

The future of technology in Fountain Lakes

Our community is facing a crossroads in the next year....plotting the future for how we will provide technology to our residents.

We currently have a contract with Comcast that will expire in 2018. The features of that contract provide no discounts or “bulk” charges for our residents. Instead, each quarter, Comcast pays the Fountain Lakes Community Association for access to the community, which is part of the current contract. Our residents pay standard retail fees charged by Comcast to any customers in the area. The amount of the rebate paid to us varies by the number of customers, but usually generates around \$6,000 each quarter. This payment goes into our general reserve account and is then used for such things as infrastructure upkeep and repair.

Comcast currently offers telephone service with varying options for long distance, various TV channel line-ups that escalate in price based on channel content and internet speeds in the 10 to 20 MBS (megabits per second) range. The internet speeds are probably adequate for standard email usage but are slow for anyone working with video content. Residents tell us that when everyone comes home from work around 6 PM internet usage peaks and service slows to a crawl. Our contract with Comcast is up for re-negotiation in 2018. The terms call for Comcast to be able to renew unless we give them notice that we plan to end it.

A year ago, we began a process of examining alternatives to Comcast. We looked at Fiber Optic companies, Centurylink and continuing with Comcast. A committee was put together and spend a considerable amount of time meeting with vendors, examining options and debating the issues. This culminated in a meeting with the Presidents’ Council where we presented what we had learned. After some discussion, the Presidents voted unanimously to table the discussion since the Comcast contract still had two years to go.

Now that a year has gone by, we are faced with a running clock. Our preliminary discussions with alternative vendors tells us that, were we to change providers, there is at least a year’s lead time to get the new service up and running. For example, one fiber optic vendor is not taking orders for any new service for all of 2017 because of business they already have on the table.

Future Options

The infrastructure in Fountain Lakes is approaching 30 years old. It barely supports the current technology that we are using. So, any capability enhancement is going to involve upgrades to the infrastructure to be able to carry the demand that we anticipate going forward.

So far, in our preliminary discussions, prospective vendors will gladly upgrade the facilities but that comes at a significant cost and they are only willing to go forward with these upgrades if the community has sufficient interest to warrant the cost.

In many cases, this would involve the vendors billing the Association for the monthly charges and then having the Association bill the end users. The discussions generally begin with the provider requiring 100% participation of users, meaning that everyone in Fountain Lakes would pay a monthly fee regardless of whether they were using the capability or not. While we have, with some effort, gotten some agreement to phase in the billing, it still would require significant participation leading to 100% over time.

What do you get for that investment? Generally the offerings include substantial TV channel coverage and the ability to upgrade to some of the more advanced offerings including movies and enhanced sport coverage (e.g. NFL, Big 10, SEC). The internet capability would include speeds approaching and, in some cases, exceeding 100 megabytes per second. Telephone capability can be added at fairly attractive rates. The numbers we have seen so far are in the \$60-\$65 a month for TV and internet with the phone charges in the \$15-\$20 range. This compares to the \$150-\$175 per month that most of us are paying now.

We fully recognize that we have a variety of providers now active in our community....Direct TV, Dish TV, Centurylink and, of course, Comcast. We also recognize that not everyone uses an internet connection and many residents no longer have a landline phone and rely strictly on their cell phones.

So, here's the reason for this article: The committee spent a significant amount of time researching this a year ago only to have it shelved for the past year. We need to know whether our residents have any interest in pursuing this upgrade in capability before we expend more ergs of effort chasing it.

The options as we see it now are

1. Fiber Optics. Summit Broadband has capability on US41 at our front entrance so bringing it into the community would involve branching off of capability that is already close by. Incidentally, Marsh Landing next door, has signed on with Summit and appears to be happy with it at this point.
2. Cable. Since we already have a contract with Comcast, this would involve renegotiating an agreement going forward from 2018. This could range from the existing arrangement where our residents pay standard rates and the Association

- gets a rebate, to an arrangement for sharply discounted user rates with an accompanying requirement for exclusive or close-to-exclusive participation.
3. DSL. Centurylink already provides service in the community over “twisted pair” telephone lines. There is some question whether they would be willing to upgrade the infrastructure to accommodate the much faster internet speeds being offered by the other vendors but it is worth looking into.
 4. High speed internet capability to the home with no “end user” TV or phone service offered. The theory behind this option is that the future of TV delivery is heading for high speed delivery over the internet....using “ala cart” vendors like Hulu, Netflix, and numerous others that seem to be popping up weekly. This is relatively new in concept and would require more research but, given where the industry is headed, we would be remiss in not looking into it.

So where do we go from here?

Before the committee spends any more time on this issue, we want to understand the “grass roots” interest in pursuing the revamped capability. Therefore we have included a questionnaire here in the flash that we would like to have you fill out and return to the office. You can also call it up on our website www.fountainlakesestero.com or on our Facebook page.

The important point to emphasize here is that we need your feedback to determine how much effort we want to put into this as it will require a significant amount of time invested by volunteers if we’re going to pull this off.

Our commitment to you is that, once we have the results of the survey, we will be back to you so you know how the community feels about this important issue.

Fountain Lakes Technology Survey

Please check one:

1. Leave well-enough alone. Keep the current offering in place. I am unwilling to pay any incremental monthly fee, even if it means better capability at a reduced rate for service.

2. I am interested in upgrading our technology and would be willing to invest in enhanced capability in order to experience better capability and a reduced monthly rate for service.

Please check appropriate box or boxes:

I currently use the following vendor for TV, internet and Phone

Comcast

Centurylink

Direct TV

Dish TV

No landline (use cell phone only)

Please check the appropriate box:

If you expressed an interest in upgrading our technology in the first question above, let us know your primary interest:

Fiber to the home;

Use of existing vendors for cable/internet;

Getting high speed internet to the home and leaving TV/Internet selection to each homeowner.

Homeowner Name: _____

Address: _____