

Cable TV franchises have consumers in mind



CAREN COLLINS

The Michigan Telecommunications Act passed the Senate and is in the House for approval this week. Your local governments will continue to represent your rights as this issue develops. Cities, villages and townships have long made effective, consumer-oriented use of franchises. Franchises with cable television companies have benefited Michigan consumers in numerous ways. In addition to overseeing careful use of public rights-of-way, local jurisdictions have been able to be watchdogs for residents and businesses. By monitoring and enforcing technical standards as well as working towards ensuring customer service satisfaction. By overseeing proposed transfers of ownership to make sure

that customer rights are protected.

Without having some form of control at the local level, how long before state offices are swamped with questions and complaints from consumers who don't have anywhere else to turn? Local franchises work.

Federal telecommunications legislation recognizes this and will likely pass this year with provisions preventing only franchises that are unreasonably discriminatory or in lieu of competition.

Michigan communities are not adverse to competition — they would like to see more of it. But in looking towards the future, local government has an obligation to protect itself and the best interests of its residents. We need to think twice before we allow out-of-state, profit-making telecommunications companies to invade our back yards.

Cities are entitled to receive fair market value for use for their rights-of-way and citizens should not be expected to subsidize private, profit-making businesses by

giving them free or low-cost use of public property.

Competition in the telecommunications marketplace can be properly managed to provide for economic growth — cities, villages and townships are best equipped to facilitate growth that benefits everyone.

Michigan legislators have an opportunity and an obligation to lay the groundwork for an information revolution that doesn't hold hostage local jurisdictions and the public.

The local artery of the information super highway must be left in the hands of Michigan's municipalities.

The next Southwestern Oakland Cable Commission meeting is at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 12, in Farmington City Hall.

The next Cable Access Committee meeting is at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 14, at the SWOCC office.

Caren A. Collins is the executive director for the Southwestern Oakland Cable Commission.

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