



For Immediate Release

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Local Community Radio Station Plans April 12 Public Meeting to Develop Survival Strategy

Station's founder says "We have one chance.... The time is now."

WESTCHESTER – WDFH-FM 90.3, the community radio station for the lower Hudson valley, will hold a public meeting at 7:30 p.m. on Monday evening, April 12, at the Chappaqua Public Library, 195 South Greeley Avenue in Chappaqua, N.Y. The purpose of the meeting is to introduce the station to people in its greatly expanded listening area and to discuss plans for the station's short and long term survival. The Chappaqua Public Library is generously providing space for the meeting.

Community radio is a unique kind of grassroots local media – noncommercial, non-institutional, participatory, and volunteer powered. Of the 15,000 radio stations in the country, there are only a few hundred community radio stations, and WDFH is the only one in the region.

The station's founder and executive director, Marc Sophos, spent nearly 20 years securing WDFH's broadcast license from the Federal Communications Commission. "There are so many stations in the New York metropolitan area that it was almost impossible to squeeze a new station onto the FM dial in our northern suburbs," he explained.

For most of its history, WDFH was hampered by a tiny broadcast signal. "We had terrific volunteers and were producing great programming – in-depth news and public affairs, nationally recognized political coverage, eclectic and adventurous music programming, and interviews and in-studio performances by local and regional musicians. But relatively few people could hear our signal."

That changed a year ago, when WDFH completed a 7½ year expansion project. Now, the station's signal reaches about 400,000 potential listeners in central and northern Westchester and eastern Rockland. That represents a 40-fold increase over the station's previous coverage and places WDFH in the top half of community radio stations nationwide in terms of potential audience.

But the momentum the station had been building was cut short when it lost its studio space in 2006. This has led to an extended period of operation without live studios, limiting the amount of new programming that can be produced and forcing the station to rely on a computer automation system to stay on the air.

“It’s extremely frustrating,” Mr. Sophos said. “After decades of work, we finally have a viable signal, but without live studios we can’t fully develop a stable listening and funding base.”

That limitation, combined with the prolonged economic downturn, is now threatening the station’s survival. “We have a spectacular opportunity here,” said Vinny Cohan, a Croton resident and longtime WDFH volunteer who co-hosts the weekly news discussion program *In Focus*. “Public concern is growing that big corporations have taken control of the mainstream media. Groups are forming across the country seeking to ‘reclaim the media.’ But WDFH is already locally controlled, already grassroots, already able to respond to local interests in ways that large commercial or public radio stations can’t match. WDFH doesn’t need to be reclaimed because we already have it. It just needs a financial foundation so that it can be sustainable. We’re holding this meeting to bring together people who believe in independent community media and are prepared to fight for its survival.”

Mr. Sophos explained that if fundraising efforts are unsuccessful, the only remaining option would be to sell the hard-won WDFH broadcast license. The likely buyer would be an out-of-area public or religious broadcaster that would turn WDFH into a mere repeater, beaming in programming by satellite and eliminating all possibility of local programming.

It is unlikely that a new community radio license will become available in Westchester and Rockland in the future, he said. “We really have just this one chance if we want community radio in our area. When local noncommercial stations are sold, the community is often not told until it is a done deal, and by then, of course, it’s too late. We’re turning to the community before that happens. So the time is now. If you’re interested in maintaining local community radio, this is the meeting to attend.”

For more information, please visit <http://wdfh.org>, call 914-674-0900 after 3:00 p.m., or send an e-mail to meeting@wdfh.org.

About WDFH

WDFH is the lower Hudson valley’s only community radio station. The station’s parent organization is Hudson Valley Community Radio, Inc., a local nonprofit organization that is tax exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. WDFH is an affiliate of the Pacifica Radio Network and is the lower Hudson valley’s on-air source for *Democracy Now!* and *Free Speech Radio News*. The station can be heard on the radio at 90.3 FM and online at <http://wdfh.org>.

This meeting is open to the general public. As with other non-Library meetings, it is not sponsored by the Chappaqua Public Library and the Library does not have any relationship to the meeting or to WDFH or its parent organization, Hudson Valley Community Radio, Inc., a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization.