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COMMUNITY TELEVISION

Board delays drawing curtain on Community TV

Communications

Despite failed membership vote on changes, public access gets a reprieve

By JASON HOPPIN

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SANTA CRUZ — Granting Community Television what amounts to a seven-week reprieve to get its act together, the county Board of Supervisors voted Tuesday to delay a search for someone else to run the

county's public access channels.

The Santa Cruz nonprofit, which runs three channels offering local public benefit, educational and government programming, faces major changes to its funding sources that have raised questions about its future viability.

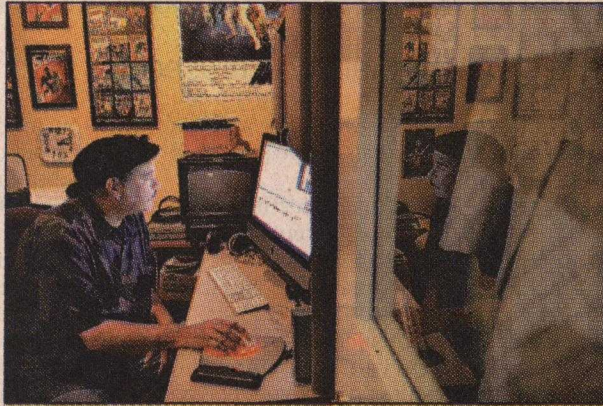
To help address those changes,

CTV's 300 members took up a vote to change CTV's governance structure. The voting concluded Monday but failed — though there was overwhelming support for change, not enough members cast ballots for the vote to pass.

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Peter McGettigan edits videos of city council meetings and other special shows for Community Television, where he has been a part-time staffer for 11 years.

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BOARD

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"This gives Community Television an opportunity to do what they need to do," board Chairman John Leopold said of the reprieve. "But I just want to make sure they understand the time for action is now."

The county board — which jointly controls the nonprofit's franchise agreement with the city of Santa Cruz — clearly has been unhappy with the nonprofit since it became evident that federal law restricting a major portion of CTV's funding to equipment purchases was going to be enforced starting in 2014.

That has left the nonprofit

scrambling for how to pay for its operations, with major changes to local programming likely part of the answer. CTV's board has even explored a merger with Gilroy-based Community Media Access Partnership.

CTV's executive director is leaving Friday, and the board is reviewing three candidates as a replacement, board members said Tuesday. Those members pleaded with the county to hold off on a plan to seek a new nonprofit to run the public access channels until the new executive director was in place.

"We feel that the excitement and enthusiasm of a new executive director will motivate the membership," said board member Keith Gudger, later adding the uncertainty of

future operations would handcuff new leadership.

It is expected CTV would hold another vote prior to Aug. 14, when the board wants to hear back from the group. Members supported governance changes 89 to 14, but more than half of the group's 300 members needed to vote in favor for the vote to pass.

Gudger and two other board members said they would seek the governance changes regardless of whether CTV merges with Community Media Access Partnership, saying CTV needs to be run more like a traditional nonprofit to survive.

While Leopold initially was ready to seek new suitors to run county cable-access channels through a request-for-proposals — something CTV

would have been allowed to compete for — other board members stepped in to delay the move.

But they also had strong words for CTV's failure to adapt to future funding changes. CTV's current structure gives regular members — anyone who pay a \$25 annual fee — a vote on any major changes.

"The nervousness up here is waiting too long and then not being able to react in time," Supervisor Mark Stone said.

Despite postponing it, the board unanimously directed county staff to prepare the paperwork for a request-for-proposal, should it choose that route at the Aug. 14 meeting.

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