

Another group bids for cable TV franchise

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SANTA CRUZ — Another local group has indicated its interest in bidding for the city and county cable TV franchises.

The latest group is headed up by beer distributor George Couch as president and developer Jack Baskin as chairman. It's composed of about 12 members, said Couch.

Stopping short of giving a "definite yes," Couch said Tuesday, "The odds are very good that we would submit a proposal."

If that group does enter a bid, it will join at least one other group of local people, calling themselves the Cable Co-op of Greater Santa Cruz, in bidding for the cable TV franchises.

The deadline for submittal is Dec. 31. The county and city have solicited "Requests for Proposals" from any interested group.

The current cable TV operator, Group W Cable Inc., a subsidiary of Westinghouse Broadcasting Co., filed a lawsuit Friday in federal court, seeking to retain its proprietorship over the lease.

Couch said his group is "doing a lot of work in the community, taking a look at the project from an engineering standpoint.

"The group is a local group (with the exception of two persons) and we are very concerned with making certain that, should we decide to bid, that we can keep

all our promises and do a good job," he said. "We're being deliberate in all our decisions."

Couch responded with "an emphatic 'yes'" when asked if the group can pull together the financing for building a new cable TV system.

Couch said the two members from outside the area "bring expertise and have careers in the cable industry.

"We have retained technical expertise and the experts are in the community now. You can see that we're serious," said Couch. "But I would stop short of saying we'll definitely file a bid."

Asked if he had any comment on the lawsuit, Couch said "I have nothing to say.

The only thing our group is doing is responding to the city and county's call for proposals. We don't have anything bad to say about anybody — and you can quote me on that."

Meanwhile, the cable co-op announced it has received a commitment of \$43,000 from the National Consumer Cooperative Bank.

The money is "supply risk capital" and amounts to about half of the co-op's budget for bidding on the franchise.

"This is a classic venture investment by the NCCB," said co-op president Ed Newman. "They're risking money with us now because they want part of the major capitalization we will need if we win the franchise."