

Are supervisors heading for stardom as cable television expands its service?

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SANTA CRUZ — Former Supervisor Dale Dawson called it "the best show in town."

He was speaking of the weekly meeting of the county Board of Supervisors and while it may be the best show in town, it has a limited audience.

The audience could be vastly enlarged — virtually to everyone in the county — in the coming years of cable television, county and city administrators were told Monday afternoon.

The message came during a seminar on "Cable and Government in Santa Cruz," led by Tom Karwin, the \$10,000 consultant hired by city and county governments to determine the county's television needs and desires.

Karwin told the administrators there's something in the coming cable franchise negotiations for government and other "public" interest groups — if they want it.

He said cable companies, eager to get lucrative franchises, are willing to concede a number of channels (from four to eight of the 50 to 100 channels they provide) for "public" use.

Among the public uses are transmission of government activities.

"Several communities currently use video programming for public information purposes, often starting by televising meetings of city councils, boards of supervisors and major commissions and committees and public hearings," Karwin said in his prepared handout.

"These events can be televised very simply, as they occur, using cameras that require little or no supplementary lighting.

"In most cases, such meetings are televised 'gavel to gavel,' without editing.

"Some California communities that televise public meetings on local cable systems are Brea, Capitola and Marin.

"Some communities select a few major current issues and televise only those portions of the agenda that address those issues.

"In Marin, the local community video group augments these presentations with 'mini-documentaries' illustrating the issue."

Karwin said in Reading, Pa., a two-way system is used so the citizens gathered at community centers can also telecast back to the city officials and engage in dialog.

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Government can use one of the channels for text (reading material) and possibly fulfill its legal requirement to "publish" agendas and other legal notices.

Karwin said the present Group W system that basically serves north Santa Cruz County has 32,000 subscribers which means that "right now the cable service has more subscribers than The Sentinel."

Group W's franchise is up for negotiation by county government and Scotts Valley in 1984, and in Santa Cruz City in 1986.

The company wants to negotiate with

all three jurisdictions in one contract and have that contract extend over a 15-year period.

That amount of time is needed to pay the cost of rebuilding the present inadequate 12-channel system.

Group W will make its offer prior to Karwin's report which is due in early January. Karwin said his report will be on hand during the negotiations that are expected in the early months of next year.

Since Group W has the north county service and Sonic Cable has south county, administrators were asked why no one was talking about public service television for south county.

No one would talk about that question, but Karwin said the question has been raised at other seminars.

Karwin said that no matter what the administrators manage to get from the company in concessions on public access channels "it is the (cable service) customer who pays for it — I don't believe the cable companies take it out of profit."