

# Words get in way of cable settlement

■ The township and schools are at odds over the phrasing of a proposed \$80,000 deal to resolve the issue of cable franchise fees that may have been owed to the schools.

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It's been more than a month since the Bedford Township Board hammered out an offer to settle an ongoing dispute over cable franchise fees that used to be shared with Bedford Public Schools, but the \$80,000 offer — and a legal discharge statement that could put an end to the ongoing dilemma — has been bounced back and forth between both sides' attorneys and has yet to be voted on by the school board.

"It is fair to say that we looked at the agreement and we agreed there was wording either missing or that we didn't like," said schools Supt. Jon White. "We want to settle on the wording of the agreement before making it final."

Specifically, he said, the school board wanted assurances that the settlement offer would end the entire ordeal, and that nothing else would change.

"We felt they were editorializing a little bit," Supt. White said. "We felt there needed to be assurances that we could keep our channel and our equipment. Those items weren't mentioned."

"There was some equipment purchased by the cable company for us some 10 years ago," Supt. White said. "That equipment is long gone and obsolete for years. ... We want to make certain they have no claim to equipment we have now."

The decision to protect equipment and the school's existing channel comes on the heels of the township board taking official action in February to move the township's public access station from the schools to the township hall.

The \$80,000 settlement offer came shortly afterward.

The actions and settlement offer followed the December recommendation of the township's 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 any cut of the \$180,000 annual franchise fee collected by the cable company from cable customers across the township.

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

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

When the schools stopped televising township board meetings — more than a year's worth of meetings went untelevised 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 has now disbanded: Many longtime members were not reappointed in January, and others have resigned.

Township Supervisor Wilburn still is hesitant to discuss the issue.

"This isn't over, so it's not worth writing about. It's going back and forth between the attorneys. We're not happy with some of the changes they made."

"So we changed it and have sent it back to their attorneys. We never wanted their equipment to start with," Mr. Wilburn said. "I'm not going to sit here and guess at this thing. It's just some language; it's not a big deal. We should be able to put this thing to bed and let everything settle down. Let everyone be friends again."