

# Commissioners

Continued from Page One

nance.

"No business we do is written in stone. I don't think we'll change the world in two months, Commissioner Larry Huffman said.

Commissioner Campbell agreed, saying, "It's sort of silly, really. I can't see purpose; most of the people say it is foolish."

Burke County commissioners had little problem voting unanimously to approve a telecommunications ordinance drafted by Action Audits, the consulting firm hired by the county to give the county more power in negotiating with cable providers.

Falcon Cable TV's regional manager, Larry Ott, expressed concerns about the ordinance, stating among other disputes, that the ordinance's reference to a daily fine of \$500 per offense/per day is "onerous and excessive."

Chairman Simpson retorted, "If anything, the \$500 per day per offense charge is too light. With all the stories of long delays and cable out all weekend, if all I've got is snow, I say \$500 per customer is appropriate."

The county has set up two public meetings to hear citizen input on the cable TV issue, one at 7 p.m. Sept. 22 at Liberty Middle School, and the other meeting at 7 p.m. Sept. 24 at Heritage Middle School.

Simpson said in his chairman's comments that residents were concerned about the length of time required to settle the issue between the county and Falcon.

He said that due process must be

followed. Under federal regulations, documentation must occur before a county can officially remove an inept cable provider. The public meetings are part of the county's attempt to show evidence of unsatisfactory performance by Falcon.

He said that if the process was rushed, it could put the county in a losing position in a federal court, which could give way to a 20-year contract with Falcon.

Action Audits anticipates a minimum of six months before the franchise issue is settled.

The commissioners also voted to extend the contract with Falcon until Dec. 31.

Attorney Dan Kuehnert advised that the safest route to take in light of the legal problems was to extend the contract until the county's cable counsel could determine if other options are viable.

On other matters, the commission agreed to:

- Accept a bid by Bliss Products and Services, a North Carolina company, to provide East Burke Park with park and recreational furnishings at a cost of \$33,458.

- Accept the concept of leasing office space at the former BB&T building in downtown Valdese to house a branch of the Department of Social Services and the Health Department's Home Health section. This would free up space at the Parker Road facility. Estimated cost for improvements at the Valdese building is \$55,000.

The county manager will work to finalize the plan, presenting it to

the commissioners at a later date for approval.

- Approve operation agreements for community development block grant water lines to serve Icard Township Corp. and Triple Community Water Corp. service areas.

- Approve a resolution authorizing Burke County Public Library Inc. to serve as an agent for the county and city in its main library renovation project.

Steve Farlow, library director, told the commissioners that during renovation, beginning in May 1999, the library would be closed for approximately 15 to 16 weeks. The library staff is currently seeking an alternate site to temporarily house its facilities during the construction period.

Commissioners also heard an update from Judy Francis of the community development department regarding the possibility of the county assuming operation of recreational facilities along the shorelines of lakes James and Rhodhiss.

Approximately 180 acres are available to the county in the Linville Access Area and 127 acres are available in the Rhodhiss Access Area at no cost to the county. Four other smaller sites are also available on the two lakes.

However, documented plans for expanded facilities at the recreational areas must be made and submitted to Duke Power before June 2000. The county must express an interest in acquiring management of the areas by letter to Duke Power no later than Dec.

31.

Francis and her staff are in the process of evaluating the sites, referencing current conditions and Duke's ongoing projects at the six locations.

Duke Power is making the properties available to the county as part of its compliance procedures with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. The sites must be available for public recreation at least some of the time at "no cost" and there must be a documented need for recreational facilities in the area.

Should the county decline involvement in the recreational facilities, Duke Power will offer the properties to commercial developers. Commercial developers would also be required to provide recreational facilities; however, they would not be required to designate 100 percent of the properties for public use.

The commission also heard an appeal for applications from the public to serve on several county boards. The county is seeking members of the community interested in performing civic duties to apply for vacancies on numerous boards, from the Criminal Justice Partnership Advisory Committee, where four vacancies exist, to the Council for Women, where an opportunity exists for five volunteers to lead the community in this endeavor.

Persons interested in applying for the appointments are asked to call the city manager's office at 439-4340 for an application.