

CABLE TV

Cable consultants reappraise bidders

11-13-85
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SANTA CRUZ — The county's and city's cable TV consultants have revised their appraisal of the top two groups currently engaged in a four-way struggle for the two jurisdictions' lucrative CATV franchise.

But while the consulting firm, Telecommunications Management Corporation, now ranks Greater Santa Cruz Cable TV Associates (GSC) over Cable Cooperative of Greater Santa Cruz instead of the other way around, the consultants say the relative advantages and disadvantages of the two groups' proposals still make a choice between them a virtual toss-up.

Still well behind Cable TV Associates and the Co-op in the consultants' rankings are third- and fourth-place Public Service Cable Co. and Group W, the county's and city's current cable franchisee.

The county Board of Supervisors and Santa Cruz City Council held a joint public hearing to take testimony on the cable issue Oct. 8. A second joint hearing is scheduled for next Tuesday.

Group W's franchise with the county expired in Oct. 1984. The company's franchise with the city is due to expire next July.

Group W says the current cable bidding procedure is illegal and is suing the city and county to prevent them from awarding the cable franchise here to another firm. The suit is still pending.

In a report released in September,

Telecommunications Management ranked the Cable Cooperative's proposal the best of four submitted for the city's and county's consideration. But the consultants expressed reservations about the Cable Co-op's financing arrangements and the group's plans for extending cable service to areas not presently served.

The consultants said that in view of those concerns, second-ranked Greater Santa Cruz Cable TV Associates' proposal merited equal consideration.

Responding to comments on their first report, the consultants reversed the rankings of Cable TV Associates and the Co-op in a report released Tuesday.

But the consultants also stated that, "the small differential between the two top (proposals) reinforces

the previous conclusion that the proposals of GSC and the Cable Co-op are essentially equal on balance, although they differ in details."

In response to comments from Cable Associates, the consultants revised their point rankings to give Associates the edge over the Co-op on system capacity and the number of subscribers served per mile. The consultants gave the two proposals equal ranking on support for public and business access to cable transmission facilities. Previously, the consultants had ranked the Co-op higher in that category.

The consultants said Cable Associates' financial resources and plans to extend service to unserved areas were superior to the Co-op's, but said the Co-op's proposal offered more overall support for local programming.