

Cable

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ation that as we consider re-franchising that we require at least a 90-day notification to the commission prior to any rate increase going into effect," Costick said in a letter dated May 25.

Last year, when the FCC tried to regulate rates, MetroVision raised the broadcast basic rate from \$1 a year to \$10.62 a month.

Broadcast basic service includes channels 2-23, which carry local-access outlets. Extended basic service comprises all non-premium channels.

"These rates are in compliance with FCC," said Tom Bjorklund, vice president at MetroVision. "We've done our best, given what we've had to work with, to notify the cable commission and our customers."

"We understand the frustration, but there's nothing else we

'I don't think they are justified. They came up with the same gobbledygook. Their notice hints that the FCC made them do it. I don't think that's true.'

Aldo Vagnozzi
SWOCC board member

can do," FCC announced the change in late March. MetroVision officials locally didn't see the recalculated rates from their Atlanta office until May 13, Bjorklund said.

SWOCC was notified May 16. Rates have been frozen by the FCC for 14 months. MetroVision lost \$25,000 a month in revenue during that time, Bjorklund said. The rate increase will recoup some of that, he added.

Both SWOCC and MetroVision officials agree the new FCC regulations are confusing.

Seven variables are factored into the formula, including the number of cable systems the parent company operates and medium household income in the community.

The role of regulatory bodies — such as SWOCC — is limited. They may review and ask a cable company to justify a rate increase,

but only for basic service.

"The FCC has given us a gun with no bullets," said SWOCC chairman William Hartsock.

MetroVision, like most cable companies, is a for-profit company. Though it provides the SWOCC with audited financial reports, MetroVision is not obligated to open its financial books.

"The bottom line is, we know they are profitable," Hartsock said. "How profitable? I don't know."

"That's certainly one of the things we're going to look into, though, when negotiating the re-franchise agreement."

The 15-year franchise agreement expires May 1997.

New subscribers benefit under the new rates. Installation rates will drop up to 50 percent in some instances.

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Questions

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sure," Vagnozzi said.

Dave Tietmeyer, who handles cable broadcasts for the city, said he has been investigating this plan.

"The system of choice would be install a telephone delay system which would give us an opportunity to screen a caller before their comments are heard in the council chambers as well as cablecast," he said.

He consulted Brian Belinski, an engineer who works for radio station WXYT who designs telephone delay systems.

"The other method would be to install a caller ID system so we know where a call is coming from," Tietmeyer said. "By stating to our residents that all calls will go through this system, may deter any inappropriate questions or comments."

Another suggestion was a mul-

'As a council watcher, I often sit there with only a few other people. I think anything that gets people active is a good idea. It's the only way that democracy can work.'

Masha Silver

ti-line telephone with a built-in speaker, installed near the mayor's seat. "This telephone would be wired into our public address system, allowing our audience to hear caller questions," Tietmeyer said. "All questions can then be answered during 'questions and comments' at the next council meeting."

If a two-way dialogue between caller and city council/staff is not desirable, Tietmeyer recommends establishing a city council hot line where residents can call in their questions to be recorded or

an answering machine. These questions can then be answered during questions and comments at the next council meeting.

"I would not recommend using a telephone answerer/runner, where one person answers the telephone during the meetings, writes down the question, then runs it to the mayor to be answered," Tietmeyer said. "In order for this to be successful, two people would be needed who have a very good understanding of city policies and our activities throughout the community. With this type of

call-in format, there is always the potential of lost information when one person translates another person's questions."

In a report to council, city manager Bill Costick said that "administrative staff attempts to respond to inquiries, complaints and issues. The number of complaints that go unanswered is very small."

A call-in program "may invite an atmosphere of receiving less than well-intentioned and serious questions," Costick said.

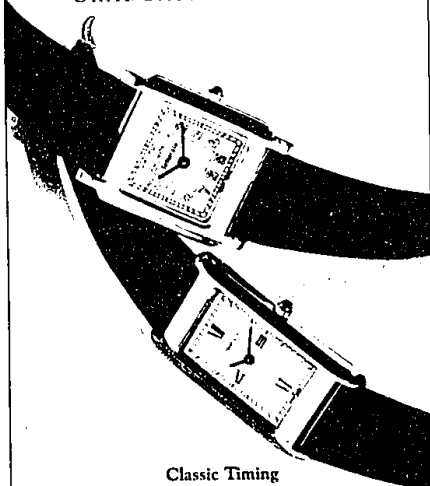
"While I am certain that council member Vagnozzi's intentions are clearly to open up channels for the public to express themselves, it just seems to me that this kind of procedure might be more disruptive than we would expect and produce a negative reflection on the city."

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