

# Board heads back to TV

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\$78,000 is allocated  
to air freeholders

BY JOE RYAN  
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

Union County freeholders plan to spend \$78,000 on equipment that will allow them to televise their weekly meetings for the first time since 2004, officials said yesterday.

The freeholder board stopped broadcasting its Thursday night meetings roughly 18 months ago, when the cameras and microphones at the county administration building in Elizabeth went kaput, county spokesman Sebastian D'Elia said.

"We couldn't go on the air because our tapes were basically a squiggle," D'Elia said.

Within the next few days, the county will begin ordering and preparing to replace and repair much of its audio-video equipment. Freeholders hope to resume broadcasting on local public access channels by September or October, D'Elia said.

"This investment in our sound system, PA (public-address system) and taping system will ensure that the public, our constituents and all entities that do business with the county will continue to receive information about our meetings in a timely and accurate manner," County Manager George Devaney said yesterday.

Republicans and residents have criticized the all-Democratic freeholder board for not televising their meetings over the last year-and-a-half. County Republican Chairman Philip Morin welcomed news of the new equipment, but he said it is only the first step toward more open and responsive government.

"It's great that the freeholders are committing resources to televise meetings, but more importantly, they shouldn't be just sitting there when residents ask questions," he said. "They should be having a dialogue with the citizens, and all too often that doesn't happen."

The county's plan calls for 16 new microphones, monitors and two new cameras.

Tina Renna, president of Union County Watchdog Association, regularly accuses the freeholder board of overspending. She, too, was heartened to hear the freeholders would be back on the air. But, she said, \$78,000 seemed like an extraordinary amount to pay for television equipment.

"For \$80,000," she said, "I would hope they would be Webcasting meetings, too."

Actually, the county is looking into doing that, D'Elia said.