time. Mayor Bailey replied okay.

Council Member Garza asked are you all, I'm sure you're pretty familiar with KDWA, and so, the owners there, they have a really awesome model site, I worked with them several years ago. And as far as what you were mentioning as advertisement or any type of marketing or anything, and I don't know if you're familiar with their business model for that.

Ann replied they do quite a few different things; they're a little different model because they're not the same, I think they're a for-profit station, correct? Mayor Bailey replied they are.

Council Member Garza said well, they are, but on the one side of it, you would be able to maybe do trade for marketing or something. That's the way that they do a lot; so, instead of exchanging cash, they exchange trade. So, whatever that business is, they will trade you whatever their product is, and you can, I don't think they sell it on their shopping show, because they have a shopping show as well. So, I don't know if it's something that you guys would possibly do, but it is for-profit, so, I don't know if that's a line with you all or if there's another entity that you could create that would be able to bring you an avenue of profit, but it's really good for them. They're doing well with it, and they've had it for a lot of years, I've shopped with them for probably 20 years or more, so.

Ann replied oh, excellent; they're on our list to talk to.

Council Member Garza said and I know them really well, so I can give you some great introductions, as I've worked with them for a while, so. Ann replied okay, awesome, thank you.

Council Member Olsen asked how's your staffing? Ann replied staffing is great.

Council Member Olsen said good, you guys were able to find the right fits for?

Ann replied we moved some pieces around last year, and everybody kind of fell into their positions, and it's going great.

Council Member Olsen said yeah, I don't know who you had in that picture up there, next to Brian, but man, whoever that fellow was, you should keep him around.

Council Member Clausen asked Ann, with respect to the podcasting and the radio station, is that going to be for internal use only or can someone from the public come in and do their own podcast, use your studio for a fee or your radio station? I've got a neighbor, for example, that does an internet radio show, one hour, twice a week; he's got 5 listeners, I think. Could he come in, if he wanted to rent your studio for his little talk show/radio show? Can he do that, or is that something you'd think you'd?

Ann replied it's something we're exploring.

Council Member Olsen said you've got to very carefully vet.

Ann said yeah, but Brian and Lonnie took a trip to, what was it, Frogtown?

Lonnie replied, Frogtown Radio, over in St. Paul, and it's in the top of the Radisson over there, by the old Sears building, on like the tenth floor, and they have 76 volunteers that provide programming for their radio station. So, they're never hurting for that, and a lot of it is done remotely, and they just email it to them, they don't even have to come to the station.

Ann said now, they have channel guidelines, what you can and cannot say; it cannot be political or religious or, it's to play music and have, you know, community content. So, that is something we're exploring; you know, we got away from the public access a long time ago, and we don't want to go down that road again, but how can we involve the community is the question.

Council Member Olsen said yeah, there are some in town with podcasts that we probably don't want to have associated with, you know?

Lonnie replied and that's why we're going to do that right now is try to figure out what those guidelines will be, that's why we're visiting other stations.

Council Member Garza said and I think KDWA, again, they do a lot of that. Ann replied yeah, they must have to do that. Council Member Garza replied they do, and they're right down the road, so I would really have that conversation because they're doing all that stuff, too; and they've been doing it for so long, they're probably ready to retire.

Mayor Bailey asked what's your timeframe for getting into the new studio; is that yet this year?

Ann replied it's either going to be at the end of this year or the beginning of next year; it kind of depends on construction and timing with our current lease. At the latest, it would be probably February of next year.

Mayor Bailey said when you showed the picture, I don't know if that's still new; Ann replied it was about a month ago.

Mayor Bailey said so, they're still putting walls up, obviously. Ann replied we still have a lot of work to do, yeah. Our construction portion hasn't started yet.

Council Member Olsen said I didn't pay attention close enough, but were you guys able to give back anything to the member communities last year?

Ann replied no, that money went into the Relocation Fund.

Council Member Olsen said it did, okay, and that was a decision made by the Board, I assume? Ann replied correct, yes.

City Administrator Jennifer Levitt asked Ann, are you able to talk a little bit about your marketing plan with your new logo and what that is, and then you obviously are over \$50,000 in outside money; how many entities does that represent?

Ann replied that \$50,000, most of it is from Renewal by Andersen, for renting our studio. We also contract with the School District, and we have a Cablecaster down there that does all the School Board meetings, and I think last year we did graduations as well. That's primarily where that \$50,000 came from.

The rebrand launched yesterday, so it's out there. We launched a newsletter, a press release, and we are rebranding everything that we have. If you haven't seen our van going around town, you probably will, its hard to miss, its very bright, and we'll be doing the rebrand all year, which is why we'll be at Strawberry Fest and all the other events this year with a new tent.

Council Member Olsen asked will there be T-shirts? Ann replied there will be T-shirts, yeah.

Mayor Bailey said you can have one of those guns that shoot, too.

Ann said you know, we talked about that, we'll carry them during the parade, wouldn't that be fun? Mayor Bailey and Council Member Olsen said yeah. Ann said everybody loves a shirt, though. Mayor Bailey said shirt guns are allowed; Council Member Thiede said as long as they don't make too much noise, right? Council Member Olsen said have Dave drop them from the drone show. Ann said yeah, I like it. Council Member Olsen said yeah, it's Dave's dancing drones with shirts.

Mayor Bailey said they've got their drone, they could drop it with their drone. Administrator Levitt said now, there you go. Council Member Thiede said that'd probably be safer. Mayor Bailey said oh, we're really getting off base here.

Ann said we probably should mention, too, some of the projects that will be happening in Cottage Grove this year.

Lonnie said this room will be redone in June where we move the projector and the monitors, there'll be four 75-inch monitors that they'll make one big video on, and you'll be able to select what you want in each quadrant of that video one. There'll be a monitor on the back wall for a conference, we'll put new cameras in, some new microphones.

Then we're also updating your St. Croix Room, and that's going to get some new technology, too. And then the Kingston Park building, we've had to do some design work on that with the architects.

Mayor Bailey said you're talking about the new one, right? Lonnie replied yes, I'm sorry, its the new one.

Lonnie said so, yeah, it will be nice in here when we're done with it. Hopefully this starts sometime in June, and we're going to try to coordinate it so that we'll do all screens at one time. So, it'll probably take about a week and a half before it's all done.

Council Member Thiede asked so the projector goes, huh?

Lonnie replied the projector's going, yeah. The touch panel will be on this wall, it will actually be at the podium, and it will be a drag and drop. So, you'll select cable TV, and drag it to any monitor you want or on the whole thing. So, if you want to quick share whatever you want, you just drag and drop it to the monitor and there it will be. And then there's an HDMI, you know the failsafe has always been unleashed in my cable, it works great every time; so there'll be a failsafe, and that'll be a plate in the wall, which will lead you to the cable, which is always there. You just need to do something quick, though. It's kind of an EOC room, and that matters so you can display several different things in quick access.

Mayor Bailey said well, I think the clarity piece will be nicer versus this; Lonnie said that's an older monitor and an older projector.

Council Member Thiede said it's a beast.

Council Member Garza said well, it will just be nice because when you show the same thing on all three screens they will all be the same, right?

Lonnie replied let's hope so. Council Member Garza said that's the goal.

Council Member Clausen said the side screens are going to go over there now, right?

Lonnie replied yeah, we'll actually move this one to the back wall for a conference monitor, and then we'll remove all these.

Council Member Clausen said I was going to say because no one really looks at the side screens anymore, and Lonnie agreed.

Ann said yeah, I think the original thought was that for an EOC, you could have weather on one, you could have cable TV on another, and then two things on the middle one.

Lonnie said if you have cameras on the street, you can also have those.

Mayor Bailey said awesome, anything else from Council or staff?

Council Member Olsen said that's exciting news, I think the name is cool; Mayor Bailey said yeah, I do, too. Ann replied thank you, it took a long time to get there, a lot of discussions.

Ann said we did have something our Board recommended that the other cities are actually going to start doing, but it's a little something to say before televised meetings, to just let people know that this is brought to you by TrueLens Community Meetings and where people can watch their meeting and plugs the City's YouTube channel. So, I'll pass that along if that's something that you're willing to say before a televised meeting, that would be great.

Council Member Olsen asked you'd like us to say it? Ann replied either the Chair or the Mayor has to say it. Council Member Olsen said as opposed to having like a blurb before the meeting? Ann replied correct.

Mayor Bailey said sounds good.

Council Member Garza said it'll create a profit margin; Mayor Bailey said well, if it gets more people to know who is doing it.

Ann replied yeah, it shows people where they can rewatch the meeting.

Council Member Thiede said well, it's a tiny little bit better than South Washington County Telecommunications Commission; Mayor Bailey said yeah, don't get me to do that one. Council Member Garza said now you can get all the words, so now this should be easy. Ann agreed.

Lonnie said the new graphic will be at the end of tonight's meeting, so.

Council Member Olsen it's cool, and Mayor Bailey said yeah, I like it. Mayor Bailey said all righty, thanks you two; Ann replied, thank you very much.

3. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting ended at 6:42 p.m. Minutes prepared by Judy Graf and reviewed by Tamara Anderson, City Clerk.