

Cable deal splits advisory panel in Bedford Twp.

TEMPERANCE—The Bedford Township Board's committee of the whole meeting wasn't televised on local cable last night, even though the whole meeting was ostensibly about what gets put on cable and who gets the money that people pay to watch it.

If viewers had been able to tune in, they would have seen a show quite different from the normally sedate regular meetings.

The heated and often personal two-hour debate involved current and former members of an advisory cable committee. Township board members tried to defend a decision in 2002 to stop giving \$10,000 a year to Bedford Public Schools from money the township receives through the local cable television provider.

At issue are conflicting ordinances that were written at different periods to cover Bedford Township's current cable provider, Buckeye CableSystem, and its former provider, Comcast, whose system Buckeye ultimately purchased.

The two ordinances discuss annual payments to the school system, but set no minimums for the payments.

In 2002 the township board voted to hire a company to begin taping its regular meetings in 2002. The move was intended to end the use of student broadcasters. As a result the trustees also quit giving the schools the annual payments.

"I'll tell you my intent. I thought we were severing the relationship with the schools.

We thought at that time that it just wasn't workable anymore," said township Trustee Dennis Steinman, who was on the board in 2002 when the decision was made.

Steve Lennex, a former school board member and longtime member of the township's cable committee, said the township's decision to stop the payments may have been legal, but it wasn't the moral thing to do.

"It will be a sad day in Bedford Township history if you take this position against Bedford Public Schools — if you [offer] anything less than full restitution, full payment, and restoration of the obligation under the agreement," Mr. Lennex said.

But township Supervisor Walt Wilburn said Mr. Lennex and others pushing the question of the annual payments had split two local elected bodies — the school and township boards — that had worked very closely in the past.

"Steve, you've successfully [driven] a wedge into this thing," Mr. Wilburn said.

Tom Dawson, senior manager of government and community affairs for Buckeye CableSystem, a sister company of The Blade, said the firm has paid its franchise fees on time to the township.

However, he said the company was under the impression the money was to go to the schools.

No action was taken at the committee meeting, and several township board members expressed afterward that they had little interest in making any more payments.