

The Farmington Observer

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Display Advertising.....734-591-2300
Home Delivery.....734-591-0500
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Newsroom.....734-593-2104
O&E Online * www.observer-eccentric.com.....248-903-4718
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The Farmington Observer

A HomeTown Communications Network™ publication
33411 Grand River, Farmington, MI 48335
(On the southwest corner of Grand River and Farmington Rds.)

SUBSCRIPTION RATES:

CARRIER DELIVERY	MAIL DELIVERY
One year.....\$47.40	One year.....\$55.00
One year (St. Clair).....\$39.00	One year (St. Clair).....\$44.00
Newsstand.....75¢ per copy	One year (out of County).....\$65.00
	One year (out of State).....\$90.00

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Former mayor to serve on cable franchise administrative panel

BY JONI HUNTER
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When Farmington Hills city officials begin the formal process of re-franchising cable television service provider Time Warner, a familiar face will appear at the table.

Council members have appointed Aldo Vagnozzi to serve on an administrative review panel that will hear Time Warner's case for re-franchising. Vagnozzi, who just ended a term as Farmington Hills mayor, fills a spot created when the city agreed to establish the panel earlier this year.

"This is part of the process to try to come up with a franchise agreement," Vagnozzi said. "We act as hearing officers on issues as they come of out negotiations."

Vagnozzi's history with the issue made him the right man for the job, according to City Manager Steve Brock. While serving as mayor, he was a member of the city's cable commission.

In a memo to council members, Brock wrote, "I believe Mr. Vagnozzi will be an excellent representative based on his knowledge of the topic and concern for the community and its cable subscribers."

That's exactly the reason Vagnozzi volunteered.

"I thought it was appropriate because I had the experience of dealing with Time Warner for four years," he said.

Among the sticking points, Vagnozzi explained, has been the issue of local access channels. Currently, the system includes city, school and public access channels, all commercial-free. The cable company provides them at no charge, as part of their franchise agreement.

He said the biggest sticking point has been the cable company's desire to cut back on those services. Time Warner's General Manager Bob McCann said the intent is to split one channel in a narrow broadcast so only residents in each city would view that city's programming.

The cities have balked at the idea, which would eliminate the opportunity for residents to learn what's going on in neighboring communities.

"We think the number of channels the cities want is unreasonable," McCann said.

However, he added, that's only one of several major sticking points that have stalled informal negotiations. He believes Time Warner has consistently negotiated in good faith.

"I've had hope for the informal process since we started," he said. "It's incredible that it's taken this long. Should they decide to take (the formal) road, there's not much we can do about it."

Brock also hopes officials can succeed with informal negotiations. Governed by federal law, the franchising process generally moves from the informal to the formal, which is more tightly



Appointed: Former Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi will remain involved in cable television.

"I believe Mr. Vagnozzi will be an excellent representative."

Steve Brock
—City manager

regulated, he explained.

On the positive side, the three cities served — Farmington, Farmington Hills and Novi — have a little more control in the formal arena. They have the authority to appoint a panel and choose how negotiations will pro-

ceed.

"It's just been very frustrating," he said. "The formal process gives us a bit more latitude."

It should also move more quickly than talks thus far, Brock added. If all else fails, he expects the panel will begin its work in early January, reviewing written briefs from both sides.

But he still hopes an agreement can be struck before then. "We're hopeful the informal process will still prevail, but we have the formal process to fall back on," Brock said. "We're not that far apart, quite frankly."

MILITARY NEWS

Military Grad

Air National Guard Airman 1st Class Keith Bowles has graduated from basic military training at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas.

During the six weeks of training, the airman studied the Air Force mission, organization, and customs and received special

training in human relations.

In addition, airmen who complete basic training earn credits toward an associate degree through the community college of the Air Force.

Bowles is the son of Susan and stepson of Keith Westbrook of Farmington Hills. He is a graduate of Harrison High School.

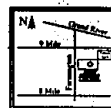


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