



City of Cambridge

18.

IN CITY COUNCIL

May 18, 1992

COUNCILLOR WOLF
COUNCILLOR DUEHAY
COUNCILLOR WALSH

WHEREAS: The City Council has received the attached letter from a resident regarding the impending scrambling of channels on Cambridge cable; and

WHEREAS: This procedure has never been discussed with the City Council and, it seems, would cause extraordinary inconvenience to customers; now therefore be it

ORDERED: The Cable Committee of the City Council be requested to take up this matter and that the City Manager see that the Committee receive all relevant information so that the Committee can take whatever action is appropriate.

In City Council May 18, 1992.

Adopted by the affirmative vote of nine members.

Attest:- John E. Flynn, Deputy City Clerk.

A true copy;

ATTEST:-

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John E. Flynn". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "J" and "F".

John E. Flynn, Deputy City Clerk

275 Walden St.
Cambridge, MA 02138
9 May 1992

Mr. Phil Ripa
General Manager
Continental Cablevision of Cambridge
88 Sherman St.
Cambridge, MA 02140

Dear Mr. Ripa,

I happened to notice on my latest bill that you plan to scramble essentially all the channels beginning in June. Aside from this being a pretty poor way to notify your customers of this (many people will be shocked on June 8!) I would like to strongly protest this action. I feel strongly enough about this to consider cancelling cable service if you go ahead with this action. I had a long discussion with operations manager Scott Nickerson about this last Friday and wanted to put in writing my strong opposition to this action. I feel this way for the following reasons:

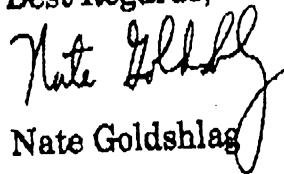
- In my opinion, it is outrageous to scramble channels which can readily be received with an antenna! I was upset when I discovered that many channels which you get with even the most basic service were scrambled, forcing one to tune from the cable box for these channels, but to scramble over-the-air channels is even more ridiculous. Most cable companies have no scrambling of basic channels.
- I currently have a splitter on the cable, with one output going to the cable box and one to my VCR. I'm sure many other people use this configuration. I usually watch the nonscrambled channels, and the tuner in my VCR gives a significantly better picture and sound than the tuner in your cable box. I have had about 4 different boxes in here over the years due to problems with them, and it is not the particular box I have now that is responsible for this. My VCR just has a better tuner, and you will force me to get worse reception if you scramble the basic channels. My main reason for getting cable was better reception!
- If one tunes from the VCR as I do, one can use the programming of the VCR to tape programs on different channels easily. If you scramble the channels this becomes impossible. Scott claimed that the cable box can be programmed, but given the fact that the vast majority of people can't even figure out how to program their VCRs I would guess that the only people able to program their cable boxes have PhDs from MIT. In effect, programming multiple channel programs will become impossible. Even programming single channel programs would mean setting the cable box on the channel desired in advance, a real pain in the neck.
- It will become impossible to tape one program and watch another if you scramble all the channels. To do this one would have to rent a second cable box from you. In addition, the people who have wired the cable to a second

television will suddenly find lots of snow on June 8 on their TVs. They will also need to rent a second cable box from you to receive anything on their second televisions. I suspect this may be the real reason for scrambling the channels — more revenue from renting cable boxes.

- You give contradictory reasons for scrambling the channels. You state on the cable bill that it is "an effort to reduce unauthorized reception of channels and to ensure that only legitimate customers like yourself receive programming through the cable system." Yet there is a simple solution to this — if people cancel cable service or move, disconnect the cable from that house or apartment. Yet that would cost Continental Cablevision money, so instead you are penalizing and inconveniencing all your other customers. On the other hand, Scott Nickerson told me that the reason was that when people put splitters on the cable and wire their houses, there is electromagnetic leakage that causes you problems with the FCC. Yet other cable companies in the country manage to deal with the leakage problem without scrambling channels, so I'm sure you too could figure out a solution to this problem. What is the real reason for scrambling over-the-air channels? Again revenue from renting cable boxes comes to mind.

I would like to urge other customers to register their protests with you and with the cable subcommittee of the Cambridge City Council. Hopefully you will listen to reason from your customers, otherwise you may quickly find me a former customer.

Best Regards,



Nate Goldschlag

cc: *Cambridge Chronicle*
Scott Nickerson, Operations Manager of Continental Cablevision
Councillor William Walsh, Cambridge City Council Cable Subcommittee
Councillor Walter Sullivan, Cambridge City Council Cable Subcommittee
Councillor Alice Wolf, Cambridge City Council Cable Subcommittee

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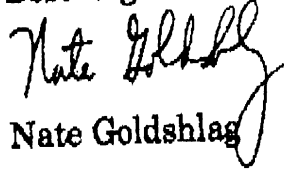
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CONSENT ORDER #18

Duehy, Walsh F-199
Councillor Wolf re: scrambling of channels
on Cambridge Cable.

In City Council,

May 18, 1992

Order adopted