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## Comcast outage interrupts Moraga Town Council meeting a second time

By Vera Kochan

In the space of nearly two months, Comcast internet outages have disrupted service not only to residents in the Lamorinda area, but have caused confusion, aborted service and television screens to broadcast test patterns during a couple of Moraga's town council meetings.

The first incident of note was during the Feb. 10 discussion of the Bellavista subdivision improvements. Both Mayor Mike McCluer and Council Member Teresa Onoda disappeared from the Zoom broadcast. Any viewers who retained their internet service were informed that it was a Comcast issue by Police Chief Jon King.

McCluer and Onoda were eventually able to phone in to the meeting, which was adjourned early due to the difficulty in conducting town business in that manner.

The second, and most recent interruption, occurred during the April 14 meeting when Vice Mayor Steve Woehleke disappeared from the Zoom screen. He, too, was eventually able to rejoin via phone. In both instances, Town Clerk Marty McInturf and Administrative Assistant Mary Jane Muller scrambled to record the meetings, in one form or another, for eventual viewing/audio playback by the public.

Silicon Connections President Mark Dahlen, whose company is the town offices' internet service provider, stated that many of his clients throughout the Lamorinda area, Emeryville and even the San Francisco Peninsula had lost their Comcast internet connection. He speculated that recent, sporadic outages could be due to so many people still working from home, school kids performing online assignments and an over-usage of Zoom. He explained that Comcast does have backup generators on utility poles that are capable of delivering service for up to eight hours, but thieves have been known to abscond with them on a regular basis.

According to a CNN news report in 2015, fiber optic internet cables in the San Francisco Bay Area were cut so often that year that the FBI joined the investigation. According to the report, 11 incidents happened in the space of seven months, noting, "The individuals may appear to be normal telecommunications maintenance workers or possess tools consistent with that job role."

Downdetector.com stated that on April 14, 88% of issues reported by Comcast customers were internet related. Television disruption was 5% and total blackout involved 5%.

Comcast Senior Director of External Communications for California, Joan Hammel, could give no details as to the Feb. 10 outage, "It's possible it was related to routine maintenance of our network." However, Hammel was able to give more information on the more recent April 14 disruption. "The outage was caused by a vehicle incident that damaged our system. Our services started being disrupted at about 3 p.m. and services started being restored at about 8 p.m. that same evening. Roughly 20,000 customers in the East Bay were impacted. As always, we apologize for any service disruption for our customers. It is important for folks to sign up on the Xfinity MyAccount App. That is so useful, because they can access pertinent, timely information about the status of their services."

The exact address of the vehicle incident, according to Hammel, was in a residential area of Walnut Creek. The Walnut Creek Police Department Public Log disclosed that the incident occurred "Time: 142602" involving "utility."

The old adage, "Misery loves company" couldn't be truer in today's internet-dependent society. Fastmetrics, a San Francisco Bay Area internet service provider, has some tongue-in-cheek suggestions for things to do when the internet is down: "Cry in the mirror; yell at your internet provider; nervously pace back and forth; repeatedly click refresh; complain to your local congressman; paint your feelings; stagger outside, become confused and disoriented by 'real world'; ask God `Why me?'; stay calm by assuming the fetal position and humming quietly; and fill that nagging pit of despair in your stomach with donuts."

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