Ergen: Dish Has Time to Mull Many Options for Wireless

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Dish Network Chairman Charlie Ergen said his company has plenty of time to decide how to use its spectrum, which was recently approved by the FCC for use in deploying an LTE-Advanced wireless network.

"I think the focus for the next year will be to figure out what the best path for us with our preference being to partner with somebody that's in the business today," Ergen said, reiterating comments from last week when he said Dish would consider selling its spectrum if it couldn't find a partner to help it roll out its wireless network.

"We have plenty of time to do that and make the right decisions and so forth. The trick is not to lose a lot of money while you're trying to make the long-term strategic call."

Dish recently offered $3.30 a share to buy Clearwire, with stipulations that Clearwire help Dish roll out its wireless network. Dish also offered $2.2 billion for a chunk of Clearwire's spectrum.

Some say the many stipulations involved in Dish’s offer could make Sprint’s current bid for Clearwire of $2.97 per share a more attractive offer.

In Thursday's earnings call, Ergen called Dish's offer a "pretty good deal for Clearwire" because of the $2.5 billion in capital the offer would generate for the struggling WiMax provider.

He also said that Dish's offer is good for rival Sprint as well, because it would mean capital to help Sprint's build-out, particularly in Clearwire. Ergen said if Clearwire were to accept Dish's offer, Sprint might make a good partner.

"The reverse of that is, is that, that offer is not accepted or there's a bidding war for Clearwire, right? And were we to lose that bidding war or if we were not to prevail for our offer for Clearwire, then Sprint's probably not a likely partner," Ergen said, adding that if things don't work out that way, Dish as "other alternatives."

Clearwire is still mulling its options, but the company's board has seemed more enthusiastic about Sprint purchasing the remaining portion of the company it

doesn't already own.

For the fourth quarter Dish reported $209.1 million in profit, which was down from $313 million in the same quarter last year. Revenue hit $3.59 billion, a 1.2 percent drop over the previous year.

Shares of Dish were down about 2.5 percent in early trading to $35.12-0.9, while Clearwire remained mostly flat $3.13.

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