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MEMORANDUM

TO: Jeff Irwin, Chair
Ways & Means Committee

FROM: Robert E. Guenzel
County Administrator

DATE: July 6, 2005

SUBJECT: Approval of Resolution submitting to the Washtenaw County electors a question of whether the tax limitation should be increased by 0.25 of a mill for ten (10) years, beginning with the December 1, 2006 tax levy, to provide funding to construct upgrades to the County's Enhanced Emergency Communications System in Washtenaw County.

BOARD ACTION REQUESTED:

It is requested that the Board of Commissioners approve ballot language for the November 8, 2005 election requesting the Washtenaw County electors to approve a 0.25 millage increase for ten years beginning with the December 1, 2006 tax levy to fund the construction of upgrades to the County's Enhanced Emergency Communications System.

BACKGROUND:

In 1986, Washtenaw County and the Cities of Ann Arbor, Saline and Milan formed the 800 Mhz Consortium to improve the ability of their respective public safety entities to communicate with each other. Over the years, the Consortium has tried to address three main goals associated with the 800 Mhz system: (1) achieving adequate coverage—i.e. getting the radio signal out to all geographic areas of the County; (2) having all public safety providers communicate on one system; and (3) sustainability of the system.

Currently, the 800 Mhz system has two towers—the County-owned tower on Jackson Road and the WEMU tower owned by Eastern Michigan University. The Michigan State Police also built a tower in Scio Township in the late 1990's. This tower was part of a State-wide communications system to benefit the State Police. The County and the 800 Mhz Consortium attempted to co-locate its tower with the State Police Tower in Scio Township at the time it was built. The State Police, however, rejected this

overture. As a result, the County built the Jackson Road tower and undertook its own system.

This communications system has commonly been known as the 800 Mhz system. However, with the proposed upgrades to the system, including the use of digital versus analog technology, along with the proposed migration of the system into the State-run communication system, this 800 Mhz system will now be referred to as the County's "Enhanced Emergency Communications System."

The State Police tower system is now run by the Michigan Public Safety Communications System ("MPSCS"). The MPSCS is willing to allow other governmental entities to use their system. A number of Counties, including Livingston and Monroe are either already on the State system or will be shortly.

In May, 2003, the 800 Mhz Consortium created a Subcommittee to analyze the gaps in emergency communications, examine solutions to those gaps and identify a strategy to reach those solutions. The Subcommittee included members from local police, fire and EMS agencies. The Subcommittee recommended that a number of upgrades to the current system be completed, including the construction of new towers as well as upgrades to the system's technical infrastructure and the purchase of related equipment. These capital improvements would result in 97% coverage with mobile radios throughout the entire County.

The Subcommittee also recommended that once the improvements to the Enhanced Emergency Communications System were complete, the system should be merged with the State MPSCS system. According to the Subcommittee recommendation, merging the Enhanced Emergency Communications System into the MPSCS system would result not only in improved County-wide communications, but also improved State-wide communications as the County public safety agencies would have access to the existing State-wide communications system.

Finally, the Subcommittee recommended that the improvements to the system should be paid for by requesting a County-wide millage from the voters of Washtenaw County. As such, the Board of Commissioners is being asked to approve a ballot proposal for a .25 mill increase for 10 years, beginning with the December 1, 2006 tax levy. The millage increase, if approved, would raise approximately forty-three million dollars, which is enough to pay for all of the proposed upgrades to the County Enhanced Emergency Communications System.

The 800 Mhz Consortium Board approved the Subcommittee's findings and recommended that they be forwarded on to the County Board of Commissioners for final approval.

DISCUSSION:

The current 800 Mhz system must be upgraded to keep abreast of evolving technology. The current system is an analog radio system. More public safety communications systems, including that used by the State, are digital systems, which are more technologically advanced than analog systems. Also, under the current system, it is difficult for certain public safety agencies to communicate because they use equipment

produced by different manufacturers. Often, this equipment is not compatible thus impeding the ability for public safety personnel to speak to each other. With the current system, public safety providers in the County have less than adequate coverage on mobile radios throughout the County. In some locations in the Western part of the County, there are areas where there is virtually no coverage at all.

The proposed improvements to the 800 Mhz system, which will result in the County Enhanced Emergency Communications System, would greatly increase radio coverage throughout the County. Building additional towers in strategic parts of the County would provide the following coverage: (1) 97% geographic coverage throughout the County; (2) 93% portable in-building coverage in medium density buildings in Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti; and (3) 93% portable in-building coverage in light density buildings throughout the rest of Washtenaw County.

Moreover, the proposed upgrades to the system would greatly improve the ability of public safety users to communicate on the system, despite having equipment manufactured by different companies. The 800 Mhz Committee's recommendation is that once the improvements to the system are complete, the County's system should migrate to the State's MPSCS system. There are several advantages to joining this System. First, as noted above, the system is digital, thus providing a technological upgrade from the current analog system. In addition, the MPSCS meets the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials ("APCO") standards. The APCO 25 standard requires that equipment manufactured by one company be compatible with other manufacturer's systems. As noted above, public safety providers in the County use radio equipment from more than one manufacturer. By joining the MPSCS, which complies with the APCO 25 standard, these public safety personnel would be able to communicate with each other despite using radios from different manufacturers.

In addition, because the MPSCS is part of a State-wide system, the County could use existing towers in Livingston County, Monroe County, Northville and Stockbridge to enhance communications in the furthest regions of Washtenaw County. This would result in fewer towers having to be built in the County. This could save the County taxpayers millions of dollars in tower construction costs.

Merging the Enhanced Emergency Communications System with the MPSCS would ultimately result in each County entity currently participating in the County System paying an annual maintenance fee to the State. The amount of this fee is based upon the number of microphones and the number of tower sites the County's Enhanced Emergency Communications System brings into the State system. The State has indicated that if the County System builds additional towers and then merges with the MPSCS, maintenance fees would be reduced or waived for a period of time depending on the value of the assets brought to the State system, as the State would then have access to the new County System towers. Additionally, the State would assume all of the management issues related to the radio system.

IMPACT ON HUMAN RESOURCES:

The proposed Resolution, if passed, will have no impact on the County's human resources.

IMPACT ON BUDGET:

If the proposed Resolution is passed and the ballot proposal seeking a millage increase is passed, the additional millage funds will be added to the County's budget and used to pay for the items described above.

IMPACT ON INDIRECT COSTS:

There are no indirect costs associated with the proposed Resolution.

IMPACT ON OTHER COUNTY DEPARTMENTS AND OUTSIDE AGENCIES:

Approval of the proposed Resolution will require the County Clerk to insure that the ballot language is properly placed on the ballot for the November 8, 2005 election.

CONFORMITY TO COUNTY POLICIES:

The proposed Resolution conforms to all County Policies and Procedures.

ATTACHMENTS:

800 Mhz Consortium Business Plan

A RESOLUTION SUBMITTING TO THE WASHTENAW COUNTY ELECTORS A QUESTION OF WHETHER THE TAX LIMITATION SHOULD BE INCREASED BY 0.25 OF A MILL FOR TEN (10) YEARS, BEGINNING WITH THE DECEMBER 1, 2006 TAX LEVY, TO CONSTRUCT IMPROVEMENTS TO THE COUNTY'S ENHANCED EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS RADIO SYSTEM WITHIN WASHTENAW COUNTY.

WASHTENAW COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

July 6, 2005

WHEREAS, in 1986, Washtenaw County and the cities of Ann Arbor, Saline and Milan formed the 800 Mhz Consortium to improve communications between their respective public safety agencies; and

WHEREAS, the current 800 Mhz communications analog system is outdated with many of the components unsupported by the manufacturer due to its age, does not provide sufficient radio coverage throughout the County and does not permit public safety entities that use equipment from different manufacturers to communicate with each other; and

WHEREAS, in May, 2003, the 800 Mhz Consortium created a Subcommittee to analyze the gaps in the existing 800 Mhz Communications system, recommend solutions to filling those gaps, and identify a strategy to reach those solutions; and

WHEREAS, the Subcommittee ultimately recommended that four new communications towers be constructed in strategic areas around the County to maximize coverage, along with improvements to the infrastructure of the system, and the purchase of new digital radios, with the upgraded system to be known as the County Enhanced Emergency Communications System; and

WHEREAS, the cost of the upgrades to the system is approximately thirty-two million dollars; and

WHEREAS, the Subcommittee also recommended that the system improvements be paid for by a County-wide millage; and

WHEREAS, a millage of .25 mill for 10 years would fully pay for the system improvements; and

WHEREAS, the Subcommittee also recommended that once the improvements to the system were complete, it be merged into the Michigan Public Safety Communications System ("MPSCS"), which operates a State-wide digital communications system; and

WHEREAS, the MPSCS is willing to merge the County Enhanced Emergency Communications System into the State-wide system. And

WHEREAS, this matter has been reviewed by the Office of Corporation Counsel, the Finance Office, the County Administrator's Office and the Ways & Means Committee

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners, State of Michigan, as follows:

1. There shall be submitted to the electors of the County of Washtenaw at the Election to be held on November 8, 2005 from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. prevailing time, the following proposition:

“Shall the limitation on the amount of taxes which may be imposed each year for all purposes on real and tangible personal property in Washtenaw County, Michigan be increased as provided in Section 6, Article IX of the Michigan Constitution and the Board of Commissioners of the County be authorized to levy a tax not to exceed one quarter of one mill (\$0.25 per \$1,000 of state taxable valuation) for a period of ten years, beginning with the December 1, 2006 tax levy, (which will generate estimate revenues of \$3,400,000.00 in the first year) to acquire, construct, renovate, maintain and operate an upgrade to the County’s Enhanced Emergency Communications System, including constructing additional towers, upgrading the existing infrastructure, purchasing equipment, and paying for maintenance and user fees?”

2. The election shall be held in accordance with Chapter XXVII, the General Election laws of the State of Michigan.
3. The Washtenaw County Clerk is instructed to carry out all appropriate statutory duties stated in this Resolution and the General Election laws of the State of Michigan so that the question of adoption may be submitted to the voters on November 8, 2005.
4. The Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners certifies to the County Clerk the following question as the appropriate ballot wording for the November 8, 2005 Election for the above-referenced proposition:

PROPOSITION TO INCREASE THE TAX LIMITATION TO PROVIDE FUNDING TO IMPROVE THE COUNTY ENHANCED EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM BY CONSTRUCTING ADDITIONAL TOWERS, UPGRADING THE EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE AND PURCHASING THE NECESSARY EQUIPMENT

“Shall the limitation on the amount of taxes which may be imposed each year for all purposes on real and tangible personal property in Washtenaw County, Michigan be increased as provided in Section 6, Article IX of the Michigan Constitution and the Board of Commissioners of the County be authorized to levy a tax not to exceed one quarter of one mill (\$0.25 per \$1,000 of state taxable valuation) for a period of ten years, beginning with the December 1, 2006 tax levy, (which will generate estimate revenues of \$3,400,000.00 in the first year) to acquire, construct, renovate, maintain and operate an upgrade to the County’s Enhanced Emergency Communications System, including constructing additional towers, upgrading the existing infrastructure, purchasing necessary equipment, and paying for maintenance and user fees?”

YES

NO

5. Each city and township clerk shall give appropriate notice of the submission of the Proposition as provided by law, which notice shall contain the statement of the Washtenaw County Treasurer as to previously voted tax limitation increases affecting property within Washtenaw County.