

Schools mull township's cable offer

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Bedford Now

The debate over the cablevision franchise fees could be nearing a close.

A discussion between Bedford Schools Superintendent Jon White and Board of Education members at a committee of the whole meeting on May 25 indicated the district is close to accepting a February offer of \$80,000 from township officials.

Mr. White told the board that the township's proposal has been clarified so the district can keep the equipment it has, although the district's access to the school's existing channel will not be guaranteed. He added that "editorializing" inserted by the township had been eliminated.

Mr. White told board members he was advised by school attorney Joe Urban that the offer is about the best the district can expect.

Several school board members said they were unhappy with how the township handled the matter, but President David Taylor pointed out that the dis-

trict had no direct say in the agreement between Buckeye Cable and the township and that the district is a third-party beneficiary in the arrangement.

"I don't know that we have much leverage," he said.

The main concern remains the access to the channel, but Mr. White, however, said Buckeye Cable has been supportive of the schools in the past. "I would be very surprised if Buckeye would take away that channel," he said.

The proposal comes out of a dispute that began last year, when the township's Cablevision Advisory Committee — a volunteer panel charged with overseeing the township's cable franchise agreement with Buckeye Cable — learned that the schools have not received any of the \$180,000 franchise fee collected by the cable company from its township customers. In 1998, a deal was struck between the township and the district that the schools would receive about \$20,000 a year in return for televising township board meetings. After more

than a year's worth of meetings went untelevised because of conflicting schedules with students, the 2002 township board stopped annual allocations to the school.

In December, the cablevision committee said the township should pay \$60,000 in back payments to the schools. The debate over the fees, the use of the equipment and the station — which was moved from the high school to Township Hall — continued until late February, when township officials made the offer to the schools.

Several board members seemed inclined to approve the agreement when it comes up for a vote at the board's next meeting on June 1.

"If you turn it down, you may come out with nothing," said board Trustee Tim Brakel.

"And have legal fees besides," Mr. Taylor added.

If the agreement is approved, the \$80,000 will be earmarked for the high school's broadcast program, district officials said.

Staff writer Joshua Kennedy contributed to this story.