

AtMC Lacks Only Construction Permits For Channel Expansion

BY SUSAN USHER

Atlantic Telephone Membership Corp. has cleared all but one hurdle in its plans to expand its cable TV service in 1987.

Speaking to the Shallotte Town Board last week, ATMC General Manager Russell Price said that construction permits from the Federal Communications Commission are all that is needed now to proceed with the project, and they are expected to be approved in December. If so, construction should begin in the first quarter of 1987, he said.

The rate structure and channel offerings have been approved by the

cooperative's board of trustees on his recommendation. He and staff members compiled the list of proposed additional channels that were approved by the board, he said. The system will offer 17 basic channels and three premium channels. The new premium, or extra-charge channels will be The Movie Channel and Disney Channel, in addition to Home Box Office. The basic 17-channel lineup will eliminate ABC and CBS duplicate stations and will add The Weather Channel, Arts and Entertainment Network, CNN 24-hour News, MTV, Nashville Network, ESPN coverage of the U.S. Congress

and the Black Entertainment Network in addition to existing stations.

"It does give you some good choices," Price said. Initial response to the offering has been better than anticipated, he noted, though there have been some members to express dissatisfaction with the proposal. "We realize the changes are not all friendly," he added.

There have been customer requests to include the offerings of the system, he noted, and additional channels required going to a converter system. That means customers must have been to

uncountable signals going into their sets.

The converter system ATMC will use allows the cooperative to "address" the converters from a central office computer terminal. A service representative will be able to connect or disconnect channels within "an hour or so or less of a request," he said, eliminating most site visits after initial installation.

Customers can switch channels at an \$8 service charge per change, with a minimum of one month's usage.

The typical ATMC cable customer has only one outlet, according to Price. That household's monthly rate

for the basic service will increase from \$8.00 to \$11.75. However, households with additional sets would be charged another \$1.75 per added outlet and \$3.25 per additional converter per month. Households with remote controls would have to rent controls compatible with the new system, at a cost of \$1.25 per month.

Households that want to record one channel on a videocassette recorder would have to have a converter for each.

"They are using two signals at once," explained Russell. "We thought it more fair to charge the user than to include it in the base rate."

However, customers who want to continue with the basic service and rate they now have will not be able to, Price explained in response to a question from Alderman David

Gause. He said ATMC chose to go with a single-tier service, rather than a two-tier service as offered in Horry County, S.C., where customers can choose whether to take the channel expansion package.

Price said ATMC's basic system cable subscribers were due to be charged a "substantial" price increase next year in any case, in part because HBO subscriptions have declined from 67 percent to 41 percent, putting pressure on the basic rate to bear a larger portion of the system's overall cost.

Of ATMC's 16,000 customers, 4,000 have access to cable TV and 12,000 do not. In the third quarter of 1987, the cooperative proposes to begin a major expansion, equivalent in size to its original construction project.

Price said 291 Shallotte residents subscribe to CATV basic service. "All who want cable TV in Shallotte have it," he said.

Shallotte Board Hears Audit Report

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grant First Investors Savings & Loan of Whiteville approval to locate a temporary office at Coastal Plaza for up to six months during construction of a full-service branch office adjacent to ACE Hardware on U.S. 17.

The 14-by-26-foot structure will be located at the rear of the property line at Wilson's Food Store, to allow access during construction of a 14-story Williamsburg-style office with 2,200 square feet of space.

President Ross Rankin told aldermen plans currently call for bids to be let this week, with ground breaking after the first of the year. Construction is expected to take about 4 1/2 months, no more than six months. A branch manager will be on site to start putting a staff together, he said. "We want to be open before summer, as soon as we can."

Audit Report Heard

Aldermen heard a report on the 1985-86 audit from Johnny Britt,

partner in charge of S. Preston Douglas & Associates' Whiteville office.

Britt noted that the town was in good financial shape as of June 30, but noted that the town's operating budget for 1986-87, totaling \$40,891, reducing its overall fund balance. "It would be nice to keep a close eye on that coming year also," he added.

All valent taxes represented 43 percent of the town's budget. Collections as of June 30 were at 92.49 percent, or \$164,281 of the total levy of \$177,519, down a full percent from the previous year.

For the several consecutive years, Britt recommended the town exercise greater accounting controls of the department expenditures, since by law the town finance officer is responsible for the money.

"Certainly you need a better handle than you have on it right now with the use of quarterly reports," he said. Britt recommended instead

the use of advance approval of checks with submission of copies or establishment of a revolving petty cash fund plus town board approval of major expenditures.

Other Business

In other business, the board:

- Approved a contract with S. Preston Douglas & Associates of Whiteville to conduct the town's 1986-87 audit of the same terms as this year's audit, \$25 per hour for consultants, \$10 per hour for clerical help, plus reasonable travel and subsistence.
- Approved one addition and one amendment to the sanitation ordinance. The changes exclude prior sanitation contracts entered into by businesses from the town's exclusive contract with Chambers Inc. for collection within the town limits and require residents to remove trash containers from curbside except when set out for collection.

Board report recommendations

from the planning board to square up the town's boundaries and to consider enacting extraterritorial zoning and to pursue acquisition of land to expand the sewer treatment plant land application area.

"We've recommended and recommended and what for—nothing is happening," said Alderman Paul Wayne Reeves, an ex-officio member of the planning board. "Excepting myself we have some smart people on that board. We ought to make some moves to show them some support," he said, with Mayor Jerry Jones saying he agreed "100 percent."

He added in regard to the proposed annexation of spot areas now surrounded by the town, "Let the planning board mark the map and make a proposal to us, then let the attorney investigate." Completing the annexations will take a year or more, Jones continued.

Board Talks Priorities For Water Line Installation

With no quorum to conduct business, three members of the Brunswick County Utilities Operation Board talked informally for more than an hour Monday evening on establishing priorities for expansion of the county water system.

The meeting was rescheduled for Monday, Dec. 1, at 4 p.m. in the Planning Building conference room at the Brunswick County Government Center. At that time, the board expects to name projects with which to

begin expansion of the county's water system with the installation of lateral lines.

"We're about to zero in on the first six projects," said Planning Director John Harvey. "We hope to make a report on which six projects it will be at the next county commissioners' meeting."

The utilities board was appointed by the county commissioners in August to review the operation, planning and expansion of the county's

water system, and to adopt rules and regulations concerning its operation.

The county recently designated \$1.5 million in revolving funds for the installation of lateral lines to subdivisions and possibly trunk lines that would need to be installed in some areas.

The residents taken into the new system will be assessed, which will replenish the funds as more projects are completed.

"We utility board members think that establishing six priority projects is a good starting point," said Harvey. "We think maybe all of them could be handled in this fiscal year."

Although the board members could take no action Monday, members present discussed the materials available and made suggestions on which areas would be in the highest need for new water lines.

On Nov. 17, a majority of the members of the utilities board met in an apparent violation of the N.C. Open Meeting Law. At that "informal work session," they asked Planning Director John Harvey to begin the task of setting priorities for the water lines.

They also tentatively agreed, without taking a vote, that Robert Nibel, manager of the Pfizer Chemicals plant in Southport, should

succeed Thomas as chairman, according to County Engineer Dan Shields, clerk to the board. He said Vice Chairman Alfonso Roach had "informally" said he didn't want the chairmanship. Shields said he understood no vote will be held until the District 5 vacancy on the board has been filled. Former District 5 member and Chairman Frank Thomas resigned earlier this month, citing business pressures. He was not a resident of the county at the time of his appointment by Commissioner Grace Bowden, and as of early November, still had not moved from Wilmington according to his announced intentions.

Local media were not notified in advance of the Nov. 17 session as required by law for any special meetings of public bodies. County Engineer Dan Shields, clerk to the board, indicated the omission wasn't a deliberate one. Notification of the Nov. 21 meeting was given.

The board had agreed, in a joint meeting with county commissioners on Nov. 10, to establish priorities concerning the installation of the new water lines throughout the county. The utility board is to report to the commissioners on which areas are considered priority at their next regularly-scheduled meeting.

Wet, Warm Trend Continues

The area's unseasonably warm and wet weather is expected to continue through Thanksgiving week.

Temperatures should range from the upper 60s at night into the upper 60s in the daytime, according to Shallotte Point meteorologist Jackson Canady.

Canady said he expects at least three-quarters of an inch of rainfall. During the period Nov. 18-21, a maximum high of 73 degrees was

recorded on Nov. 21 and a minimum low of 32 degrees was recorded on the morning of the 22nd.

An average daily high of 65 degrees combined with an average morning low of 45 degrees for a daily average temperature of 55 degrees, which Canady said is near normal.

At Shallotte Point, he recorded 1.13 inches of rainfall, considerably above average for this time of year.

Appointment Discussed

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considered replacing him," he said.

He said he does expect the Brunswick and Bladen County bars to appoint someone from the two counties, since he and the other district judges, Jerry A. Jolly and Jack Hooks Jr., are both from Columbus County.

"I think the governor would like to distribute the judgeships geographically," he said. "I'd just like to see the best person for the job get it."

Robert Serra, secretary-treasurer for the Brunswick County Bar Association, said the group will definitely meet within the next few weeks, but it hasn't discussed when that will be yet.

The nominee chosen to fill Greer's position must be from the same political party (Democrat) and will serve a full four-year term.

Greer was in Elizabethtown on his way to the Bladen County Courthouse

on Oct. 6 when the auto he was operating was struck by a pick-up truck. He received severe head injuries in the accident and remained unconscious until his death.

Monday, in a two-page statement in praise of Greer read at the opening of Brunswick County District Court, Judge Gore ordered that all courts in the district be closed at noon, reopening Tuesday morning. He also ordered the sheriff of Columbus County to fill the bill of the courthouse in Whiteville for 16 minutes following the funeral service for Greer, who was a native of Whiteville.

Gore's statement read in part, "I deem it fitting and appropriate to declare for the record that Judge Greer was an outstanding judge, a loyal Tarheel, and a good friend to every person affiliated with the thirteen judicial district court system. He will be greatly missed professionally and personally."

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