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DATE: October 30, 2009

TO: Lonnie R. Robbins  
Chief Administrative Officer

FROM: Lori Sherwood,  
Cable Administrator, Department of Communications and Technology Services

SUBJECT: Council Bill No. 60-2009

For the health, welfare and safety of Howard County residents, I write to request that the County Council approve Council Bill 60-2009 to amend the Howard County Cable Television Systems Franchise Act.

Since January of 2009, the Howard County Office of Cable Administration has received at least 75 complaints regarding unburied cable lines in Howard County. We receive more complaints about unburied drops than any other category of complaint.

In many instances, the complaint we receive is the same: the “temporary” line put in by the cable provider, has been left unburied for 6 months to even a year or longer despite many calls to the provider by a resident or community member to request that the temporary line be buried. Sometimes these lines are strung through trees and shrubbery, strung along multiple driveways and walkways, and strung across sheds and housing complexes and are hazardous for residents. In addition to some of the individual complaints, we also receive calls and emails every week from community liaisons and home owner association members regarding multiple instances of unburied drops, broken equipment and such in their communities.

I have attached several photographs showing examples of the types of complaints described. All of these examples are resolved.

Despite the best efforts of Cable Administration to resolve these complaints, at times it takes 2-4 weeks to 2-4 months to resolve an unburied drop complaint.

Over the last few months, Cable Administration has engaged in many discussions with Comcast and Verizon regarding the urgency of resolving these matters.

In September, Howard County Cable Administration convened multiple in-person meetings with the cable providers to specifically discuss unburied drops and other customer service issues. During

these meetings, we discussed the process including the need for permits in some instances, the reason for the temporary drops and the complaints we received. This is what I learned according to the providers:

- The permitting process for unburied drops including notifying Miss Utility and requesting permits through Howard County is generally completed in 2-4 days or less;
- In 90% of the time, unburied drops are buried in less than 7 days;

Despite these meetings, Howard County Cable Administration is still receiving complaints.

For the health, welfare and safety of our residents, I believe that we need to amend our code to clarify certain maintenance requirements; to allow for the use of temporary lines under certain conditions within a certain period of time; and to prohibit certain temporary lines and to provide for civil penalties in some cases.

The code amendments before you are reasonable based on the information and processes provided to us by the cable providers. The code amendments are enforceable and provide necessary protections to our communities.

There is minimal fiscal impact to the County.

Therefore, I recommend that the County Council approve Council Bill 60-2009.











09/04/2009



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