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Waiting for fiber-optic service in the city? Keep waiting

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Consuming Interests

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The Q: We've written a lot here about Verizon's fiber-optic video, voice and data services. Lots of people tell us how much they love it. Some people write to say they hate it, especially the problems they've had getting it installed properly. And some people, like reader Susan Gillette, just want to know when FiOS is coming to their neighborhood.

"If you have written about why Verizon can cheerfully trumpet FiOS all over the airwaves but still doesn't have it in the city and won't say when it will be there, I missed the story," Gillette said. "Is there, has there been, a story?"

"What is Verizon's timetable?" Gillette said. "If city government is stopping the rollout, readers would love to know."

The A:

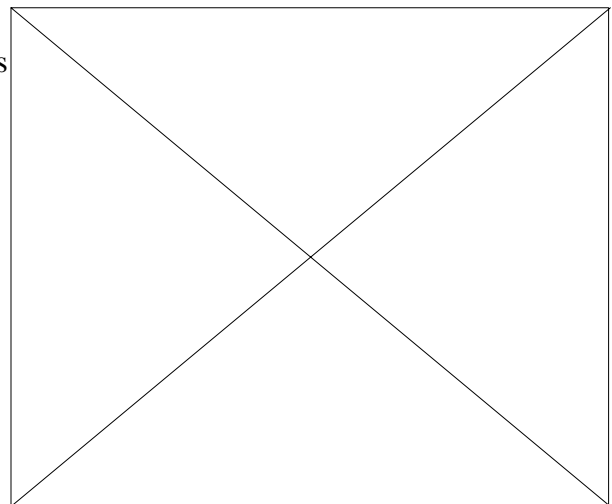
Verizon began in 2004 to aggressively roll out its fiber-optic network, which is four to 15 times faster than digital subscriber lines (DSL) that deliver Internet access over the older copper-wire phone network.

At the time, Verizon said it would spend more than \$22 billion between 2004 and 2010 to bring FiOS to millions of homes around the country and simultaneously battle cable giants such as Comcast, Cox and Time-Warner for pay-TV customers.

Verizon provides FiOS TV in parts of California, Delaware, Florida, Indiana, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, Virginia and, of course, Maryland.

In a quick search of our archives, I couldn't find any stories about when and how soon FiOS will be available in Baltimore. But Verizon says that FiOS Internet and TV services are available in dozens of communities in Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Howard, Montgomery and Prince George's counties, and the company continues to upgrade its network to all-fiber in these areas.

In addition, Verizon is placing its all-fiber network in Charles and Harford counties. The company is negotiating cable franchises that it needs to offer FiOS TV to residents in those counties.



With that said, it is not clear when FiOS will be available in the city.

"While we've not announced plans to offer FiOS TV in Baltimore City to date, it remains a very important market to us," said Verizon spokesman Sandy Arnette. "We're in the middle of a massive, transformational upgrade of our infrastructure. And we simply cannot be everywhere at once.

"We're working hard to bring the benefits of our fiber technology to as many people as quickly as possible," Arnette said. "But, as with all new technology, this will take time as well as investment to accomplish."

Arnette said Verizon is re-examining its deployment plans but cannot provide more details at this time for competitive reasons.

In fact, "Verizon has not yet begun franchise negotiations with Baltimore City," Arnette said. "But, in areas where we have negotiated franchise agreements, we have worked with the local jurisdictions on build-out requirements."

In other words, Gillette may not want to hold her breath.

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