

By LANE WALLACE
STAFF WRITER

WATSONVILLE — John Burdick is convinced Watsonville can have government, education and public-access channels on Sonic Cable TV that people will watch.

"A lot of people probably believe it's not going to happen, but if we husband our materials well, it won't be that bad," Burdick said Thursday after the city's Cable TV Committee discussed possibilities for a channel dedicated to local affairs.

Burdick, who teaches the video academy at Watsonville High, is chairman of the Cable TV Committee and is on the board of the corporation that oversees the public channels on TCI cable. TCI serves all of Santa Cruz County except Capitola, Watsonville, Freedom and parts of Corralitos.

The city of Watsonville is renegotiating its franchise with Sonic, and the addition of public channels will be part of any new agreement.

Thursday night's meeting drew three people interested in public programming — one from Radcliff Adult School, one from Watsonville Community Hospital and one from the city's Recreation Department.

Burdick said he wasn't bothered by the small turnout. When similar meetings were held in Santa Cruz, where there's five times as many cable subscribers, 10 to 12 people would attend meetings, he said.

Money for operating the public channels will come from a fee the city collects from Sonic. Because Watsonville has 11,000 subscribers compared to TCI's 50,000, Watsonville's system won't be as elaborate, Burdick said.

But there's still a lot of things that can be done, said Burdick and Heinz Ludke of Sonic.

Programming could range from educational shows and government meetings to programming where anybody who wants to bring in their own videotapes to go on the air.

"It's a wide open subject," Burdick said.

Burdick said he envisions installation of cable lines that would allow live programming from 15 to 20 sites in Watsonville. Members of the committee and the small audience ticked off about 25 possible sites

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last night, ranging from City Hall to the gazebo in the City Plaza.

Sonic's Ludke said his company has talked to TCI about some cooperative efforts on public programming.

The committee made no decisions last night and will discuss public programming again at 7 p.m. June 19 at City Hall, 250 Main St.

Sonic's franchise with the city expires in 2003. Sonic is negotiating for an extension to 2011, on the condition that Sonic expand and improve its system. Sonic has 36 channels now and is looking at expanding to 50 to 60 channels.

Committee member Robert Chacanaca said he has reservations about endorsing a new contract with Sonic because there have been many complaints in the past. "Their only interest is profit. They've done nothing to bring the system up," he said.

People in the community "have stated repeatedly that they don't want Sonic," Chacanaca said.

REFERENCE

APR 1965, California 95003