

# Bedford board votes to move cable studio

■ By moving the cablevision studio from Bedford Public Schools to the township hall, officials hope to alleviate the battle over \$60,000 in missed payments for the service.

BY JOSHUA KENNEDY  
For The Evening News

**BEDFORD TOWNSHIP** — The Bedford Township Board Tuesday night took official action to move the township's local origination/public access television studio from Bedford Public Schools to the township hall.

The matter was a last-minute addition to the working agenda, and it seems to be a major concession of the township during a months-long public battle between the board and its cablevision advisory committee.

That volunteer panel in December recommended to the board that it repay \$60,000 in missed payments due to Bedford Public Schools, which committee members argued had been the township's local origination studio for years.

Township officials originally denied that.

Local origination funds are collected by cable companies — Buckeye Cable Co. provides cable service to residents in Bedford — and doled

out to local governments for rights-of-way use throughout their respective communities.

In Bedford Township, cable users pay a 4 percent fee on top of their cable bill to create that local origination funding. The township today nets about \$180,000 a year from the fees, and that money is deposited directly into the general fund.

When Buckeye assumed the local cable franchise in 1999, an agreement was created between the Ohio-based firm, the township and the schools that \$20,000 of that funding would be given to the schools each year to help fund its broadcasting program in exchange for the schools assuming local origination duties.

That money was paid to the schools from 1999 to 2002. Scheduling conflicts with students prevented the schools from televising any meetings for most of 2002, so the township board in August of that year hired Triple "L" Productions of Lambertville to televise its board meetings.

That's when the funding to the schools stopped, despite then-Supervisor R. LaMar Frederick stating during a public meeting at the time, "We still have some obligations to pay. Simply saying we're going to spend \$6,700 doesn't solve the issues on the franchise fees still outstanding."

"We still have obligations. We still

owe the school something under the franchise agreements. I just want you to understand that by picking Triple 'L' tonight does not end our obligation to the school."

The cablevision committee — charged with overseeing the agreement and the funding to the schools — took no action on the missing payments until November. The action it finally did take was chastised by the current township board as "airing our dirty laundry."

Just two of the seven-member panel were reappointed to the committee in January, though Supervisor Walt Wilburn claims not re-appointing the others — including longtime panel Chairman Steve Lennex — is only to ensure "fresh blood" on the panel and is not retribution for the public discourse.

Since then, Gene Stock — one member who was reappointed — has resigned, citing his dismay at the politicking involved in correcting the matter. At a joint meeting between the board and the committee this month, a township attorney explained that many of the issues surfaced because of verbal agreements and handshakes.

"Our attorney explained the contract that we have," Mr. Wilburn said after that meeting. "There's really no agreement or anything like that. Basically there were a lot of verbal agreements made."

"There was a lot of 'You do this for us, and we'll do this for you' type stuff," he said. "Nobody ever wrote anything down. They were flying by the seat of their pants. And then one day somebody discovered a mistake, and they want to make a big deal about it."

"All I want to do is fix it. I didn't create this problem, I just get to fix it," Mr. Wilburn said. "I think there was some intent there. But nothing was put in writing. We don't really know who intended to do what. But this is a new administration here."

"What somebody said 10 years ago shouldn't affect me. I can't be held liable to that."

That still might need to be determined. At Tuesday's meeting, township attorney Philip Goldsmith said that while "significant and substantial" work on the issue has been undertaken, "That's not meant to state that this is the final step in the process. Further work will be done."

Mr. Wilburn agreed.

"This is just the first step in the process," he said. "We're going to get this to where it's straightened out and everybody can understand it."

Whether that means the township owes the school money is up in the air.

Bedford Public Schools officials could not be reached for comment.

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