

Cable TV Operating Costs & Issues

The current cable TV landscape is that cable TV is massively declining. It's currently at subscription levels not seen since the mid-80's and providers are not even selling it as an option as they have been replacing it with streaming services.

Timing options for ending cable TV broadcasts:

1. Ending the operation at the end of 2025

To maximize the amount of fund balance retention in 2025, Council could end cable television operation at the end of 2025. This would save \$2,445 as the City would not have to renew its annual Cablecast subscription for video distribution services.

This would limit the amount of time to notify residents that they no longer will be able to watch Council meetings on cable TV.

This option would mean delivering short notice to cable TV viewers that the operation will no longer be supported.

2. Ending the operation mid-2026

This option does not maximize financial value as the City's annual Cablecast subscription for video distribution services along with the remaining captioning service purchased in 2025 would be paid for. The City would pay a full year to Cablecast for a half-year of use. Additional captioning may be required to purchase to fulfill a recent FCC mandate requiring all programming be captioned starting in April 2026.

This option would give time to get the word out and try to get cable TV viewers to utilize the City website.

3. Ending the operation at the end of 2026

To maximize the effective use of spent funds stemming from the City's annual Cablecast subscription for video distribution services along with the remaining captioning service from a 2025 purchase, the City could continue cable TV operation until the end of 2026.

This option allows plenty of time to deliver notice to those who primarily utilize cable TV to watch Council meetings.

Replacement options for ending cable TV broadcasts:

1. Streaming and/or video on demand (VOD) of City content only

City administration and staff prefer to replace broadcasting to cable TV with an online video on demand of official City content. The City and its cable program providers are already maintaining online VOD libraries, and many have included online streaming. The plan would be to at least continue recording of City

meetings and make them available for viewing on the City website. Utilizing services like Teams, Zoom or YouTube, staff would be able to record more boards, committees, and commissions without significantly increasing workload by training liaisons to record the meetings they participate in. The video file then can be loaded to YouTube and linked to the City's website. The previous cable program providers would continue to produce programs they share online.

Benefits:

- Low-cost, less staff time needed
- Leverage a growing and long-term viable media platform
- Relatively easy switchover – already utilizing YouTube to add City meetings to the City website

Disadvantages:

- No “one-stop shop” for local video content
- Consistency and technical hiccups during early implementation
 - Staff liaisons to various boards, committees, and commissions would be trained to film their respective meetings.

2. Low-power television (LPTV) directly replacing cable TV

The FCC will be accepting LPTV applications beginning January 21, 2026. LPTV is over the air and would require heavy investment in a transmitter along with residents purchasing an antenna to make use of LPTV. This option would also require the City to purchase additional captioning services for broadcasting of all programming aired – not just City meetings on LPTV. Regular maintenance and upgrades of equipment would require ongoing funding even if cable franchise fees go away. The City would need to have staff to maintain and program the LPTV channel.

Benefits:

- Contribute towards local media outlet for Columbus
- City has multiple staff that can leverage experience in cable TV

Disadvantages:

- High initial cost and maintenance
 - New broadcast unit needed in 2028 and maintained annually along with a captioning service for all programs aired.
 - New infrastructure, site selection, etc.
- No guaranteed cable franchise fees funding or community support
- Subject to minimum program-related regulations