

Open Channel unhappy with Sonic

By BOB SMITH
STAFF WRITER

Volunteers who have been operating Capitola's public access channel were definitely unhappy with the terms of Capitola's new cable television franchise with Sonic Cable TV Thursday night.

Open Channel, which has been operating Capitola Community Channel 8 since the late

1970s, protested a clause in the franchise that commits Sonic to provide \$20,000 in television broadcast equipment to be installed in Capitola's City Council chamber, and to overhaul the lighting and sound systems in the council chambers.

Open Channel representatives told Councilmembers Robert Bucher, Dennis Beltram and Stephanie Harlan last night that they believed public access television in Capitola deserved more support from Sonic and that the equipment to be purchased should be available for all types of community events, not just for televising events and meetings taking place in the City Council chambers.

(Mayor Michael Routh and Councilman Jerry Clarke were absent from the meeting.)

The council tentatively approved the franchise ordi-

nance that allows Sonic to operate in the city for another 15 years after assuring the Open Channel representatives that the \$20,000 Sonic commitment was "just the foundation, a building block" for a far more comprehensive public access system, and that the city would be providing additional equipment and, possibly, some financial aid to the beleaguered volunteers.

The ordinance will be brought back to the council for final approval May 23.

City Manager Steve Burrell, who was the city's chief negotiator in the talks that extended over three years, told the council that new federal legislation will strip the cities and counties of any control over rates by 1987, leaving companies such as Sonic free to charge whatever rates and fees the market will bear.

"It will be an unregulated monopoly and the market will have to bear what they will charge," Burrell said. "It will not be possible for the council to determine what is paid (for cable TV service)."

Sonic is committed to providing a 35 channel system with 34 operationally-active TV channels with two-way operation and interconnections possible, 25 FM radio channel, one public access channel, a five percent a year franchise fee, and \$20,000 worth of public access equipment that will be installed, maintained and replaced by Sonic as needed during the life of the franchise.

Burrell said he and Sonic representatives are recommending that a system similar to one used in the Cupertino City Council chambers, with fixed position, remotely operated television cameras, new lights and sound equipment and the necessary control room equipment be installed in the City Council chambers.

"We viewed the purchase of this equipment," Burrell said, "as the foundation — a building block. Certainly it was not the intent of the staff to limit use of the access channel to only City Council meetings," Burrell said. "On Thursday nights, that is probably all you would see (on the access channel). But there are six other nights of the week in which you would see other programs.

"This equipment will provide the foundation but \$20,000 will not provide everyone with everything," Burrell told the council.

Open Channel board member John Beucher disagreed.

"The proposal that Sonic offers Capitola doesn't benefit Capitola so far as access is concerned," Beucher said. "What will people see when they tune to the access channel? A bird's eye view of the City Council chambers.

"Without public access, capable staff and support from the community, no public access channel can survive," Beucher added.

Open Channel chairman Greg Becker told the council his group thinks the city should get a "better deal" from Sonic.

"We hope to convince you to get a better deal from Sonic. For the same amount of money, you can get a portable facility that most people can share. We asked for \$80,000 but we are willing to compromise," Becker told the council.

Open Channel gave the council an advertisement, showing a package of television equipment costing just under \$20,000 what would providing the portability and editing capabilities

they are now seeking.

"We think this portable system offers a much more flexible system for the city," Becker said.

Burrell said the city has no list of equipment to buy. "The cameras will be fixed but movable.

"What Sonic is proposing is to give up \$20,000 to be spent in any way we decide. It will be a foundation, not the end," Burrell said.

Councilmembers seemed to promise more support in the future.

"I'd like to propose that we have a part-time, paid coordinator for the access channel in the future," Councilwoman Harlan said.

Bucher and Beltram didn't endorse the coordinator proposal but they also agreed that the city might buy additional equipment.

The motion to approve the ordinance, made by Harlan, passed unanimously.

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REFERENCE

CAPITOLA COMMUNITY CABLE Television