

3/25/2009

Cityside

CAN TV legislation update

City Council members voted 38-11 with one abstention last week in favor of an ordinance that will split future fees paid by cable television firms offering service in Chicago and licensed to do so by the state between the established public access network CAN TV and the City of Chicago.

Both the city and the state government provide franchises for cable television operators. Three are currently franchised by the city, and one - AT&T - has a state franchise. Under both city and state franchises, 1 percent of general revenues is earmarked for the local PEG (public, educational and government station). Historically, CAN TV - which operates five local channels - has held that distinction. Now the city's channels will as well.

The ordinance gives CAN TV the 1 percent funding stream from AT&T, but reserves any other funds from cable operators franchised by the state for the city - or, more specifically, the commissioner of business affairs and consumer protection.

The move worries CAN TV executive director Barbara Popovic, who noted that if any of the current city franchise holders seek a franchise from the state, CAN TV wouldn't get a piece of the PEG funding.

Popovic told Chicago Journal that the cable access network is facing a deficit of \$300,000 this year and is considering cutbacks.