

Waiting for FiOS, Baltimore? Verizon says 'Fuhgeddaboutit!

by Fern Shen, *Baltimore Brew*, February 28, 2010

Verizon made it clear last week that the utility is not deploying its much-awaited, desperately needed high-speed Internet service, FiOS, in Baltimore city.

Oh, they might bring FiOS to Baltimore in the future, Verizon spokesperson Sandra Arnette wrote in email to inquiring journalists, but "we just can't say when that will happen right now."

Accusing the utility of redlining, the group Progressive Maryland and some city council members are pushing Verizon to provide service to Maryland's biggest city. The company has brought their super-fast, high-speed Internet service to most of the state's other major jurisdictions, but not Baltimore.

"City to Verizon: What are we, chopped liver?" was The Baltimore Messenger's excellent headline on their story Wednesday.

Addressing the charge that the company's behavior constitutes redlining, Arnette said "race and ethnicity and income are never factors..."

"Verizon does not redline. We never have and never will," she wrote. "It's illegal, immoral and counter to our century-old legacy of providing good service to Baltimore residents."

So, why aren't they serving Baltimore?

Verizon is just going to focus on "those communities where we already have approved cable franchises and where we already have begun to build our FiOS network," Arnette wrote.

Progressive Maryland is leading the charge on this issue and a couple of city council members, William H. Cole IV and Mary Pat Clarke, are involved as well and are planning a hearing on the matter next month.

The coalition that has signed on to support the effort (listed on Progressive Maryland's website) includes the NAACP, CASA de Maryland, and church and community organizations from across the city: Mount Winans, Upton, Reservoir Hill, Darley Park, Upton, Charles Village and others.

Interestingly, a slicker campaign aimed at a similar cause is being mounted now by Baltimore's tech community. It looks beyond providers like Verizon and Comcast to a new potential broadband source: Google.

Since the search engine giant announced recently that it would pick one city to test market super-fast broadband service, a campaign called BmoreFiber has picked up steam. The idea is to convince Google to pick Baltimore, over Cincinnati, Hartford, Washington and a host of other cities vying for the spot.

This group has attracted support from some of the biggest players in town — deputy mayor Andy Frank, city schools chief Andres Alonso, First Mariner Bank, Johns Hopkins University, the Open Society Institute, the Downtown Partnership, etc. — but their goals are ostensibly the same as the little WhereisBmoreFiOS? project: to get better Internet service for Baltimore.

If the city doesn't win the broadband lottery and snag the Google gig, maybe the BmoreFiber folks could put all that horsepower behind WhereisBmoreFiOS?

Here is the complete text of the Verizon email:

Verizon is not deploying FiOS in Baltimore City or in any other new areas in Maryland or across the country at this time because we're now focused on delivering our FiOS services in those communities where we already have approved cable franchises and where we already have begun to build our FiOS network.

We have extensive deployment obligations in several states and are working to fulfill them.

That said, just because we're not deploying FiOS in a particular area now doesn't mean we won't do so in the future.

We just can't say when that will happen right now.

Baltimore is and will continue to be a strong market for Verizon. We know many Baltimoreans are eager to see Verizon build our FiOS network in the city, and want to do what they can to move the process forward. We understand people's concerns, and we can and will carry those back to our business.

We know that FiOS TV is a highly successful and popular service, and that there is much demand for it. A number of factors go into determining where Verizon deploys its FiOS network. We use a blended market approach, taking into account factors such as the ability to rapidly deploy our network. This involves review of material and supply issues, workforce locations, technology locations and other related business factors.

Race, ethnicity and income are never factors in this decision. Verizon does not redline. We never have and never will. It's illegal, immoral and counter to our century-old legacy of providing good service to Baltimore residents. Our commitment to diversity is evident in many communities where FiOS is now offered such as Dundalk, Essex, Glen Burnie, Milford Mills, Randallstown and Woodlawn.

Again, we understand the desire to have FiOS in Baltimore, and we're listening. We met with several city officials in 2009 and have appreciated them sharing their interests. We will use those discussions and other feedback when the company is prepared to consider locations for new franchises in the future.

We believe that this is the best way to proceed – as other actions that some parties may think would help may not have the intended effect.

*Thanks,
Sandy Arnette
Verizon Media Relations*