

# Baltimore City Council holds hearing on FIOS

By Richard Wonders, *Baltimore Business Examiner*, May 24, 2010

Subcommittee of the Taxation and Economic Development Committee held hearings regarding Verizon's current position of not offering FIOS in the city. In addition to committee chair, Councilman William Cole IV, and Council President Jack Young, other sitting council members included Mary Pat Clarke, Jim Kraft, Helen Holton, and Belinda Conaway.

Representing Verizon was Vice President for Governmental Affairs, Tad Bishop. The hearing included testimony from Mr. Bishop, two current Communication Workers of America(CWA) local presidents, and one former CWA local president. In addition, the two hour 10 minute meeting included a number of local community and neighborhood leaders, as well as a number of local business leaders offering their opinions regarding the subject.

Verizon has been accused by some of redlining Baltimore city. The broad definition of redlining is discriminating against certain groups or entities based on race, or economic status. When addressing how Verizon chose the communities where its FIOS product is being implemented, Mr. Bishop stated, "Verizon selected these markets based on a very detailed examination that took into account a number of business factors including engineering and cost considerations."

Mr. Bishop followed the account with the following; "Race, ethnicity, and income were never factors in the selection of markets for Verizon FIOS. Verizon does not redline."

The first issue raised by Councilman Cole were the reasons given to residents explaining why FIOS was not being made available to the city. Councilman Cole told of constituents who called Verizon's 1-800 number, and were told by Verizon customer representatives that the city council was blocking FIOS. Councilwoman Clarke verified she had heard the same concerns from her constituents.

Councilman Cole also related the story of an employee at the Arundel Mills Mall Verizon outlet telling him the city does not have FIOS because former City Councilman Ken Harris worked for Comcast. The same Ken Harris who was murdered in September, 2008.

A spokeswoman from Verizon responded; "... we are working vigorously to ensure that any such commentary from our representatives stops. We have trained our representatives in our call centers on this matter, as well as others who sell our FIOS services. We will continue to be vigilant with our workforce and ensure that this message is at top of mind with our marketing representatives and technicians."

Tomorrow, we will take a look at the positive things Verizon does for the city. They are a generous contributor to local charities, and partner with a number of non-profit organizations.