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Towamencin Township (Montgomery Co.) supervisors have added their voice to the list of local municipalities speaking out against a proposed state law. The supervisors voted



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unanimously last week to formally oppose House Bill 1620, proposed legislation that would set out new rules for where communication companies can place their infrastructure. "The board authorized a resolution essentially saying they're opposed to House Bill 1620, and I've sent that to our state representative," said Township Manager Rob Ford.

House Bill 1620, introduced to the state Legislature last summer, would amend the state's Wireless Broadband Collocation Act of 2012 in several ways the township says would be harmful. Five specific aspects of the bill could prove problematic for local municipalities, according to Ford: Municipalities would lose most of their ability to regulate wireless towers and antennae in public rights-of-way, the fees that could be collected for them would be

limited, the public would be excluded from the approval process, municipalities would be prohibited from requiring standard legal guarantees, and contractors would be allowed to submit up to 50 applications in a single bundle, with limited time for review.

Several local municipalities have already formally declared their opposition to the bill, including **North Wales Borough in October** and **Upper Gwynedd Township in December**, and the bill is currently before the state House Consumer Affairs Committee. Ford said in addition to contacting state Rep. Kate Harper, the township has also contacted a consortium of Montgomery County communities that are also jointly voicing their opposition.

In addition to a resolution opposing House Bill 1620, several other items were also approved by the board during the Jan. 10 meeting, including an application for a grant from the

Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development. Applications can be submitted for the state's "PA Small Water and Sewer program" through Feb. 28 for grants of between \$30,000 and \$500,000 that must be matched by 15 percent in local funds, according to Ford.

Towamencin applied for \$212,500 in funds, to be matched with \$37,500 from the township's sewer capital fund. The money will be used to continue work on **the township's "I & I" — infiltration and inflow — program** to repair aging sewer lines, for which \$200,000 has already been budgeted. "If we're successful in the grant, we would use those funds to supplement our 'I & I' efforts. We've been very serious and aggressive with trying to fight that," Ford said. "We're seeking \$212,000, and with our match it would fund a \$250,000 effort to continue to get the stormwater out of our sewer lines. We're going to continue to work on it, and then if we get the grant we'll keep on going."

The board also approved an agreement for staff to acquire a dump truck for the township's Public Works Department, at a price below that originally included in the township's budget. Staff typically wait until late in the year to make major capital purchases, Ford said, but received a discount of \$38,130 on the estimated price of \$200,000 for the dump truck, since the truck was used as a demonstration model. "Usually we'd wait 'til later in the year to get those, but I think it's such a savings that we tacked it onto the financing for the equipment from the 2017 budget, that we just finally went out and got," Ford said.

The board also voted unanimously to name Supervisor Dan Littlely to act as the township's delegate to the Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors, a statewide organization that monitors and advises on issues of concern to all municipalities. Supervisor Chuck Wilson had served in that role, but starting in February Wilson will take over a leadership role for the Montgomery County Association of Township Officials, according to Ford.

The board also named resident Peter Murphy to serve on the township's Open Space and Parks Committee, according to the manager, and that group plans to oversee utility upgrades to the township's Grist Mill, Butch Clemens and Green Lane parks over the course of 2018. Towamencin supervisors next meet at 7:30 p.m. on Jan. 24 at the township administration building, 1090 Troxel Road. — **Lansdale (Montgomery Co.) Reporter**

Google is expanding its sprawling network of undersea cables to plug into new regions around the world, in a bid to speed up its cloud-computing business and catch up to rivals Microsoft Corp. and Amazon.com Inc. The search-engine operator has plans to build three new underwater fiber-optic cables lining ocean areas from the Pacific to the North Sea, extending its private data network to regions competitors haven't touched with similar projects.

The cables, expected to be finished in 2019, are designed to speed the transfer of data and reroute users to servers around the globe if a region fails or gets overloaded. Google said the investments could cost hundreds of millions of dollars but are worth the expense to get a better shot at the multibillion-dollar cloud-computing market. "I would prefer not to have to be in the cable-building consortium business," said Ben Treynor, vice president of Google's cloud platform, but when the company looked at ways to push its cloud business past new frontiers like Australia and South America, "there weren't a lot of great options."

Google parent Alphabet Inc. owns a massive network of fiber-optic cables and data centers built up over the past decade. Mr. Treynor said the infrastructure already adds up to the world's biggest private network, handling roughly 25% of the world's internet traffic, and helps Google control its data-intensive software without relying on telecom companies. The projects would bring the number of subsea cables Google has helped build to 11 after **a decade of nonstop construction**. Its engineers rely on all those conduits to refresh search results, move video files and serve cloud-computing customers who do business in different parts of the globe.

That last business line could use a boost. Google is **third in cloud-computing revenue** behind Amazon and Microsoft in the race to win big customers, which run everything from shopping websites to government databases on the tech giants' computer servers. Billions of dollars of annual revenue are at stake as corporations move their information-technology operations to more flexible systems on the cloud. Google has teamed up with other firms, including domestic telephone operators and Facebook Inc., to build its subsea cables. But it is breaking precedent with its longest, fully private long-distance cable, which will stretch 6,200 miles from

Los Angeles to Chile, where the company finished a data center in 2015. “This is, I believe, the largest single pipe into Chile,” Mr. Treynor said of the Curie cable, named after the French scientist Marie Curie.

The company is planning to share capacity with Facebook on a planned 4,500-mile cable from the East Coast of the U.S. to Denmark, with a pit stop in Ireland. The Havfrue line, Danish for “mermaid,” will give the company more bandwidth across the Atlantic Ocean. A planned 2,400-mile cable called HK-G, running from Hong Kong to Guam, will hook up with other cable systems linking Australia, East Asia and North America.

Google’s new cables will help link five new regions for cloud customers in Montreal, the Netherlands, Los Angeles, Finland and Hong Kong. The company’s network-driven strategy has gained it some attention. PayPal Inc. technology chief Sri Shivananda said the company spent months considering where to move some of its developer and testing systems before settling on Google in mid-2017.

Mr. Shivananda said the payments processor was impressed by Google’s consistently fast connections. Transactions that take too long often make users abandon a purchase entirely, he said. Some of PayPal’s acquired companies, including Braintree and Venmo, still run partly on Amazon. “We’ll be a multi-cloud environment” for the foreseeable future, Mr. Shivananda said. – **Wall Street Journal**

Congressional Republicans breathed new life last year into the all-but-ignored Congressional Review Act, using it to reverse **a wide range** of Obama administration regulations on the environment, consumer protection and workplace issues. Now Senate Democrats are trotting out the act to undo a Republican effort to let cable and phone companies meddle with the internet. This particular turnabout is most definitely fair play.

At issue is the Federal Communications Commission’s move not just to repeal the strict net neutrality rules it adopted in 2015, but also to renounce virtually all of the commission’s regulatory authority over broadband internet providers. Its new “**Restoring Internet Freedom**” order, adopted last month on a party-line vote, opens the door to the likes of Comcast, AT&T and Verizon giving deep-pocketed websites and services priority access to their customers for a fee. It also lifts the ban on broadband providers blocking or slowing down traffic from legal online sites and services, provided they do so openly. Such steps could cause unprecedented distortion in what has been a free and open internet.

The Restoring Internet Freedom order was a triumph of ideology over sense, sacrificing the interests of internet users and innovators on the altar of deregulatory purity. Some leading broadband providers, recognizing that they got more from the FCC than they’d bargained for, pledged never to use their newfound freedom to interfere online. But that’s not enough.

Ideally, Congress would do something it should have done a decade ago: update federal communications law to give the FCC a mandate and clear authority to protect net neutrality. In the meantime, though, Senate Democrats have gathered more than enough support to force a floor vote on a resolution to reject the new FCC order and bar any similar deregulation for 10 years. In fact, they’ve lined up 50 senators in favor of the resolution, including one Republican, Susan Collins of Maine. That’s just one short of passage.

The prospects are dimmer in the House, where Republicans seem to rank deregulation in the pantheon with Mom and apple pie. Still, the **fierce public backlash** to the FCC’s order is powering a multi-front effort to repeal it, including lawsuits (one of which was filed Tuesday by the attorneys general of California, 20 other states and the District of Columbia) and proposals for state net neutrality laws in California and elsewhere. Although the FCC’s abdication invites states to wade in, no one should be eager for a patchwork of state neutrality rules. That’s all the more reason for Congress to step up. Lawmakers should reject the FCC’s latest rule and preserve the qualities that have made the internet what it is today. – **Los Angeles Times editorial**



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