

1/12/83 J.C. Seftuel

# City Council OKs cable TV lobbyist law despite Santa Cruz chamber's objection

By PAUL BEATTY  
Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — Over the objections of two councilmen and the Santa Cruz Area Chamber of Commerce, the City Council Tuesday gave final approval to controls over cable television lobbyists.

Reacting to an initial approval Dec. 14, the chamber's directors voted unanimously to urge reconsideration.

"In our view the extent to which the ordinance goes is unwarranted and unnecessary and provides no public information which could not be established by relatively simple questioning," the chamber stated.

Councilman John Laird disagreed and quoted material from the California Journal, a state political magazine, telling of extraordinary lobbying efforts by the companies.

Laird said in some communities the cable companies had hired friends of county supervisors to push their cases and hired other local persons to stack meetings.

"It's called 'rent a citizen' by the companies," Laird said.

The ordinance is much like one that will soon go be in use in the county area. It requires cable lobbyists to register and disclose their activities.

They can't contribute to campaigns

within two months of an election and can't give gifts to officials or any other government employee who has anything to do with the cable contract.

The city and county are joining to contract for an improved cable system and contract talks are expected to begin soon and could take six months.

Initially, only Group W Cable will be at the table with local officials since that company owns the existing local system.

Councilman John Mahaney agreed with the chamber, saying, "We don't need this. Even with Dominican Hospital's bonds that were worth millions, we didn't need something like this."

City Manager Richard Wilson cautioned, "The practice of the industry has been to spend a great deal on lobbying efforts and we have one of the most lucrative cable areas in the country because of the high percentage of customers."

The ordinance was seen as impugning the integrity of the council, according to Councilman Joseph Ghio.

"It means that we as City Council members are untrustworthy, and if you're going to be influenced, you shouldn't be here. You shouldn't be here if you are basically the dishonest person the ordinance says we are."

Mayor Bruce Van Allen blamed it on "the monopoly situation" in cable con-

tracting and warned, "We should enter into it with care and with full knowledge of who the actors are."

The ordinance passed 4-2 with Ghio and Mahaney opposing and Van Allen, Laird, Mardi Wormhoudt and Spiro Mellis supporting.

The council was given a study done by consultant Tom Karwin to determine what it is the average viewer in Santa Cruz County wants in the improved system.

Preliminary reports of Group W's proposal will offer approximately 50 channels.

Karwin surveyed the county and got 584 responses.

They showed that 80 percent want expanded world and national news, 77 percent for first run movies, 70 percent want local news and emergency information.

Also, 61 percent want local college courses and 60 percent want a national arts channel.

Desire was low for any sort of two-way services by the tube with approximately 25 percent wanting to shop and do banking through their TV sets.

No one was asked if they wanted more Laverne and Shirley, soaps, variety programs or game shows.

However they were asked if they wanted video games and only 16 percent said they do.