

Chapter 25

CABLE TELEVISION RATE REGULATION

[HISTORY: Adopted by the Village Council of the Village of Bellaire 10-8-1993 by Ord. No. 29-1993. Amendments noted where applicable.]

§ 25-1. Definitions.

A. As used in this chapter, the following terms shall have the meanings indicated:

ACT — The Communications Act of 1934, as amended (and specifically as amended by the Cable Television Consumer Protection and Competition Act of 1992, Pub. L. 102-385), and as may be amended from time to time.

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT — All equipment and services subject to regulation pursuant to 47 CFR § 76.923.

BASIC CABLE SERVICE — "Basic service" as defined in the FCC rules, and any other cable television service which is subject to rate regulation by the Village pursuant to the Act and the FCC rules.

FCC — The Federal Communications Commission.

FCC RULES — All rules of the FCC promulgated from time to time pursuant to the Act.

INCREASE IN RATES — An increase in rates or a decrease in programming or customer services as provided in the FCC rules.

B. All other words and phrases used in this chapter shall have the same meaning as defined in the Act and FCC rules.

§ 25-2. Purpose and interpretation.

A. The purpose of this chapter is to:

- (1) Adopt regulations consistent with the Act and the FCC rules with respect to basic cable service rate regulation; and
- (2) Prescribe procedures to provide a reasonable opportunity for consideration of the views of interested parties in connection with basic cable service rate regulation by the Village.

B. This chapter shall be implemented and interpreted consistent with the Act and FCC rules.

§ 25-3. Rate regulations promulgated by FCC.

In connection with the regulation of rates for basic cable service and associated

equipment, the Village of Bellaire shall follow all FCC rules.

§ 25-4. Filing; additional information; burden of proof.

- A. A cable operator shall submit its schedule of rates for the basic service tier and associated equipment or a proposed increase in such rates in accordance with the Act and the FCC rules. The cable operator shall include as part of its submission such information as is necessary to show that its schedule of rates or its proposed increase in rates complies with the Act and the FCC rules. The cable operator shall file 10 copies of the schedule or proposed increase with the Village Clerk. For purposes of this chapter, the filing of the cable operator shall be deemed to have been made when at least 10 copies have been received by the Village Clerk. The Village Council may, by resolution or otherwise, adopt rules and regulations as allowed by law prescribing the information, data and calculations which must be included as part of the cable operator's filing of the schedule of rates or a proposed increase.
- B. In addition to information and data required by rules and regulations of the Village pursuant to Subsection A above, a cable operator shall provide all information requested by the Village President that is related and helpful in connection with the Village's review and regulation of existing rates for the basic service tier and associated equipment or a proposed increase in these rates. The Village President may establish reasonable deadlines for submission of the requested information and the cable operator shall comply with such deadlines.
- C. A cable operator has the burden of proving that its schedule of rates for the basic service tier and associated equipment or a proposed increase in such rates complies with the Act and the FCC rules, including, without limitation, 47 U.S.C. § 543 and 47 CFR §§ 76.922 and 76.923.

§ 25-5. Proprietary information and confidentiality.

- A. If this chapter, any rules or regulations adopted by the Village pursuant to § 25-4A, or any request for information pursuant to § 25-4B requires the production of proprietary information, the cable operator shall produce the information. However, at the time the allegedly proprietary information is submitted, a cable operator may request that specific, identified portions of its response be treated as confidential and withheld from public disclosure. The request must state the reason why the information should be treated as proprietary and the facts that support those reasons. The request for confidentiality will be granted if the Village determines that the preponderance of the evidence shows that nondisclosure is consistent with the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. § 552. The Village shall place in a public file for inspection any decision that results in information being withheld. If the cable operator requests confidentiality and the request is denied: where the cable operator is proposing a rate increase, it may withdraw the proposal, in which case the allegedly proprietary information will be returned to it; or the cable operator may seek review within five working days of the denial in any appropriate forum. Release of the information will be stayed pending review.

- B. Any interested party may file a request to inspect material withheld as proprietary with the Village. The Village shall weigh the policy considerations favoring nondisclosure against the reasons cited for permitting inspection in light of the facts of the particular case. It will then promptly notify the requesting entity and the cable operator that submitted the information as to the disposition of the request. It may grant, deny or condition a request. The requesting party or the cable operator may seek review of the decision by filing an appeal with any appropriate forum. Disclosure will be stayed pending resolution of any appeal.
- C. The procedures set forth in this section shall be construed as analogous to and consistent with the rules of the FCC regarding requests for confidentiality including, without limitation, 47 CFR § 0.459.

§ 25-6. Filing of rates; public notice; initial review.

- A. Upon the filing of 10 copies of the schedule of rates or the proposed increase in rates pursuant to § 25-4A above, the Village Clerk shall publish a public notice in a newspaper of general circulation in the Village which shall state that:
 - (1) The filing has been received by the Village Clerk and (except those parts which may be withheld as proprietary) is available for public inspection and copying; and
 - (2) Interested parties are encouraged to submit written comments on the filing to the Village Clerk not later than seven days after the public notice is published.
- B. The Village Clerk shall give notice to the cable operator of the date, time, and place of the meeting at which the Village Council shall first consider the schedule of rates or the proposed increase. This notice shall be mailed by first-class mail at least three days before the meeting. In addition, if a written staff or consultant's report on the schedule of rates or the proposed increase is prepared for consideration of the Village Council, then the Village Clerk shall mail a copy of the report by first-class mail to the cable operator at least three days before the meeting at which the Village Council shall first consider the schedule of rates or the proposed increase.

§ 25-7. Tolling order.

After a cable operator has filed its existing schedule of rates or a proposed increase in these rates, the existing schedule of rates will remain in effect or the proposed increase in rates will become effective after 30 days from the date of filing under § 25-4A above unless the Village Council (or other properly authorized body or official) tolls the thirty-day deadline pursuant to 47 CFR § 76.933 by issuing a brief written order, by resolution or otherwise, within 30 days of the date of filing. The Village Council may toll the thirty-day deadline for an additional 90 days in cases not involving cost-of-service showings and for an additional 150 days in cases involving cost-of-service showings.

§ 25-8. Hearing on rates following tolling of deadline; public notice.

- A. If a written order has been issued pursuant to § 25-7 and 47 CFR § 76.933 to toll

the effective date of existing rates for the basic service tier and associated equipment or a proposed increase in these rates, the cable operator shall submit to the Village any additional information required or requested pursuant to § 25-4 of this chapter. In addition, the Village Council shall hold a public hearing to consider the comments of interested parties within the additional ninety-day or one-hundred-fifty-day period, as the case may be. The Village Clerk shall publish a public notice of the public hearing in a newspaper of general circulation within the Village which shall state:

- (1) The date, time, and place at which the hearing shall be held;
 - (2) That interested parties may appear in person, by agent, or by letter at such hearing to submit comments on or objections to the existing rates or the proposed increase in rates; and
 - (3) That copies of the schedule of rates or the proposed increase in rates and related information (except those parts which may be withheld as proprietary) are available for inspection or copying from the office of the Clerk.
- B. The public notice shall be published not less than 15 days before the hearing. In addition, the Village Clerk shall mail by first-class mail a copy of the public notice to the cable operator not less than 15 days before the hearing.

§ 25-9. Staff or consultant report; written response.

Following the public hearing, the Village President shall cause a report to be prepared for the Village Council which shall (based on the filing of the cable operator, the comments or objections of interested parties, information requested from the cable operator and its response, staff or consultant's review, and other appropriate information) include a recommendation for the decision of the Village Council pursuant to § 25-10. The Village Clerk shall mail a copy of the report to the cable operator by first-class mail not less than 20 days before the Village Council acts under § 25-10. The cable operator may file a written response to the report with the Village Clerk. If at least 10 copies of the response are filed by the cable operator with the Village Clerk within 10 days after the report is mailed to the cable operator, the Village Clerk shall forward it to the Village Council.

§ 25-10. Rate decisions and orders.

The Village Council shall issue a written order, by resolution or otherwise, which, in whole or in part, approves the existing rates for basic cable service and associated equipment or a proposed increase in such rates, denies the existing rates or proposed increase, orders a rate reduction, prescribes a reasonable rate, allows the existing rates or proposed increase to become effective subject to refund, or orders other appropriate relief, in accordance with the FCC rules. If the Village Council issues an order allowing the existing rates or proposed increase to become effective subject to refund, it shall also direct the cable operator to maintain an accounting pursuant to 47 CFR § 76.933. The order specified in this section shall be issued within 90 days of the tolling order under § 25-7 in all cases not involving a cost-of-service showing. The order shall be issued within 150 days after the tolling order under § 25-7 in all cases involving a cost-of-service

showing.

§ 25-11. Refunds; notice.

The Village Council may order a refund to subscribers as provided in 47 CFR § 76.942. Before the Village Council orders any refund to subscribers, the Village Clerk shall give at least seven days' written notice to the cable operator by first-class mail of the date, time, and place at which the Village Council shall consider issuing a refund order and shall provide an opportunity for the cable operator to comment. The cable operator may appear in person, by agent, or by letter at such time for the purpose of submitting comments to the Village Council.

§ 25-12. Written decisions; public notice.

Any order of the Village Council pursuant to § 25-10 or 25-11 shall be in writing, shall be effective upon adoption by the Village Council, and shall be deemed released to the public upon adoption. The Clerk shall publish a public notice of any such written order in a newspaper of general circulation within the Village which shall summarize the written decision, and state that copies of the text of the written decision are available for inspection or copying from the office of the Clerk. In addition, the Village Clerk shall mail a copy of the text of the written decision to the cable operator by first-class mail.

§ 25-13. Rules and regulations.

In addition to rules promulgated pursuant to § 25-4, the Village Council may, by resolution or otherwise, adopt rules and regulations for basic cable service rate regulation proceedings (including, without limitation, the conduct of hearings) consistent with the Act and the FCC rules.

§ 25-14. Failure to give notice.

The failure of the Village Clerk to give the notices or to mail copies of reports as required by this chapter shall not invalidate the decisions or proceedings of the Village Council so long as there is substantial compliance with this chapter.

§ 25-15. Additional hearings.

In addition to the requirements of this chapter, the Village Council may, in its sole discretion, hold additional public hearings upon such reasonable notice as the Village Council shall prescribe.

§ 25-16. Additional powers.

The Village shall possess all powers conferred by the Act, the FCC rules, the cable operator's franchise, and all other applicable law. The powers exercised pursuant to the Act, the FCC rules, and this chapter shall be in addition to powers conferred by law or otherwise. The Village may take any action not prohibited by the Act and the FCC rules to protect the public interest in connection with basic cable service rate regulation.

§ 25-17. Failure to comply; remedies.

The Village may pursue any and all legal and equitable remedies against the cable operator (including, without limitation, all remedies provided under a cable operator's franchise with the Village) for failure to comply with the Act, the FCC rules, any orders or determinations of the Village pursuant to this chapter, any requirements of this chapter, or any rules or regulations promulgated hereunder. Subject to applicable law, failure to comply with the Act, the FCC rules, any orders or determinations of the Village pursuant to this chapter, any requirements of this chapter, or any rules and regulations promulgated hereunder, shall also be sufficient grounds for revocation or denial of renewal of a cable operator's franchise.

§ 25-18. Conflicting provisions.

In the event of any conflict between this chapter and the provisions of any prior ordinance or any franchise, permit, consent agreement or other agreement with a cable operator, the provisions of this chapter shall control.