

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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Email

What's your e-mail address? That question arises in conversations when participants want to stay in touch with each other. A budding friendship may result from the exchange of contact information, or a successful business relationship may be the product. Electronic mail is becoming the dominant means of communication for more of us every day. And for many Longmeadow residents that e-mail address ends with the domain name mediaone.net – for one more week.

The abrupt announcement from AT&T Broadband of the termination of its Mediaone domain-name is the topic of this week's Byline. Customers have been notified that their mediaone e-mail addresses will "no longer be available" as of March 15. I am working to delay or halt the company's recently forced changes to the e-mail addresses of many of its Longmeadow residents.

An e-mail address, like a telephone number, provides an access point for individuals or businesses. It is printed on stationary and business cards and listed in membership rosters. A mandatory change is more than inconvenience; it is a major disruption that will cost customers both time and money. Imposed over a short span of time, it will result in lost communications as would-be contacts have their messages returned with the error message, "user unknown."

I have asked Dan Bosley, Chair of the House Government Relations Committee to hold hearings on the sudden truncation of an identity that has been marketed up to the present time. AT&T Broadband states that the change is required "in order to enable us to meet our legal obligations. It has owned Mediaone for several years, and its ownership of the service has not changed. What legal obligations can exist?

I have asked AT&T Broadband executives to provide an extended time period for automatic forwarding from the expiring "Mediaone.net" addresses or to allow customers the option of retaining that address. Transition time was short to begin with, and problems with the conversion process have hindered many individuals' attempts to implement the changes.

Because many customers throughout the region are affected by the change, I will also request that AT&T Broadband announce their new domain name through print and media outlets.

AT&T Broadband is pursuing a merger with Comcast. When the FCC considers that merge proposal, I will change my focus to the federal level. In its notices to customers, AT&T Broadband states that additional changes may result from its pending merger with Comcast, so I will work to make the merger conditional on retention of existing domain names.

When the phone company changes area codes, that change occurs only hafter an extended lead time to minimize disruption to customers. When a mailing address changes, although it is a voluntary change by a customer, the U.S. Post Office notifies correspondents of the change even after six months of forwarding service. AT&T Broadband has such substantial marketshare that I believe it owes us, its customers, similar consideration.