Atascadero City Council
Staff Report - City Manager’s Office

Proposed Government Access Channel Policy

RECOMMENDATION:

Council approve the attached draft Government Access Channel Policy for the City of Atascadero.

DISCUSSION:

As part of our franchise agreement with Charter Cable, the City is provided with access to analog cable channel 20, also known as the government access channel. Currently, the cable channel is used for broadcasting regularly scheduled Council meetings, Planning Commission meetings, and past and current photos of the community. The channel is controlled by the City and managed under contract by AGP. There has been interest expressed by certain departments regarding possible programming on the channel. Examples include programs about public transportation, fire safety, water conservation and a community calendar. Additionally, the City Council’s Building Public Trust Committee, comprised of Council Members O’Malley and Béraud, has requested that the City-sponsored candidate forums be broadcast on the government access channel.

The City currently has no policy addressing what type of programs may air on the City’s government access channel. The channel is a “government access channel” as provided for in the Cable Communications Act of 1984. This Federal legislation established public, educational, and government (PEG) channels for use by each of the broad corresponding groups. Because this is a government access channel, there is no legal requirement to broadcast any type of programming that is not government related or sponsored. In anticipation of potential programming, staff has drafted a Government Access Channel Policy (Attachment A).

The Policy basically states that the City’s government access channel is to be used as an informational and outreach tool to assist in increasing community knowledge and
awareness of the functions and responsibilities of City government, including broadcasting regularly scheduled Council and Commission meetings and providing direct, non-editorial, non-political, non-commercial and neutral information to the citizens of Atascadero concerning the operation, deliberations, and/or programs of City government. Examples for what may be broadcast on the channel ultimately may include:

- City Council meetings
- Planning Commission meetings
- Parks and Recreation Commission meetings
- City-sponsored meetings and forums of educational interest to the community
- City-approved public service announcements regarding fire safety, water conservation, public transportation, recycling, etc.
- City calendar and slides of information generated by the City
- Videos of events sponsored or supported by the City such as Cruise Night, Colony Days, Winter Wonderland or Movies in the Park
- Emergency broadcasts during times of crisis

All programming broadcast on the government access channel should address topics that pertain directly to City government-related or sponsored meetings, services, events, programs and/or activities, and needs to comply with all FCC regulations and applicable federal, state and local laws. The City Manager or his/her designee would be responsible for administering the channel in accordance with the guidelines recommended herein. Under federal law, the government access channel does not constitute public access and is not a public forum. In other words, the channel is for the City’s use and not for independent programming, features, etc.

The contract with AGP currently provides for the recording of regularly scheduled Planning Commission and City Council meetings only. Funding is not available in the budget for recording additional meetings. The contract also provides for the actual management of content and broadcasts of the channel, but it does not provide for submitting, scheduling or determining content. Currently there is not adequate staff or financial resources for this function. Additionally, the City has no cameras or editing equipment for productions. At this point, programming would either need to be produced by other governmental entities, provided to the City, or equipment would have to be rented from a video provider such as AGP at an additional cost.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact to the City as a result of approving the attached Policy. However, funding is not available for the City to support programming of the government access channel at this time.
ALTERNATIVES:

Council direct staff to review and revise the attached Policy.
Council reject approval of the attached Policy.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A: Draft Government Access Channel Policy