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Cable hassle settled

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

"A relief."
That's Lark Samouelian's reaction to a recent compromise between the cable industry and municipal representatives, who have haggled for months over the nation's first cable television policy.

The Southwestern Oakland Cable Commission (SWOCC) executive director said the proposed federal legislation would finally "provide definition" to the relationship between communities which have cable television franchises and the cable industry.

Cable industry representatives echoed similar reactions.

"Overall we support the bill," said John Liskey, director of the Michigan Cable Television Association. "There's been such pressing need for the Legislature to set down the rules."

Bob McCann, MetroVision general manager, said, "It was a good compromise. There is nothing (in the proposed legislation) that is really going to hurt us."

The compromise has put an end to the longstanding disagreement between the cable industry and communities about how much control local cable commissions should wield over cable franchises.

If agreed upon by members of the congressional telecommunications committee, the bill would go before both the House of Representatives and Senate for approval.

"It is quite a bit that they compromised," said Jack O'Reilly, an aide to Rep. John Dingell, D-Dearborn, who has been involved with the proposed legislation.

For months the cable industry has pushed for complete deregulation. Local communities, represented by the National League of Cities, sought to retain control over rates. Municipalities also sought to maintain authority over demanding certain services and programming from cable firms.

As proposed, the legislation maintains the integrity of local franchises while allowing the cable industry to have "free market ability," Samouelian said.

The most notable aspect of the compromise is the cities' ability to maintain control over rate regulation for two more years.

After that, schedules would be solely in the hands of the cable operators.

The communities' right to demand that cable firms provide local access programming, grants, equipment and fees would be maintained under the proposed policy.

THE PROPOSED legislation would also restrict communities from requiring cable firms to pay more than 5 percent of the firm's gross revenues in franchise fees.

Grants, equipment (such as for educational or governmental use) and services the cable firm would provide to the communities would be included within that 5 percent franchise fee cap.

MetroVision provides SWOCC and the three cities of Novi, Farmington and Farmington with a 5 percent fee plus equipment, grants and services, Samouelian said.

The tri-city franchise would be unaffected by this requirement, for example, because of "grandfathering clauses," Samouelian said.

"It (the proposed legislation) grandfathered many things for the existing franchises," Liskey said.

SWOCC, which represents the three cities, holds a 15-year franchise with MetroVision.

From the local community's point of view, the provisions for maintenance of existing contracts are the most positive aspects of the proposed legislation, Samouelian said. "The contract (between SWOCC and MetroVision) was put together in light of community needs."

From MetroVision's point of view, the most positive aspect of the proposed legislation is that finally there may be federal law covering "theft of service," McCann said.

Theft of service is pirating cable programs and services without legitimately subscribing for service through the



Showing the colors

The homemade banner outside Pat Wayne's house on Whitaker Street in Farmington leaves little doubt about her loyalties in the American League playoff series. Wayne, a longtime Farmington resident and Detroit Tiger fan, paints flags as a hobby "for when the occasion arises." She said she's pleased that children going to and from nearby Longacre Elementary School will see her flags.

TOM BAER/staff photographer

Headlee, city disagree on Proposal C

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

Farmington Hills insurance executive Richard Headlee disagrees with local municipal officials' interpretation of the Voter's Choice Amendment — Proposal C.

The Tuesday, Nov. 6, election ballot question has spawned various interpretations of its impact on local government.

Farmington Hills officials based their estimated revenue losses, if Proposal C passes, on an interpretation issued by the Michigan Municipal League.

Headlee, a Proposal C supporter, disagrees with that interpretation.

The proposed constitutional amendment would require cities to roll back the current tax level to the rate levied in 1981.

But Farmington Hills is in a situation somewhat different than many other cities.

In 1981, the city levied 8.5 mills (for operation and debt). This year the city is levying 8 mills.

Based on the League's interpretation, Farmington Hills would have to roll back its tax rate to the lowest the city levied since 1981.

At 7.4 mills, the lowest rate levied since 1981, the city would lose an estimated \$199,000 in revenue.

Headlee, on the other hand, says that's not what Proposal C says.

ACCORDING TO Headlee, if Proposal C passes, Farmington Hills would roll its tax rate to the 1981 level of 8.5 mills. The proposal, he said, does not require a city to roll back its rate to the lowest since 1981 if a higher rate was levied in that year.

Assuming both Proposal C and the city's request for up to an additional 1.5 mills for capital improvements pass, Farmington Hills could levy 10 mills. That's 8.5 mills (at the 1981 tax rate) for operations and debt, and 1.5 mills for capital improvements, he said.

League Associate Director William Davis says that from reading Proposal C, he doesn't see where Headlee gets his interpretation.

"I cannot read this language any other way," Davis said.

Davis pointed in particular to the phrase in Proposal C that reads "... any Legislative change in the rate or base of any state or local tax which increases its revenue yield..."

According to that language, Davis said, if Farmington Hills rolled its current 8 mills up to the 8.5 mills levied in 1981, the city's tax revenues would be increased.

"I don't think there is any equivocation about it, as I see it," Davis said, about Proposal C's language.

In analyzing the potential impact of Proposal C on Farmington, City Manager Robert Deadman said, "my scenario was 1981."

IF PROPOSAL C passes, Farmington's tax rate would be rolled back to the 1981 level of 11.25 mills, according to Deadman's interpretation. The city currently levies 11.74 mills.

Rolling back Farmington's tax rate to 1981 would result in a potential loss of approximately \$77,000 in tax revenues, Deadman said. That represents a potential loss of about 13.12 percent of the city's local tax revenues.

"If it is determined that the local millage must be reduced to the 1982 rate of 10.785 mills, the revenue loss would be even greater," Deadman said.

Added to the loss from a reduced tax rate would be another almost \$125,000 of estimated loss in the city's state equalized valuation, he said.

If Proposal C passes, both Farmington and Farmington Hills would lose money for road maintenance because of a rollback in the state's gas and weight taxes.

Farmington would also lose an estimated total of \$40,000 for major and local roads, Deadman said. Farmington Hills officials say the city would lose an estimated \$530,000.

What concerns Deadman most is Proposal C's potential impact on the city's ability to pay off its debt service.

In 1983, for example, council increased the tax rate from 10.78 mills to 11.74 to pay Farmington's share of the debt service on the Old Town Drain project, Deadman said.

"Even if the millage rate or tax base

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Police seek woman's attacker



This police rendering was garnered from a woman who was attacked by a man matching this description. She was attacked near the post office in downtown Farmington on Thursday.

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

Farmington police are looking for an unidentified man in his mid-to-late 20s who attempted to rape a 30-year-old Wilson woman early last Thursday morning near Downtown Farmington Center.

Anyone with information about the attacker should call Detective Charles Lee or Detective Dan Potter at 474-4700.

The woman, who works in Farmington, suffered a cut to the face and a bruised eye in the attack, said Lee. Following the attack, the woman was taken to Bolingford General Hospital where

she was treated and released, Lee said.

Police last Friday released a composite drawing of the man, who was described by the victim as having short and wavy dark brown hair, brown eyes and olive complexion. The man is also described as about 5 feet 9 inches tall and of medium build.

THE WOMAN was attacked about 9:45 a.m. while she was walking to the Farmington Post Office along a dirt trail in a field between the paved parking lot of TJ Maxx and the post office, Lee said.

"She said that when she was walking down the trail she heard some running footsteps," Lee said.

Religion and Reds discussed

"Religion in a Communist State" will be the topic of a presentation delivered by Jaraslaw Krejci, an internationally known speaker on European cultural history and philosophy, at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 1 at Lawrence Institute of Technology in the sciences building auditorium, 21000 W. Ten Mile, Southfield.

Sponsored by LIT's School of Arts and Science and the Humanities Department, the lecture is open to the public free.

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