

Asian, Catholic programming endorsed by cable TV viewers

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A public hearing on Sonic Cable Television service yesterday produced two loud-and-clear messages: People want more Asian-language programming, and they want the Catholic channel, EWTN, to remain on the air.

There weren't enough seats in the Watsonville City Council to accommodate the crowd that turned out for the two issues yesterday, and a back row of folding chairs was added. Members of the Japanese-American Community filled one half of the room, and supporters of EWTN sat across the aisle on the other.

The meeting was the last of three called by the city Cable Television Commission. The commission hopes to soon begin negotiations with Sonic and first wanted to learn the public's concerns.

Japanese-Americans, many of them elderly, have turned out at all three meetings to demand more Japanese programming. What they would like is 24-hour

access to KTSF Channel 26, a San Francisco station that broadcasts in Japanese and several other Asian languages.

Sonic now airs the station several hours a week, or in response to special requests.

Lillian Tomosawa said she had spoken to members of Watsonville's Chinese and Filipino communities and that they also support 24-hour access to the channel.

Noburu Nakatani said some local Japanese-Americans subscribe to Sonic solely for the Japanese-language programs. He figures they pay 61 cents an hour for it.

Nakatani said he wanted to be able to watch the news in Japanese every morning, just like cable TV viewers elsewhere can.

"Not many of us can afford to move to San Jose just to watch Japanese programming every day," he said.

Japanese-Americans also want a seat on the cable commission, speakers said.

Commission member Jon Silver

suggested that they, or anyone else who wants their group represented, write a letter to the City Council, which set up the commission.

Marlene Radovich told the commission that she and the 1,500 people who signed a petition submitted to Sonic Cable wanted EWTN to "remain on the air, untouched, in its 24-hour format."

"This strong mandate," she said, "seems to have fallen on deaf ears."

Sonic said it did not have plans to take the Catholic program off the air, but had switched it from channel 36 to channel 19 where, according to a number of speakers yesterday, the reception is not as clear. In addition, Tuesday night programming on channel 19 has been pre-empted by KRUZ programs.

Gerrie Ridgeway, who has worked for a number of years doing outreach to elderly and disabled people in the area, said

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"people watch (EWTN) and are tremendously comforted by it."

Ida Bobeda said, "I want to speak for the Hispanics. They didn't ask me to, but I'm going to anyway."

She said she thought Hispanics would have packed the council chambers if they had been aware of "what is going on here."

"For those who would really like to follow a good life, EWTN gives them that chance," she said.

John Adams, Sonic's new general manager, said he thought the message regarding EWTN was "loud and clear," and that there were no plans to drop it. In response to requests from the Japanese-Americans, he said, "I can't make a commitment to you today as far as KTSF is concerned."

He likened Sonic to a "supermarket that doesn't have enough shelf space to accommodate everything that every faction wants."

Adams said he'd already "set the wheels in motion" to deal with some of the complaints heard at the last meeting. Office hours have been expanded and a new phone system put in, he said. Other changes are going to take more time, he said.

A tie-in with United Artists, the