

Cable TV agreement defended by Radin

By STEVE SHENDER

A proposed 30-year, non-exclusive franchise for Sonic Cable TV does not speak specifically to the number of channels to be delivered to Watsonville residents because that service is already mandated by federal regulations, City Manager John Radin said today.

Radin said Federal Communications Commission regulations already require cable companies within 100 miles of San Francisco to "pick up all the major stations." That means, he said, that Sonic must deliver all the major San Francisco Bay Area stations to its customers, even though the proposed ordinance says nothing about what or how many stations shall be available.

The ordinance is up for discussion and possible final passage at tonight's City Council

meeting. Councilman Rex Clark, who served on a committee which negotiated the franchise ordinance with Sonic, said Monday that he would seek a 30-day delay in action on the franchise when the council meets at City Hall at 7:30 p.m. this evening.

Currently, Sonic offers 12 stations to Watsonville residents who subscribe to its basic \$8-a-month cable service. The company will shortly be adding a health channel and music TV to its basic service, Radin said today. The proposed franchise does not require Sonic to augment its current offerings, however.

Responding to a "needs assessment" commissioned by the city of Santa Cruz and Santa Cruz County supervisors, Group W Cable, currently negotiating a new franchise for the Santa

Cruz and Midcounty area, recently offered a 27-channel basic service, which will pull in 20 commercial TV stations, for \$9.35 a month.

Group W also offered to provide \$170,000 worth of television production equipment for community use, contribute \$250,000 annually toward operation of "community access" cable channels and provide a five-channel institutional cable network at its own expense. Radin suggested today that Group W could afford such largesse because the company has approximately "25,000 connections" in its service area, which includes the Scotts Valley and San Lorenzo Valley areas as well as the city of Santa Cruz and the Midcounty except for Capitola.

Radin said that Sonic, whose system has a 30-channel capac-

ity, has only 4,000 to 5,000 connections within the Watsonville city limits.

Noting that Group W's proposed basic service to the city of Santa Cruz and Midcounty would cost over a dollar a month more than Sonic's in Watsonville, Radin suggested that the former company could afford to offer more service and such things as local studio equipment and money for community broadcasting, given its larger pool of customers. "If they charge (each customer) \$3 a month more (\$1.35 a month more for Group W's basic service and an additional \$2.60 monthly for the company's "second tier service" of 13 added specialized programming channels), that's \$75,000 more a month. That's close to \$1 million a year," he said.