

Doug Donnelly, city editor
phone: 240-5777
e-mail: doug@monroenews.com

LOCAL

The Monroe Evening News

Bedford makes cablevision offer

■ Township board members are offering the school district \$80,000 to resolve a dispute over the high school housing a public access studio but not televising government meetings.

BY JOSHUA KENNEDY
For The Evening News

BEDFORD TOWNSHIP — The Bedford Township Board will offer Bedford Public Schools \$80,000 in a bid to end the ongoing saga of whether the township owes the district money for missed cable franchise fee payments.

During a special meeting Tuesday, the board considered going into closed session to discuss legal opinions on whether money was due the schools as a result of a cable franchise agreement but instead opted to discuss the controversial issue in public.

"I don't care to go into closed session," Supervisor Walt Wilburn said after Trustee Larry O'Dell made a motion to discuss the offer in private. "I've got nothing to hide. Let's see if we can work this out."

What the panel is working out is how to handle a December recommendation of its cablevision advisory committee — a panel of volunteers charged with overseeing the township's cable franchise agreement with Buckeye Cable Co. — that the township should pay \$60,000 in back payments to the schools.

The cable panel late last year learned that the schools have not been receiving an intended cut of the \$180,000 franchise fee collected by the cable company from cable customers across the township.

The previous township board in 2002 stopped annual allocations of about \$20,000 a year to the schools because board members weren't satisfied the schools were living up to their end of a bargain reached in 1998.

"I was on the board when a lot of discussion went by" on this issue, Clerk Robert Schockman said, adding that at one point years ago a quid pro quo agreement was

THE MONEY TRAIL

Bedford Township cable users pay a 4 percent franchise fee on top of their monthly cable bills. Ohio-based Buckeye then passes that funding on to the township, which deposits the money into the general fund. Allocations to schools were made from that fund.

reached that saw the schools get \$20,000 — \$10,000 from the township and another \$10,000 from the cable company.

"It was a 'You do something, we'll pay you for it,' " Mr. Schockman said. "We do that for our parks board, our library board and every other board we support. We do it that way because it's fair."

When the schools stopped televising township board meetings — more than a year's worth of meetings weren't televised because of conflicting schedules with students — the board hired Triple "L" Productions of Lambertville to perform the task.

They also stopped paying the schools the money the cablevision committee members believe the school is due.

That panel is now disbanded as a result of this issue. Many longtime members were not reappointed in January and others have resigned after Mr. Wilburn and other board members complained they were "airing the township's dirty laundry in public."

Last month, the township acquiesced the only point the cable committee members had been using as justification for the back pay: That the township's local origination studio had been at Bedford High School since the contract began.

The township in February took official action to move the local origination studio from the schools to the township hall. No equipment or material will move, only the designation of the local origination studio, also known as public access studio.

But it was that designation that

Bedford hires firm to build township hall

BEDFORD TOWNSHIP — The Bedford Township Board on Tuesday unanimously hired Poggemeyer Design Group of Bowling Green, Ohio, to oversee the design and construction of a new township hall.

Poggemeyer was one of three finalists from nine contenders whose bids ranged from \$104,500 to \$168,700. Bedford will pay Poggemeyer \$125,500.

"Poggemeyer's quote is all-inclusive with total design and engineering, including all architectural services," said Trustee Dennis Steinman, chairman of the hall

building committee. "They didn't have to subcontract for all the disciplines."

Board members said they also liked that Poggemeyer has an office located in Bedford at 7276 Jackman Rd.

"This \$125,500 includes everything from beginning to end," Mr. Steinman said. "Any change orders will be included in that price."

Construction of a new two-story township hall to be built behind the existing one at 8100 Jackman Rd. is estimated at \$2.5 million. Plans are for construction to be under way within months.

cablevision committee members stood by when recommending that the schools were owed \$20,000 a year in back payments, or \$60,000. The township did pay the schools about \$20,000 a year between 1998 and 2002, when Triple "L" was hired.

"If we hand over \$60,000 for the last three years, we are fulfilling the contract even if they aren't," Mr. Schockman said, starting what became a sort of bidding contest between board members on how much the schools are owed, if anything at all.

The offers ran the gamut from Trustee Rick Steiner's suggested \$115,000 — he used a formula and determined that amount not only would catch up on any missed payments but also pay the schools through the life of the contract, which expires in 2011 — to Treasurer Sherri Meyer's offer of nothing.

Even township attorney Thomas Graham in written legal opinions told the board they have no obligation to pay anything: "My legal opinion has been that you are not required to pay even if we went to court."

He said he understood why paying some amount might be the right thing to do but disagreed with others' offers to pay into the future.

"Once you pulled the local origi-

nation back ... you've already taken a step to terminate (this arrangement). Since you've gone to that trouble, I'm having difficulty understanding future payments," he said.

In the end, Mr. O'Dell made a motion to the effect that the township should pay \$80,000 — \$20,000 a year for each of the missed years in question, plus \$20,000 for the current fiscal year.

"I'm in favor of paying \$20,000 a year for those four years and being done with it," he said, adding to his motion that the schools sign a waiver clearing the township of any future monies owed.

Mrs. Meyer cast the sole vote against the offer, which Mr. Graham assured the board was just that: An offer.

"This is a negotiation," he said. "We haven't gone to the other side. ... I hope everybody understands that."

Reached by cell phone in Lansing this morning, Bedford Schools Supt. Jon White said he heard of the offer but needs to speak with his board and Mr. Wilburn before making comment.

"I am pleased that the township board has made this gesture, but I need to know exactly what they are offering before I can say what we'll do," he said.