

Gripes support protest

Are you writing a larger check to Time Warner this month? You're not alone. Time Warner's increased rates by \$1.42.

CABLE CONNECTION



CAREN COLLINS

which represents the cities of Farmington, Farmington Hills and Novi, cannot legally prevent any rate increase by its cable operator, so long as that increase doesn't exceed the maximum allowed under a complex formula created by federal law and enforced by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

Municipal review responsibility is limited specifically to the tier of channels defined as "basic service" (up to channel 23). Should SWOCC's review procedure identify a possible violation of the maximum, this would be reported to the FCC.

You may have noticed that the rate for the basic tier didn't increase. So those of you who receive only channels 1-22 are paying only \$10.50, as you did last year and the year before. However, SWOCC will continue to conduct the necessary reviews to make sure that Time Warner's rates follow the FCC guidelines.

The rate process is cumbersome and costly. That's why Congress had originally called for this regulation to end in 1999 when it thought there would be effective competition that would regulate rates.

But that competition hasn't occurred. So now there's talk in Capitol Hill of extending regulation until there is effective competition. (Stay tuned. In future columns we'll let you know how

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things stand with the news we receive from Washington, D.C.) Here in the metro area, Ameritech provides cable competition in upwards of 40 communities. The trouble is that FCC research and our own local surveys have found that rates didn't go down when Ameritech entered the picture. We'll have results of that survey in next week's column.

Caren Collins is the Executive Director of the Southwestern Oakland Cable Commission. The next SWOCC meeting is 7 p.m. Tuesday, April 27, at Farmington City Hall. The next Cable Access Committee meeting is 7 p.m. Tuesday, March 9, at SWOCC.

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Will this do any good? It's hard to say. Last year, as a result of SWOCC's filing, the FCC ruled in the subscribers' favor, but Time Warner appealed. So there was no change and we paid the increase that Time Warner set.

In past years, this kind of action did prove beneficial to the rate payer. In April 1994, there was an \$88,727 refund to subscribers in service rates and a total \$44,323 refund in installation charges in December 1994 (\$1.25 to each subscriber).

What, if any, control does your City have regarding the cable company's charges to subscribers?

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Waterford—M-59 at Pontiac Lake Rd.
Canton Center—Ford Rd. at Canton Center Rd.
Westland—Warren Rd. at Newburgh Rd.
Southgate—Fort St., just N. of Pennsylvania
Wixom—Grand River Ave. at Wisom Rd.
Northville—Just W. of I-275 on Haggerty Rd. at 8 Mile
Van Buren Twp.—Belleville Rd. at Tyler Rd.

Sterling Heights—16 Mile & Dequindre
Rochester Hills—Rochester Rd. just N. of M-59
Shelby Twp.—Hall Rd. (M-59) at Hayes Rd.
Fraser—Ulta Rd. at 15 Mile
Commerce Twp.—Haggerty Rd. N. of Maple
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