

Group W asks extension of cable TV talks ✓

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SANTA CRUZ — The city and county of Santa Cruz should know in two weeks if Group W Cable Co. will win a contract to install a state-of-the-art cable TV system here.

If negotiators representing the county, city and Group W don't reach agreement by then, then county supervisors said Tuesday they want to put the contract out for other firms to negotiate a new franchise.

"In the last couple of weeks we've had a real narrowing of our differences," Assistant County Administrator Pat Busch said, "and they (Group W) have requested an extension of two weeks."

When supervisors questioned the latest delay, Busch replied, "I think that we've made a lot of very real progress."

He added two weeks ago there were 10 major issues unresolved, but now there are only two. He didn't elaborate to say which ones they are.

In the past, negotiations have hung up on

where service should be extended and on providing adequate assurances that the captive Santa Cruz audience won't be overcharged.

Santa Cruz is considered a lucrative market because TV reception on conventional airwaves is so poor. Most non-cable residents only receive three stations.

Busch argued the two-week delay was necessary because the Board of Supervisors and City

Council are "very, very accessible compared with Westinghouse," the parent company of Group W whose offices are in New York.

At Cucchiara's suggestion, supervisors said they wanted Group W's signature on at least a tentative agreement by May 22, or else the negotiations will be opened for other companies interested in getting into a 15-year franchise agreement with the city and county.