



For Immediate Release: 12.09.02

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Survey: Cable Subscribers See Room for Improvement

Oak Parkers who subscribe to cable television say they are generally satisfied, but many indicated the provider could do more to improve customer service – especially when it comes to convenient installation appointments, answering the telephone and letting customers know about rate and programming changes.

These findings are among preliminary highlights of a recent [formal survey](#) of residents, which randomly sampled 572 Oak Park residents via telephone in the fall. Some 400 of those polled were cable subscribers and 172 did not have cable. The survey was conducted as part of the process currently underway to determine community needs in renewing the franchise agreement with AT&T Broadband. The current franchise agreement with AT&T, which recently merged with Comcast, will expire in April 2004.

“The survey results reinforce the data we have from tracking the complaints the Village receives about cable television,” said Peter J. Dame, assistant to the Village Manager and liaison to the Telecommunications Commission, a committee of citizens who are advising the Village Board on the franchise renewal process.

“Most cable-related problems people encounter are not with the type of services offered, but are related to unsatisfactory interactions with the company such as with installations, notifications and explanations of changes, and the ability to resolve problems quickly when they occur.”

About 55 percent of Oak Park households subscribe to cable television. Among cable subscribers surveyed, 42 percent reported subscribing to more advanced digital packages, 41 percent said they subscribe to at least one premium channel and 30 percent reported subscribing to cable internet service.

Of those surveyed who do not subscribe, the most common reason given was not watching television. Seventy percent of the non-subscribers polled said they had never subscribed.

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While 71 percent of subscribers surveyed rated their cable service good or excellent, several potential areas for improvement were highlighted, including picture quality on local channels 2 and 5 (33 percent) and too few convenient installation times (42 percent).

Of the 70 percent of respondents who said they had called AT&T for any reason over the past two years, 32 percent experienced a busy signal and 50 percent said it took longer than the two minutes to reach a customer service representative, a violation of the current standard.

Respondents also were critical of how AT&T lets its customers know about rate and programming changes. Some 42 percent gave the company a fair rating, while 39 percent rated the company as poor on this issue.

Only a quarter of subscribers (26 percent) rated the price of their subscription as the "right amount" and 68 percent rated the price as "too expensive." Local access programming was valued highly with 43 percent of the respondents indicating it was "important" or "very important." Nearly 60 percent of subscribers indicated it was important that a portion of their fee should help fund local public, education and government access programming.

VOP-TV6, Oak Park's government access station, ranked high among local access programming viewership, with 22 percent of subscribers reporting weekly viewership, a significant increase from the last viewer survey conducted just after the station was launched about three years ago.

The Telecommunications Commission, comprised of Oak Park residents, will incorporate these latest survey findings into a final community needs assessment that will serve as the basis for beginning negotiations with the cable company. The assessment also will include results from public hearings, interviews with local organizations and institutions, and technical inspection reports of the cable system.

For more information on the needs assessment effort or cable service in general, contact the Village Manager's Office at 358.5778 or email village@oak-park.us.

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