

City cable station will air recall ads

PINOLE: Attorney says federal guidelines, station by-laws mandate equal access for both sides

Contra Costa Times

January 8, 2008

By Tom Lochner

Pinole officials have reversed course, agreeing after initial refusals to air on the city's cable television channel a campaign video by sponsors of a recall against two City Council members.

Recall sponsors welcomed the turnaround, announced in a letter late last week from interim City Manager Charlie Long to Councilman Stephen Tilton, Councilwoman Maria Alegria and Jeff Rubin of Concerned Citizens of Pinole. But recall group member Cindy Trego noted that by the time of the scheduled taping early next week, Alegria and Tilton will have had about two weeks of uncontested, multiple daily airings of their own campaign tapes, in which they slam the recall backers as hateful, vicious liars with personal axes to grind.

On Jan. 2, Pinole Cable TV Channel 26 began airing the Alegria and Tilton videos, along with those of the candidates who would replace them if voters opt to recall the councilmembers Feb. 5. Roy Swearingen or Steve Denlis are vying to replace Alegria, and Virginia Fujita is campaigning to fill Tilton's seat. Also airing are the videos of Ivette Ricco and Debbie Long, who are competing for the council seat vacated when David Cole resigned in August.

Charlie Long initially held that the broadcasts should be limited to people named on the ballot, including Alegria and Tilton, whose names appear as part of a yes-or-no recall question. That left out the yes-on-recall side.

But Chief Assistant City Attorney Mike Riback said that federal guidelines on public access, as well as Pinole Cable TV's own by-laws, require that the city provide access to both sides of the recall.

"We asked for this opportunity in December in the spirit of fairness and equal time for all viewpoints to be heard, but we were denied," Rubin said. "We're just happy to get the air time.

"This is the right and democratic thing to do, and we are looking forward to getting our message out to the public."

Each side will have the opportunity to tape a five-minute spot and must select a representative by Friday, Long said.

The pro-and-con recall spots, the previously taped candidate statements and tapings of two forums Thursday — one for the recall proponents and opponents, the other for candidates and incumbents — will be made available on demand via links on the city's Web site, Long said. There also will be a separate Web page for the Feb. 5 local election.

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