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## ***Listen up!***

Harpowell Radio Project getting ready to launch

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### HARPSWELL

Inspired by the success of community oriented, low-powered FM radio stations like WERU in Blue Hill and WMPG in Portland, a group of Harpswell residents are looking to create a station by and for the people of Harpswell.

“The whole idea of this is to give people access to the airwaves,” said John Halpin, president of Harpswell Radio Project, Inc. “With commercial radio, you’re not going to be able to just go in and do your own show on a particular show or type of music or whatever. This station will give members of the public the ability to do that.”

Maine’s newest radio station is part of the Low Power FM program created by Congress in 2000 and regulated by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). As part of that program, WHPW must be a noncommercial educational broadcaster. In 2013, Harpswell Radio Project was awarded the 97.3 frequency, and the project’s organizers hope to go on air as soon as the end of September.

“The idea of the LPFM program, the initial concept when it was introduced in Congress in 2000, was to give small communities a way to produce and air

local programming, much of which evaporated in the late 1990s after the (Telecommunications) Act of 1996 was passed,” said Halpin.

For emergencies

For Halpin, the most important function of a small community radio like the one he’s working to build is its utility in emergencies. In an age that relies so heavily on the Internet, the loss of power in an emergency could cut out huge swathes of the population from getting the information they desperately need. Community radio, however, could be accessed from car or battery-powered radios in nearly any situation.

“If there were something like a flooding emergency, or a wildfire or anything like that ... it would be able to be talked about in real time to get information out to people,” he said.

Larger stations or Internet radio services like Pandora or Spotify would not be able to provide that type of service, notes Halpin.

It’s still early in the process for WHPW, and their programming is still largely up in the air. Harpswell Radio Project Vice President Glenn Vose points to other community radio stations in Maine, such as WERU in Blue Hill and WMPG in Portland as examples of the type of programs they could air. Ultimately, the programming depends on what shows members of the community want to produce. WHPW will be entirely volunteer operated, and it’s up to the community to create original content.

The community radio station hopes to have a mix of about 40 percent local content. While similar stations often air nationally syndicated programs, that can be expensive for noncommercial operations like WHPW, which is projected to operate on a \$12,000-\$15,000 annual budget. Halpin indicated that the station would look to steer away from expensive national programs that are easily accessible through other means and seek out content that is unique and relevant to Harpswell and the surrounding communities.

While the goal is to eventually broadcast 24/7, Halpin notes that they have to approach the project realistically. The FCC requires that they broadcast for 30

hours a week to maintain their license, and Halpin says that WHPW will probably start out broadcasting about 40 hours a week, depending on how many people step forward to produce shows.

Harpswell Radio Project was originally awarded the 97.3 frequency by the FCC back in 2013 under its Low Power FM program with the requirement that it be broadcasting by January 2017. With that date fast approaching, the WHPW team is making its final preparations to get on the airwaves — raising money to finally buy the equipment necessary to run their operation.

With a small budget, Halpin and his team must decide whether to make the extra fundraising push to buy the equipment they really want, or to settle for what they can afford now. Ultimately, this final equipment selection is a series of trade-offs: purchasing a better antenna or a better transmitter; spending money on higher quality equipment or licensing fees for more popular syndicated programming.

“The reality is we only have so much money,” said Halpin.

Open mic night

Their final major call for financing before going to air will come at the end of August. WHPW will be hosting a community open mic night, where local musicians, artists and performers can come out, do a bit and enjoy pizza. The event will be held at the SchoolHouse Cafe in Harpswell on Aug. 28, from 4-7 p.m.

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For more information, visit [harpswellradio.org](http://harpswellradio.org).