

From WCOM Website:

carrboro community radio 103.5 FM

WCOM-FM 103.5 Community Radio Carrboro, NC

History of WCOM-FM

Back in 2000, the FCC was in a jam. The radio waves, which are supposed to belong to the public, were looking a lot like they really belonged to Clear Channel and other radio mammoths, which effectively controlled music programming by extracting payola from musicians to play their songs. In response, the FCC created low power FM (LPFM) -- a new class of non-profit community stations with about a five-mile broadcast range--to provided communities with an opportunity to get back some air time. In spite of its limited scope, LPFM was seen as a threat by big broadcasters, who convinced Congress that LPFM stations would interfere with their signal. Now you might not see how a 100 watt station was going to mess up the signal of a 100,000 watt station (and a later study ordered by Congress would prove you right) but the lobbyists won the day and convinced Congress to greatly scale back the FCC's LPFM plan.

Locally, it seemed like there would be no available frequencies for our area for LPFM--at least no one could find any on the FCC website's "Channel Finder." But late one night, Ruffin Slater (of Weaver Street Market's Community Enterprise Project) entered 35 52 51 N and 79 03 50 W and Bingo, the "frequency available" light came on. It turned out there was one 50 feet by 40 feet piece of broadcasting turf that was still available to the community. Ruffin filed the application in June 2001, and 18 months later the FCC granted a license to broadcast at 103.5 fm with the call letters WCOM.

License in hand, Ruffin, Peg Nolan, and Jacques Menache went to the National Federation of Community Broadcasters conference, where they learned about a federal grant that would fund 75% of the equipment costs. With the grant deadline only four weeks hence, a flurry of activity produced 20 letters from organizations and 1,000 signatures in support of the station. In September 2003, WCOM's PTFP grant was approved.

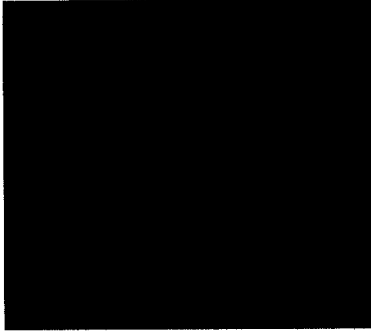
The next step was to find a place 90 feet in the air to mount a broadcast antenna. The broadcasting site permitted by the FCC was right next to WSM's Southern Village store, and WSM volunteered to put a tower on its roof for the antenna, but the plan was nixed by the Town of Chapel Hill. In search of Plan B, Jacques and his colleague Jake got a three foot balloon from Pat and Sharon at Balloons and Tunes, tied it to a 90 foot string, and started looking for a place it might fit it.

WCOM's luck was back when Jacques & Jake found a big, ugly cell phone tower at the ball field at Culbreth School. Compared to that thing, the balloon looked like a Picasso, and even a 100 watt antenna on top of a light pole looked good, so the Town gave the plan its thumbs up. Seeing as the light pole belonged to the school system, the next stop was the School Board, to request permission to lease the top of their pole for \$100 a month. The Board thought the antenna was fine and dandy but didn't go for the rent amount. Nick Didow offered an amendment to lower WCOM's rent to \$1 a year. Seeing as it was school and all, WCOM deferred to their math.

The only available building near the light pole was a port-a-john, so the search moved elsewhere for a studio building. Besides, the john didn't have any windows, and WCOM wanted a storefront studio like Northern Exposure. In the meantime, David Wright and Steve Jackson explained the concept of a "studio transmitter link", which even worked across town lines, so the search for a studio site headed over to Carrboro. Weaver Street Market had bought an old bank building in downtown Carrboro, and wasn't using the drive in teller booth. The OPEN sign still worked, so it would have been the perfect site for drive in fundraising, but the Carrboro Aldermen had decided that drive-thoroughs were no longer politically correct, even for non-profit fundraising. Absent the fundraising angle, the booth really wasn't so attractive, so a plan was submitted to the Town to tear it down the booth and build a larger studio under the roof overhang. A bunch of Carrboro construction types like Tim Peck and Frank Cole agreed to help with a volunteer booth razing and studio-raising.

That brings us to the present day. WCOM expects to have the needed permits to put up the antenna and build the studio by the end of May, so that construction can happen in June. The hope is to begin broadcasting a full schedule by the end of the summer.

From Weaver Street Market Website:



Community Radio

Weaver Street Market is working with the Public Gallery of Carrboro, El Centro Latino, and other community organizations to start a community radio station. The FCC has granted us a license for a low power (100 watts station). The station's call letters are WCOM, and our frequency is 103.5 FM. The antenna for the station will be on top of WSM's southern village store, and the studio will be located in downtown Carrboro. We expect the signal will cover most of Carrboro and Chapel Hill.

In April we submitted a grant application for broadcasting equipment to the Public Facilities Communications Program (PTFP) of the US Department of Commerce. PTFP provides matching grants for equipment purchases for public radio and TV stations. We requested a grant for 75% of the cost of the needed equipment, or about \$33,000.

Our argument for receiving the grant is that Carrboro needs to have its own radio station. Specifically, we have a need for Spanish-language programming (WCOM plans to have 40% of our programming in Spanish) and locally originated news, public affairs, and music programming.

To support the grant application, we included 15 letters and resolutions of support from El Centro Latino, the Chamber of Commerce, Congressman David Price, the Carrboro Board of Aldermen and many other organizations. We also submitted a petition of support signed by almost 1,000 people.

We expect to begin broadcasting next spring. For further information



or to become involved, please contact co-op General Manager Ruffin Slater by emailing ruffin@weaverstreetmarket.coop.

Community Radio in the news

FCC grants radio license to Carrboro group

CARRBORO -- Within a year, if all goes according to plan, you'll be able to tune your radio to 103.5 FM and listen to all Carrboro, all the time. The Public Gallery, a nonprofit arts group that coordinates, among other things, the outdoor sculpture shows in Carrboro, has been granted a license by the Federal Communications Commission to open and operate a low-power FM public radio station. The station will carry the call letters WCOM, for "Community Radio,"...
The Chapel Hill News April 13, 2003

Radio station plans get positive signals

CARRBORO - The Board of Aldermen and several local community groups are writing letters of support for the Public Gallery of Carrboro Inc. and its project to bring a 100-watt radio station to town. Public Gallery needs the board's endorsement for a grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce. The Public Telecommunications Facilities Program will provide 75 percent of the roughly \$44,000 in equipment costs to build a low-power radio station in Carrboro, said Ruffin Slater, the group's president and general manager of Weaver Street Market.
Chapel Hill Herald April 10, 2003