

**CCOM**

**CITIZENS COMMITTEE  
ON THE MEDIA**

**newsletter**

DECEMBER 1980

Cable television is coming to Chicago, and if it comes in right we all stand to gain. City officials can count on the added revenues a tax on the cable system will generate. Businesses can prepare for the day customers will be able to order goods over their television screens. Sports fans and movie buffs can gorge themselves on exclusive uninterrupted programming. Educators, health officials and others who provide needed services to the community can benefit from a revolutionary communications network linking schools, libraries, hospitals and daycare and senior centers. Skilled laborers and video artists can look forward to increased job opportunities.

## CABLE ACTION GROUP BEGINS

The outcome for cable television in Chicago depends to a great extent on whether or not the public is involved in the decision making throughout the franchise process. Without meaningful public participation from the very start, cable in Chicago could mean nothing more than a goldmine for the cable operators and movies and sports for the rich.

Most importantly, community organizations and not-for-profit special interest groups will be able to produce at no cost their own programs in studios all over the city to be aired on numerous public access channels.

On the other hand, Chicago could go the way of cities like Houston or San Francisco. Instead of implementing an exemplary cable system, the city could find itself hopelessly entangled in costly law suits and delays. Without a strong franchise subscribers might be forced to pay exorbitant fees, the city might never be adequately wired and facilities for access programming might never exist.

**Sun-Times** **Editorials**  
Saturday October 25, 1980 Page 31

*An independent newspaper, dedicated to championing individual freedom, to exposing abuse of the public trust and to fostering a healthy environment, a sound economy and a just society*

### Open up the cable panel

Enough units of government have had enough problems with cable TV franchises to show that politicians shouldn't be in sole control of the process.

In Johnstown, Pa., in fact, a politician was bribed by a cable executive in return for granting an exclusive franchise. Other problems have arisen in Houston; in Fairfax County, Va.; in Pittsburgh; in Minneapolis.

That's why the whole method must be protected from bribery and conflicts of interest. And why experts and concerned citizens should belong to the panel making most of the early—and crucial—decisions.

But this lesson is lost in Chicago.

That's the unfortunate message from the last few months of action (if you can call it that) by Mayor Byrne's special committee on cable TV, created after the mayor's hurryup order for a cable system last June.

Note well: The panel is not a City Council committee, though it is composed exclusively of Chicago aldermen. It is Byrne's baby. She has total say on its appointments. And none of its members is an expert on cable systems.

It is controlled, however, by one of the Council's most powerful and most suspicious figures: Ald. Edward R. Vrdolyak (10th). At best, he is an expert on making money.

And cable has to do with money—lots of it. The Chicago franchise will be worth millions—much more than the bribe-tainted one in Johnstown. But who are the watchdogs to watch the cable committee? Nobody. Despite pleas from the Chicago Citizens Cable Coalition, Byrne has steadfastly refused to "undercut" Vrdolyak by naming any experts or private citizens to her cable cabal.

This week, the coalition again sought a meeting with Byrne. She refused. It asked for some private expertise on the panel, plus pledges that members wouldn't have conflicts of interest. She again refused. So did Vrdolyak, cornered in a City Hall corridor.

In June, he said he was thinking of hiring an expert adviser for his panel. Apparently he's still thinking, after four public hearings detailed the complex issues at stake. Byrne should remove that burden from Vrdolyak and broaden the panel herself.

For the past several months, CCOM has been hard at work developing public awareness of cable issues. The results of our efforts are encouraging. With over 100 persons and 30 organizations active so far, the Chicago Citizens Cable Coalition has been launched!

The future of the coalition is promising. Funds are now available to implement a variety of projects, including:

- \* neighborhood meetings to discuss how cable can best serve community interests,
- \* a city-wide conference on cable early next year,
- \* a monthly newsletter to keep our members up to date on the city's franchise process,
- \* developing a cable information center for public use

We also will continue to meet with city officials and cable company representatives to negotiate ways the system can best serve the public.

By introducing the coalition in this newsletter, we hope to spark further interest among our friends so that they and/or their organizations will join us and help build for Chicago the finest cable system in the world. ☐

# PRESS FOR EQUAL ROLE

Last June 10, Mayor Byrne named ten aldermen to a special committee on cable television. Their task, she said, was to come up with a cable ordinance in "60 to 90 days." Byrne's announcement took the city by surprise. While cable is spreading rapidly throughout the suburbs, it's been eleven years since the city has considered it. CCOM, however, has been active in the suburban franchise proceedings.

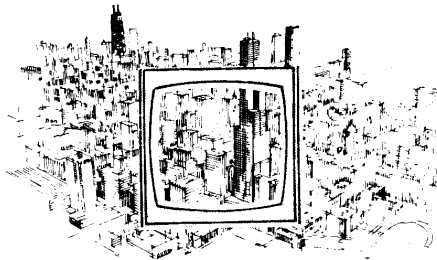
In response to Byrne's action, CCOM sponsored the city's first public forum on cable television. Cable experts, Sue Miller Buske from the National Federation of Local Cable Programmers (NFLCP), and William Grams from the Northwest Municipal Conference (a group of 20 suburbs jointly considering franchise bids), sat on a panel with Aldermen Stone (50), Orr (49) and Davis (29). The panel discussed with the 200 people who attended how cable could serve the public interest, and the various and often complicated steps of the franchise process. Both Buske and Grams scoffed at the idea that a cable ordinance could be written in 90 days.

At the end of the evening the forum passed resolutions directing CCOM to organize a citizens coalition that would press for representation on the Mayor's committee, official public guidelines regulating the franchise process and further public educational meetings on cable.

In August, the first general meeting of the coalition was held. A steering committee and education committee were formed. One month later, on September 5, the coalition testified before the committee at the first public hearing on cable. Our testimony centered on two key issues: broadening the committee of ten aldermen to include an equal number of community representatives, and a city-wide program of

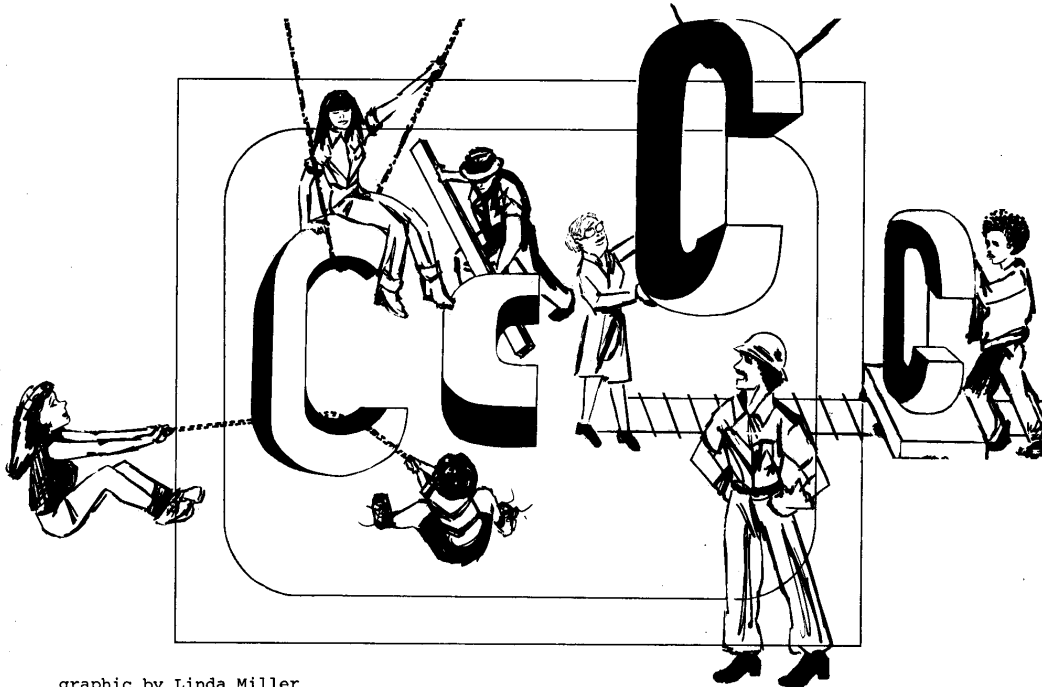
public education on cable to be followed by additional city-wide hearings throughout the franchise proceedings. Other members of the coalition representing their individual organizations also testified.

The coalition continued to press for equal representation on the cable committee. Our next effort focused on the mayor, since, as a Sun-Times editorial put it, the committee is "Byrne's baby. She has total say on its appointments." Our first request for a meeting with Byrne was turned down. On October 23, several members of the coalition gathered at the mayor's office. Again, we were refused a meeting. At that time we delivered to Byrne a list of individuals who were willing and qualified to serve on her cable committee. We also urged the mayor to require all present and future members of the committee to sign a cable pledge disavowing all conflicts of interest. Again we stressed the need for widespread educational meetings as well as official guidelines regulating cable company lobbyists. To date we have received no response from Byrne. ●



## the coalition believes that...

1. The Mayor's Committee on Cable Television must have new members, equal in number to the present political appointments, so that the interests of community groups will be represented.
2. There must be cable educational meetings throughout the city, and then ordinance hearings throughout the city, before any ordinance is drafted.
3. All committee members should be required to sign a pledge disavowing all conflicts of interest.
4. All neighborhoods must be wired without discrimination in scheduling or the quality of equipment.
5. Citizens must have free use of well-equipped and well-staffed studios around the city to produce local programming for numerous access channels.
6. Local user cooperatives should be favored for franchises.
7. City ownership must be considered as a real option.
8. Trafficking in franchises must be prohibited.
9. There must be a strong and broadly representative regulating body to enforce the franchise.
10. Policies must be developed so that financially hard-pressed families will have access to cable services.



graphic by Linda Miller

## how you can help

NOW IS THE OPPORTUNE time to shape future communications systems to serve all of the public. A year from now ordinances will have been passed, deals made, and franchises awarded. Billions of dollars and decades of social power will have been negotiated. Reforms will be hard to win.

The Chicago Citizens Cable Coalition has suggestions for your involvement now. The key factor in deciding on a level of involvement will be the amount of time you have available:

- If you have little or no time available, you can still endorse the coalition's work, and get the endorsements of organizations to which you belong. These endorsements are vital to gaining both the public's support and the politicians' respect! You can also become a paid member of the coalition, and get the organizations to which you belong to become paid members.
- If you have enough time, you can attend coalition meetings, arrange speaking appearances for coalition representatives, and join our committees when they negotiate with the other Players (Cf. pg. 5).
- And if you are an avid citizen-advocate who will cancel other important obligations to make the necessary time, you can volunteer for the coalition's steering committee or education committee.

All levels of participation are important. Please return the coupon on page 5 as soon as you can. Thank you.

### cable's uses

Free community access.  
 Local productions,  
 Continuous news channel.  
 Continuous local news.  
 School lessons, all levels.  
 Library services.  
 Hospital interconnections.  
 Press conferences.  
 Commercials.  
 Governmental channels.  
 Police surveillance.  
 Market tickers.  
 Court proceedings.  
 News wire text.  
 Continuous weather news.  
 Background music & pictures.

### developments elsewhere:

Winnetka: The village has owned its electric utility, and is now considering municipal ownership of cable. There are clear financial benefits; and municipal ownership may be the best way of all to ensure maximum public benefits.

Detroit: A consumer co-op was formed, got funds from the new federal co-op loan program, and got a franchise.

San Francisco is suing its franchisee for failure to wire poorer neighborhoods.

Chicago's North and West Suburbs: Twenty-one suburbs joined together for a common study of cable. Now they are dealing with companies individually or in small groups.

Milwaukee: Common Council members attended an excellent conference in Madison in August, sponsored by the National Federation of Local Cable Programmers. (No Chicago aldermen were there.)

Traffic bulletins.  
 Transportation schedules.  
 Personal mail.  
 Business mail.  
 Classified ads.  
 Consumer information.  
 Banking.  
 Shopping.  
 Business news.  
 Meter reading.  
 Remote control of utilities.  
 Fire, intrusion, medical alarms.  
 Extra radio stations.  
 Program listings & promotions.  
 Public service announcements.  
 Free speech messages; editorials.  
 Other cities' local stations.  
 Movie 'packages.'  
 Encyclopedic information retrieval.  
 Picture phoning.  
 Picture phone conferences.  
 Intercom & baby-watching.  
 Data banks.  
 Porno movies.  
 Data about individual users.  
 Political & opinion polling.  
 Bulletin boards.  
 Market studies.  
 Independent art.  
 Real estate listings.  
 Reruns.  
 Syndicated programs.  
 Business computer interconnects.  
 Home computer interconnects.  
 Sports-only channels.  
 Religious channels.  
 All broadcast tv stations without interference.

Evanston: Evaluations of nine proposals are due soon from the respected Cable Television Information Center consultants. Meanwhile, an official task force is being flown to cities where applicants have operating systems to demonstrate.

Boulder, Colorado: When the city limited the cable company's expansion, because of poor service, the company filed a suit.

Houston: Local powers divided the city five ways, and got the franchises for themselves. At least two have now sold out to national cable companies for enormous profits.

New York: Manhattan has had cable for more than a decade. Now franchises may be given for the other four burroughs. The New York Times endorses a study that would require 70 channel capacity, 8 channels of public access, good community production facilities, two-way capabilities, and a large city staff to ensure that companies fulfill their contracts. The Times says the selection process must be "open every step of the way."

Rebecca, Saskatchewan: A local co-op owns the cable system and provides uncommonly good local services.

Boston: An official panel composed of citizens from many areas has been planning for over a year. Large public meetings have been sponsored around the city by a cable coalition.

Minneapolis: The city council passed conflicting motions awarding the single franchise to different companies. Several suits charge that aldermen were bribed.

Oak Park: Some citizens are questioning village officials favorable treatment of Cablevision. The franchise tax rate is tiny; and new zoning laws will allow a satellite and microwave antenna 'farm' on land that was supposed to be a buffer between industry and residences. Cablevision expects to get more than half of Chicago area municipalities to award it franchises.

Berwyn may give all cable rights to the local newspaper owner.

Pittsburgh: The citizens advisory group decided on Time-Life's ATC subsidiary, which would have given free hook-up and ten channels to every home. But the city council voted for Warner-Amex (Warner Communications & American Express), which had 'rented' 17 local minority groups with an offer of 20% franchise equity. ATC is suing and says minorities really have no control because of 'trust' clauses.

Wilmette gave its franchise to a friend of some trustees.

Skokie is due now for a report from Cable Television Information Center.

Cincinnati has a promise of \$7,000,000 in local origination facilities and is still negotiating.

Park Ridge is having cable hearings.

Listed below are the coalition's recommendations for equal membership on the Mayor's Committee on Cable Television:

Joan Brown, dir. program services, YWCA  
 Milt Cohen, community organizer  
 Dr. Robert Cohen, Committee to Save Cook County Hospital  
 Jim Calao, Chicago Citizens Cable Coalition  
 Karin English, exec. dir., MultiCultural Television Council  
 Ron Freund, midwest dir., Clergy and Laity Concerned  
 Bob Gallie, exec. dir., Citizens Committee on the Media  
 Bill Kelley, co-chairperson, Illinois Gay Rights Task Force  
 Charles Knox, National Conference of Black Lawyers  
 Harold Lee, convener, Taskforce on Community Broadcasting  
 Henrietta Moore, Gray Panthers  
 Michael Pratt, broadcast engineer, NABET  
 Gary Rowe, communications director, Church Federation of Greater Chicago  
 Dr. Maria Rudisch, director, South Shore Seniors and Neighborhood Center  
 Carlos Quintanilla, West Town Concerned Citizens  
 Dick Simpson, former alderman, professor of political science, UICC  
 Charles Williams, International Association of Machinists

# OTHER MEDIA NEWS

--The Center for New Television, parent of the Chicago Editing Center, is trying to get long-dormant channel 20 on the air, with plenty of programming by local independent producers. The colleges who hold the license have shown interest in the Center's well-developed plans for a partnership.

--The Chicago Educational Television Association's (WTTW, WFMT, Chicago magazine, etc.) latest venture in commercial publishing, The Dial, has troubles. The U.S. House has passed a bill which would cut off Corporation for Public Broadcasting money from stations that sell magazine ads, even indirectly.

--New low-power television stations will soon be allowed. Local groups (yours?) with only a few thousand dollars could become broadcasters. But Sears and other large corporations already have

plans to get the licenses. With obligations to provide local programming and to limit commercials likely to be dropped, the stations would be perfect for merchandisers. But we expect that local groups would get preference in the licensing process.

--Broadcasting 'deregulation' bills, which would surrender public rights to broadcasters, have failed for now. CCOM and citizens groups around the country have fought the bills. We expect new bills with the same thrust to be introduced in both houses of Congress in 1981.

--Meanwhile, the Federal Communications Commission is proposing to allow broadcasters to get their licenses renewed by postcard, instead of having to submit information to prove they are serving their local communities' interests.

## the players

### Coalition Steering Committee

Milt Cohen  
 Robert Cohen  
 Jim Colao  
 Coleman Conley  
 Margaret Daley  
 Ron Freund  
 Bob Gallie  
 Gary Hubbard  
 Bill Kelley  
 Suzanne Kordesh  
 Susan Kryczka  
 Cynthia Lee  
 Harold Lee  
 Henrietta Moore  
 Morris Shanfield  
 Maria Rudisch  
 Sigismund Walesa  
 Robert Washington  
 R.G. Wells  
 Marc Zalkin

### Mayor Byrne's Committee on Cable Television

Ald. Edward Vrdolyak(10), chairman  
 Ald. Fred B. Roti(1)  
 Ald. Eugene Sawyer(6)  
 Ald. Edward M. Burke(14)  
 Ald. Frank J. Brady(15)  
 Ald. Walter Shumpert(24)  
 Ald. George J. Hagopian(30)  
 Ald. Terry M. Gabinski(32)  
 Ald. Wilson Frost(34)  
 Ald. Bernard L. Stone(50)

### Cable company lobbyists

Jay McMullen  
 Jack Sperling, advisor to the mayor  
 40 other members of the City Council

This is a  personal /  organizational endorsement of the efforts of The Chicago Citizens Cable Coalition.

Personal membership (Enclose \$5).  Organizational membership (\$15).

We would like coalition spokespersons to address our group (Attach contact-person's name and phone number).

Please notify us/me of cable coalition meetings and actions.

I would like to serve on the  steering  education committee.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Organization \_\_\_\_\_

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# CCOM PUBLICITY GUIDE

Media Access for Chicago Area  
Non-profit Groups

- Produced by Citizens Committee on the Media.
- Full of practical advice and important information to help you make the best use of local media.
- Articles on: Media relations tips for organizations. Public ownership of the airwaves. Cable communications. A history of Chicago radio stations.
- Plus: Sample press releases and public service announcements. Suggested reference books on publicity. An employment profile of Chicago broadcast stations. And photocopy masters for making inexpensive media labels.

BONUS: While supplies last, you can also receive at no additional charge:

Talk Show Guide. Information about call-in programs.

Collective Request for Airtime. Local groups seeking airtime and production assistance from broadcasters.

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_____	Non-profit group price	@\$ 5	_____
_____	Group		
_____	Address		
_____	Phone		
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_____	Collective Request for Airtime	n.c.	
_____	Media labels, 7 pgs., peel-off.	@\$ 3	
	Postage & Handling		<u>1.00</u>
	TOTAL		_____

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