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The Award-Winning Westshore Weekly 75¢

FCC ruling may help AT&T

By Kevin Kelley

WESTSHORE

A ruling last month by the Federal Communications Commission making it easier for new competitors to enter the cable television business may make efforts by local communities to regulate them more difficult.

City officials in Rocky River, Fairview Park and Bay Village all have voiced objections to AT&T's plans to install Project Lightspeed in those communities due to the numerous, large utility boxes the new technology requires.

Project Lightspeed is AT&T's internal name for a range of digital television and Internet services to be marketed under the name U-verse.

Fairview Park City Council withdrew a proposed moratorium on the large utility boxes at the last minute during its Dec. 18 meeting after AT&T officials promised to work with the city in the project's installation. City officials have complained the company has not submitted a comprehensive plan on when and how the project will be installed.

However, Denis Dunn, AT&T Ohio's director of external affairs, disputed this, saying he has tried numerous times to arrange meetings with city officials early last year.

"We're giving all the information we can possibly give," Dunn said.

According to a document on the AT&T Web site, the utility boxes, called "nodes," must be placed within 3,000 feet on average, 5,000 feet at maximum, to homes. The closer the nodes are to homes, the faster the Internet access, explained Dunn, who added 14 nodes would be installed in the first phase of Project Lightspeed.

In a 3 - 2 vote along party lines Dec. 20, the FCC concluded that the existing franchising process constituted an unreasonable barrier to entry that impedes cable competition and timely broadband deployment.

The new rules require municipalities issuing franchise agreements to act on applications from competitors with existing access to local rights of way (such as AT&T) within 90 days.

FCC Chairman Kevin Martin, a Republican, said in a statement that the ruling encourages affordable broadband Internet access and increased video competition.

The commission's two Democrats said the ruling tramples legitimate local regulation of telecom companies and may not be legal.

Commissioner Jonathan Adelstein said the ruling lacked sufficient input from Congress and likely will be rejected by the courts.

"Instead of acknowledging the vast dispute in the record as to whether there are actually any unreasonable refusals being made (by local governments) today, the majority simply accepts in every case that the big phone companies are right and the local governments are wrong," Adelstein said in a statement. "This is breathtaking in its disrespect of our local and state government partners."

Caryn Candisky, director of media relations for AT&T Ohio, said she didn't know how the FCC ruling would affect the company's Westshore plans.

"It's too early to know the full implications of the FCC decision," she told West Life.

Until the full FCC order is released, Candisky said AT&T will continue to meet with local officials and negotiate video agreements.

The initial details of the FCC ruling do appear to benefit AT&T, she said.

"I would say (the ruling) appears to be good news because they've streamlined regulations and that will bring the benefits of competition to consumers more quickly," she said.

In Westlake, Mayor Dennis Clough said his city is in the process of approving AT&T utility boxes on a one-by-one basis.

"We really get to look at the impact it will have at the given location," Clough said.

Meanwhile, a franchise agreement between AT&T and the city is being negotiated by that city's legal department.

Clough said two elements he wants in the agreement are that AT&T pay a franchise fee equal to what Time Warner and WOW already pay, and that AT&T's video service carry the community's government and educational access channels.

Clough said a national organization of mayors had advised municipalities to get the best deal they could before a federal or state law was passed which trumped the local government's ability to influence the rollout of new services.

Prohibiting the utility boxes would deprive neighborhoods of competition, Clough added.

Always on the go



North Olmsted Fire Captain Greg Gettens engages in fitness training last Thursday on Huntington Beach during the unseasonably warm December weather. (Photo by Larry Bennet)

Fee for ambulance transport considered

By Kevin Kelley

WESTLAKE

If you experience a medical emergency and have to be transported to a hospital in an ambulance by city paramedics, should you — or your health insurance company — be charged for it?

In recent years, more and more communities have instituted an ambulance fee. Now Westlake, which currently

does not charge, is the latest city contemplating the fee.

The proposed ordinance to enact ambulance and paramedic fees had its second reading before City Council Dec. 7. But council wants more time to gather facts about how a fee would be implemented and did not vote on the ordinance at its Dec. 21 meeting. Instead, council members plan to discuss the proposal at a public committee meeting some time this month, Council

President Michael Killeen said.

Under the proposed ordinance, revenue from ambulance charges would be placed into an EMS Revenue Fund or similar fund. Money would be used to purchase or maintain emergency medical equipment and supplies or purchase emergency vehicles. The proposal also states funds could go toward "other uses which facilitate or are relat-

See FEE, p. 15

More athletic field upgrades approved

By Jeff Gallatin

BAY VILLAGE

School officials continue to take steps to upgrade the athletic field at Bay High School.

Superintendent Clint Keener said the school board's awarding of a \$10,400 contract in December to J.A.R. Engineering and Surveying for a boundary and topographic survey of the Bay High field would help the district in

more than one way. The move came shortly after the school board approved a \$24,750 contract with the Cleveland area firm Lee Behnke and Associates to provide professional design services for the district athletic field at the high school.

"We want to make sure all the boundaries are set properly around the field area," Keener said. "There have been some questions at times with some of the neighbors around the area. So, the survey should give us clear information and guidelines as to where

everything is pertaining to the field boundaries. That will make it easier for us and other people when dealing with the field."

Keener said with probable changes coming to the school's athletic field facilities, the topography work will also give crucial information to the district.

"We either have to get some artificial turf down for the district on the athletic field or we have to get a separate soc-

See FIELD, p. 15

