Minutes of Meeting #465

Nebraska Educational Telecommunications Commission
Nebraska Educational Telecommunications Center
1800 N 33rd St.
Lincoln, NE
June 25, 2020

Present: Commissioner Heath Mello
Commissioner Patricia Kircher (Chair)
Commissioner Nick Baxter
Commissioner Marilyn Hadley
Commissioner Jacque Carter
Commissioner Paul Turman
Commissioner Greg Adams
Commissioner Dorothy Anderson
Commissioner Clay Smith

Absent: Commissioner Matt Blomstedt
Commissioner Lisa May

Advance notice of the public meeting was sent to Nebraska news media by means of a news release forwarded from the Commission office with Agenda posted on the NET front door and on the state and NET websites. The meeting was held by remote electronic means as provided for in Governor Ricketts’ Executive Order No. 20-24 which is attached to these minutes.

Chair Patty Kircher called the meeting #465 to order at 10:35 a.m.

Following the call of the roll, it was determined that a duly constituted quorum of Commissioners were present.

The Chair called for public comment. There were none.

CONSENT AGENDA

The Chair requested approval of the minutes of meeting #464 as held on December 6, 2019. It was moved by Commissioner Baxter and seconded by Commissioner Smith to approve the minutes from meeting #464. Voting aye: Commissioner Adams, Anderson, Baxter, Carter, Hadley, Kircher, Mello, Smith, Turman. Opposed: None.

COMMISSION ADMINISTRATIVE AGENDA

3rd Quarter Budget Report
Chief Financial Officer, Randy Hansen presented the 3rd Quarter Budget Report. It was moved by Commissioner Smith and seconded by Commissioner Baxter to approve the 3rd Quarter Budget report ending March 31, 2020. Roll call was recorded as follows: Voting aye: Commissioner Adams, Anderson,
Baxter, Carter, Hadley, Kircher, Mello, Smith, Turman. Opposed: None. The Finance Committee met prior to the full Commission meeting to review the report in greater detail.

FY2021 Operating Budget
Chief Financial Officer, Randy Hansen presented the FY 2021 Operating Budget. It was moved by Commissioner Smith and seconded by Commissioner Baxter to approve the FY 2021 Operating Budget. Roll call was recorded as follows: Voting aye: Commissioner Adams, Anderson, Baxter, Carter, Hadley, Kircher, Mello, Smith, Turman. Opposed: None. The Finance Committee met prior to the full Commission meeting to review the report in greater detail.

NET Commission Nominating Committee Update
Nominating Committee Member Dorothy Anderson presented the nominations for Officers of the Nebraska Educational Telecommunications Commission. The nominations were as follows: Chair – Marilyn Hadley. Vice Chair – Nick Baxter. Finance Committee – Nick Baxter, Jacque Carter, Patricia Kircher, Marilyn Hadley, Lisa May. Executive Committee – Nick Baxter, Matt Blomstedt, Patricia Kircher, Marilyn Hadley, Paul Turman. Mark Leonard as secretary. Roll call was recorded as follows: Voting aye: Commissioner Adams, Anderson, Baxter, Carter, Hadley, Kircher, Mello, Smith, Turman. Opposed: None. The Nominating Committee met prior to the full Commission meeting to nominate officers.

COMMISSION INFORMATION AGENDA

General Manager’s Report
General Manager Mark Leonard presented the report:

- Attended NETA CPB Thought Leaders’ summit in January
- OSBE meeting prior to Summit
- Attended Public Media Summit in February with Patty Kircher, Carol Russell and Debbie Hamlett
- NSAA High School basketball Championships
- Nebraska State Parks screening at Mahone State Park 3/7-- the last NET public event
- March 15th: Following guidance from both the University and the State, NET was closed to the public and all but essential on site operations were moved to remote work. Laptop computers and VDI accounts were distributed to those needing equipment allow continued work from home as well as Zoom meetings and conferences.
- April 3rd first UNL Leadership Town hall with Chancellor Green
- April 6th NET hosts Fremont Virtual Town hall with community leaders
- April 15th UNL moves to level 4 shutdown
- April 22nd first virtual meeting with NET Senior Managers and Leadership Team
- April 24th first virtual NET all staff meeting held
- May 7th NU President Ted Carter press conference held at NET Meeting and Events room
- May 8th second virtual NET all staff meeting held
- May 15th University reduction of 3% of 4th quarter state aided budget for NET, a $16,079 reduction.
- May 20th third NET all staff virtual meeting
- May 22nd NET hosts Norfolk Virtual Town Hall with community leaders
- May 27th NET employee Jon Webber – Assistant Chief Engineer, passed away unexpectedly
  - June 2nd virtual grief counselling offered to NET employees by UNL EAP
- June 8th and 9th NET live streams and broadcasts Legislature Judicial Committee hearings on Policing and Racial Diversity from Omaha and Lincoln
- June 19th NET employee Verle Finke – Media Services, passed away unexpectedly
  - June 24th virtual grief counselling offered to NET employees by UNL EAP
- 3 staff member have welcomed babies since March 2020.

We are currently allowing some staff to return to work with Manager’s approval. We continue to encourage all who can to continue to do their work off site as much as possible, and to maintain strict guidelines within NET for mask wearing, PPE, surface cleanings, etc.

Seeing impacts of Covid 19 with budget cuts over the country. American Public Media has cancelled Live from Here with Chris Thile.

Executive Vice Chancellor has been chosen at UNL. Elizabeth Spiller is now filling that role.

A few title changes to announce. Nancy Finken’s role has been expanded to include supervision of radio content as well as television. Her title is now “Chief Content Officer”. This reflects the increasing importance of viewing our content creation and distribution strategies as being organization wide and needing coordination in planning and execution. Debbie Hamlett’s title is now Chief Strategy Officer. Chad Davis is now Chief Innovation Officer. Randy Hansen is now Chief Financial Officer. Ling Ling Sun is now Chief Technology Officer.

Another has been the expansion of NET HR Director Julie Thomsen’s role to include oversight of NET’s customer service area, shipping and receiving, as well as HR and Organizational Development. Julie’s new title is “Chief Administrative Officer”, and she will be providing regular reports as well as attend upcoming Commission meetings.

**Julie Thomsen, Chief Administrative Officer, report**

In 2008, NET Foundation for Television was gifted with a permanent endowment to be used for the benefit and support of the internship program between NET Foundation for Television and the Hixson-Lied college of Fine and Performing Arts and the College of Journalism and Mass Communications at the University of Nebraska Lincoln.

NET extends our gratitude for this generous gift that has supported numerous students from UNL’s COJMC and Hixon-Lied College of Fine and Performing Arts. NET had 10 students who benefited from this gift in the 2019/2020 year to date. NET departments who had students assigned included News, Radio, Education, Communications, Emerging Media and Broadcast Production. In addition to the 10 UNL Students who benefited from the McILNAY-ROGERS Internships, NET also provided and funded 7 additional student opportunities throughout 2019/2020 in Business Development, Research, Broadcast Engineering, Information Technology Services, and Customer Service. Our students included 2 non-traditional students and 2 students of diverse ethnicity.

Specific student experiences included;

- working with NET reporters and producers on best practices and hands-on training in producing stories for multiple platforms, pitching story ideas and providing research assistance
- assisting producers in video production, editing content, and supporting and experiencing remote and studio productions
- supporting business development staff prospecting, sales proposals and Salesforce database
- assisting communications with news releases, advertising, and events to build awareness for NET programs and activities, creating ads for traditional, new and social media
- supporting broadcast engineering staff on project implementation
- supporting NET staff in IT help desk calls and installation of equipment
- answering NET member and donor calls and routing appropriately
- supporting NET Research department with collecting data and initial analysis

Diversity and Inclusion:
As stated in NET’s 2019 Statement of Commitment to Diversity, and as a condition of CPB Funding, NET partnered with the UNL Office of Diversity and Inclusion to provide training to staff and members of the station’s governing board on ways to create a more diverse workforce and to maintain a culture of respect and non-discrimination. Training was facilitated in February 2020 by Nkenge Friday, Ed.D, UNL Assistant Vice Chancellor for Strategic Initiatives. NET had nearly 100% staff in-person participation. The session was recorded and provided to the Commission and staff who were unable to attend in person.

NET Education Update
Chief Strategy Officer, Debbie Hamlett presented the report:

- **8 videos from Watershed 360° - Social Studies, Science and Language Arts** content (4-12 grades) 8 more videos are in process. Lesson plans, learning activities/interactions/ viewer guides and glossary. Updated to new Nebraska social studies standards and loaded into the PBS Learning Media Library.
- **Class of 2020: Moving Forward** – production of a 30 minute program addressing the mental health of senior high school and college students. Used student videos from across the state. Hosted by mental health professional Dr. Dave Miers Bryan Medical Center.
- **Budget goal of 4.2 million dollars was in jeopardy in March and April so we revised all of the donor messaging to reflect what NET was doing to address remote learning and increased news presence. Boosted Passport emails and Roku Plus Passport. Passport numbers tripled. The Major Giving team called every member in their portfolios to thank them for their support. A special letter was sent to sustainer members thanking them and outlining how their donations were being utilized during this time. A radio drive was conducted in June for 1.5 days. Asked for 225 people to pledge their support and during that short period 232 members pledged for a total of $43,964. The comments were overwhelming supportive and appreciative. An anonymous donor gave $3000 in honor of Brandon McDermott, the NET morning edition host, who recently graduated from college and has a new baby on the way in October. Currently in a TV drive until the end of June with a goal of $100,000. PBS is losing the rights to Downton Abbey and so NET ran a marathon of the show over Memorial Day weekend and raised $31,500. Surpassed membership revenue goal of 4.2 million budget by $200,000. Which is 4% over what they were hoping for.
• Underwriting revenue has taken about a $40,000 hit, mostly related to some of the sports that weren’t able to happen. However, we have surpassed our budget goal of $325,000 for Radio underwriting by $10,000. Have about $50,000 more to go to meet budget goal for T.V. underwriting.

• **2 online town talks- Fremont and Norfolk**
  Discussion with community leaders and organizations about their successes and challenges.

• **Prehistoric Road Trip online sneak preview screening with Q & A.**
  Guests Alvis Mar, Park Ranger from Agate Fossil Beds National Monument and Paleontologist/Science Communicator Ashley Hall. **Supported by a grant through WTTW.**
  - A new 3-part broadcast will debut in mid-June on NET featuring the Field Museum’s YouTube star, Emily Grasslie. Agate Fossil Beds National Monument is one of the places featured in the program.

**NET Engineering Report**
Chief Technology Officer, Ling Ling Sun presented the report:

**PBS DDMS**
• PBS Engineers on site the week of March 13 repairing and restoring DDMS playout system. DDMS is a key component of PBS system business continuity planning. It has reached a heightened level of importance due to the COVID-19 emergency, as well as recent construction work at PBS Tech Center through March and May. In addition to the playout system, PBS has also established PBS Kids channel generation and uplink backup at the DDMS.

**Network Operations and Distribution**
• Several OCIO related issues affected NET services at various locations.
• OCIO UPS failure at Grand Island on Jan. 26 between 11:25am -3:51pm impacted KUON, KHNE, KLNE and KXNE.
• OCIO fiber loss at Grand Island on April 12 between 8:00am-17:20pm impacted KMNE and KHNE FM.

**Network Transmission**
• KLNE:
  - Invitation to bid for KLNE TV Transmitter replacement was awarded to Rohde & Schwarz on May 4, 2020.
  - Extinguish KLNE tower sidelights, received FAA approval on March 30, 2020 and FCC approval on June 16, 2020.
• KMNE:
  - Invitation to bid for KMNE tower lighting system was posted on Jan. 21, 2020. Awaiting state funding.
• KTNE
  - Invitation to bid for KTNE tower lighting system was posted on Jan. 16, 2020. National Tower Controls was awarded the bid on Feb. 19, 2020.
  - Invitation to bid for KTNE FM transmission line and antenna replacement and installation was posted on Feb. 19, 2020. Best and final offer was completed on April 22, 2020. Award bid to National Tower Controls is in the work.
Chief Content Officer, Nancy Finken presented the report:

**NET Productions**

- The new NET documentary *A Sculpted Life* premiered February 3 and tells the story of Omaha artist Littleton Alston. Alston teaches at Creighton University and is an accomplished sculptor who was chosen to create the statue of Willa Cather to be placed at the U.S. Capitol later in 2020. This documentary, produced by Christine Lesiak will be offered to public television stations across the country later this year through NETA, National Educational Telecommunications Association.

- On a related note, in January, *Nebraska Stories* included a piece on the other Nebraska statue being installed at the U.S. Capitol in Statuary Hall. The segment called “The Chief Goes to Washington,” shows the unveiling of the new statue of Chief Standing Bear sculpted by Ben Victor. *Nebraska Stories* completed its 11th season and continues to introduce us to interesting people and takes us on journeys across the state. Among the highlights from this season was an entire episode focused on the national hot air balloon races held in Scottsbluff/Gering. *Nebraska Stories: Racing the Wind* included spectacular views of the balloons, the beautiful valley, the drama of a thunderstorm, and the tension of competition.

**NET Sports Highlights**

- In February and March, NET Sports produced live coverage of the **NSAA High School Championships** in wrestling, swimming and diving, and basketball. The boys basketball championship games at Pinnacle Bank Arena on March 14 were the last live sporting events across the country due the pandemic. In May, because the 2020 soccer championships were cancelled, we aired some “best of” soccer championship matches from our archives.

- This winter NET broadcast 3 Nebraska Women’s Basketball games including a very special broadcast featuring two legends in Women’s Athletics. Former Husker Women’s Coach Angela Beck was our color analyst, working alongside her former coaching assistant Brenda VanLengen as play-by-play for the Penn State game. The Huskers won an exciting 75 -58 game, but as NET Sports Executive Director Joe Turco put it, “This telecast was more than a game, it was celebration.”

**National Notes**

- December was full of holiday specials including *Making of a New American Nutcracker*, the Joffrey Ballet’s new production re-imagining the Christmas classic set in a humble home of a 19th century immigrant family; *Call the Midwife Holiday Special*, and numerous PBS Kids specials.

- From PBS, *Country Music* a film by Ken Burns was an 18-hour blockbuster that did so well across the country that PBS (and NET) rebroadcast it on Friday nights starting January 3.
NET National

- *And the Floods Came*, a news documentary produced by Bill Kelly will be distributed through APT (American Public Television) in July. Over 200 stations across the country have expressed an intent to broadcast this program about Nebraska’s historic flooding last year.

- NET was invited by NPR to be one of the founding stations for a new journalism hub to create greater capacity and collaboration in producing in-depth stories and investigative pieces. The Midwest Journalism Hub stations are NET, Iowa Public Radio, KCUR-Kansas City, and St. Louis Public Radio. NPR received a major grant to launch the hub from philanthropists Eric and Wendy Schmidt. Eric is former CEO of Google.

NET News and Radio

Radio Station Manager, Bill Anderson presented the report:

NET Programming

- NET has carried all the coronavirus daily news briefings of Governor Ricketts.

- A special radio-only version of the television show "What If" focused on the challenges school districts, families and school aged children faced in overcoming the challenges presented by the pandemic for people living in the Sand Hills.

- In the wake of the protests following the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, NET radio carried a national call-in show produced by WNYC and American Public Media. Driven by listener’s calls, the show focused on race, violence and policing in America.

NET Music

- Our musical hosts have responded at a time when listeners find themselves needing a diversion from the news. Special programming, designed to provide uplifting messages and inspiring music, are being programmed and a Monday segment called "Conductor House Call" features a Nebraska conductor talking in a personal way about the power of music in trying times. Anecdotally, our ongoing "Classics By Request" segment has become a healthy outlet for listeners seeking to find strength and inspiration in the music they request. Our announcers, to a person, have been challenged to weave in and out of special news coverage and they are responding impressively.

- In this 250th Anniversary of Beethoven’s birth, NET’s classical team has been featuring his work and will create some fun digital work to complement the radio offerings.
NET Emerging Media
Chief Innovation Officer, Chad Davis presented the report:

- Thus far this year we have done extensive work on NET’s first full, in-house virtual reality project. Staff from Emerging Media, working with faculty at the Johnny Carson Center for Emerging Media Arts, Architecture and Anthropology Departments have painstakingly created a virtual version of UNL’s original building, University Hall. When viewed in a VR headset, the building, with a height that topped out at more than 60 feet, feels to scale. People in the VR experience can move around the full exterior of the building, and venture inside the structure. Working with curators at the Nebraska State Museum, we have created a small museum exhibit featuring digitally replicated artifacts and multi-media components that users can manipulate with their VR controllers.
- We have thus far conducted private demos for the National Endowment for the Humanities, Chancellor Greene, members of the Nebraska Information Technology Commission, and various other stakeholders. Post pandemic, the opportunity exists to virtually reproduce the entire early UNL campus up to 1895. Additionally, we believe this VR experience will open the doors to other partners with whom we might collaborate on new VR experiences in the future.
- We intend to release the experience to the public via SteamVR, PlaystationVR, Oculus Go, GoogleCardboard and WebVR this summer.

**Recently Completed Projects include:**

- *PlainStory* season 2, “The Sound of Home”
  - Podcast series exploring the diversity of Lincoln through the indigenous music traditions that have accompanied immigrants and refugees to the city over the years
  - Concluded December 2019
- *Watershed*
  - A 16-part 360°-video series for PBS.org about life at watershed scale

**ADDITIONAL BUSINESS**

Then next Commission meeting is August 27, 2020.

There being no further business, Meeting #465 was adjourned at 11:53 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark Leonard
EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 20—03
CORONA VIRUS – PUBLIC MEETINGS REQUIREMENT LIMITED WAIVER

WHEREAS, In order to provide flexibility to assist in meeting the emergency conditions and subsequent impacts brought on from COVID-19, a state of emergency was declared in Nebraska on March 13, 2020; and

WHEREAS, the State of Nebraska is committed to providing seamless government operations to the people of Nebraska throughout the state of emergency; and

WHEREAS, state and local governmental boards, commissions and other public bodies must comply with the Open Meetings Act so that citizens may exercise their democratic privilege of participating in meeting of public bodies; and

WHEREAS, for public health purposes, meetings and gatherings have now been limited to no more than 50 people and may be further limited if the presence of COVID-19 warrants;

NOW THEREFORE, I, Pete Ricketts, Governor of the State of Nebraska, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of Nebraska, hereby issue this limited waiver of certain requirements of the Nebraska Open Meetings Act.

Pursuant to this declaration, I hereby order the following:

1. This executive order applies to all governing bodies as defined in Neb. Rev. Stat. §84-1409 (1) and to all public meetings as defined in Neb. Rev. Stat. § 84-1409 (2).

2. All governing bodies may meet by videoconference or by telephone conferencing or by conferencing by other electronic communication so long as there is made available at such meeting access to members of the public and to members of the media.
3. The advanced publicized notice and the agenda requirements for meetings that are set forth in Neb. Rev. Stat. §84-1411 and the remaining provisions of Nebraska’s Open Meeting Act shall continue to be complied with by all governing bodies and are not waived by this executive order.

4. This waiver shall apply to all public governing body meetings that occur from today through May 31, 2020.

IN WITNESS THEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Great Seal of the State of Nebraska to be affixed on this 17th day of March, 2020.

ATTEST:

[Signature]
Pete Ricketts, Governor

[Signature]
Robert B. Evnen, Secretary of State
STATE of NEBRASKA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
LINCOLN

EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 20-24
CORONAVIRUS – CONTINUED LIMITED WAIVER OF
PUBLIC MEETINGS REQUIREMENTS

WHEREAS, in order to provide flexibility to assist in meeting the emergency conditions and subsequent impacts brought on from COVID-19, a state of emergency was declared in Nebraska on March 13, 2020; and

WHEREAS, the State of Nebraska is committed to providing seamless government operations that are open to the people of Nebraska throughout the state of emergency.

NOW THEREFORE, I, Pete Ricketts, Governor of the State of Nebraska, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of Nebraska, hereby issue this continued limited waiver of certain requirements of the Nebraska Open Meetings Act.

Pursuant to this declaration, I hereby order the following:

1. Executive Order No. 20-03, which is currently scheduled to end on May 31, 2020, shall remain in effect through June 30, 2020; and

2. The identical statutory waivers and conditions contained within Executive Order No. 20-03 shall continue through June 30, 2020.

IN WITNESS THEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Great Seal of the State of Nebraska to be affixed on this 19th day of May, 2020.

Pete Ricketts, Governor
State of Nebraska

Attest:

Robert B. Evnen,
Secretary of State
State of Nebraska