

The Manchester **ENTERPRISE**

Board to lease land for communication tower

System will improve communication among emergency services

By Daniel Lai, Editor

Members of the Manchester Community Schools Board of Education approved a plan to enter negotiations with the Washtenaw County 800 MHz Public Safety Radio Consortium on the lease of district land for a public safety radio tower Monday.

Subject to all necessary approvals by Manchester Township, the Consortium will build a 300-foot tower on Gieske Road east of Manchester High School.

"This is something that has been in the works for over a year," Consortium spokesman Craig Swanson, said.

Swanson said funding for the Manchester tower and five other towers across Washtenaw County was passed with overwhelming support with the county's community safety mileage in 2006.

"We now have a fairly significant burden to provide the best public safety system we can," he said.

Swanson said the construction of the towers will allow schools and county agencies to tap into a statewide emergency network that will provide better communication between area police departments, fire departments and EMS services.

"In Manchester, emergency personnel have always had a problem with communication ability," Swanson said. "We need a tower here or very close because the topography of the southwest portion of Washtenaw County is very challenging for radio transmissions. Any signal from Ann Arbor skips over the village."

According to the 30-year lease agreement, the school district would be paid \$500 a month for the use of the property.

"Nothing has been finalized, but we are working hard to determine a viable option," Swanson said.

Manchester Community Schools Superintendent Shawn Lewis-Lakin said the Gieske Road location was chosen by district and township authorities as the least intrusive to area residents.

"If there is going to be a second tower in Manchester, let's get it as close as we can to the water tower," he said. "We feel this initiative is a real attempt to provide public safety to the community."

If the tower construction is approved, Swanson said construction could begin by the end of the year with the entire project finished by 2009. Towers are also planned for Chelsea, Ann Arbor, Salem and Ypsilanti.

"With this system, if a bus goes anywhere in the state, the school will be able to communicate with it," Swanson said.

In other business:

The Board approved several revisions to the 2007-08 budget. Of the \$12,917,276 available in the general fund, \$11,911,651 was appropriated with an estimated unappropriated fund balance of \$1,005,625. Of the \$485,299 in available revenue for the athletic fund, \$373,572 was appropriated. Of the \$334,188 available for the Community Education fund, \$320,859 was appropriated. Of the \$355,797 available in the Food Service fund, \$345,722 was appropriated.

Lewis-Lakin said because public schools in Michigan operate on a July 1 to June 30 fiscal year, the board is required to adopt a budget before all revenue is accounted for and make revisions later in the year.

"A variety of factors impact the need to revise budgets, including changes to enrollment and changes in the foundation allowance (the per pupil funding grant) that we receive from the state, Lewis-Lakin said. "Over 80 percent of the revenues for local school districts come from the state; this year the levels of these revenues were not set until the end of October when an agreement on the state budget was reached.

"The budgets approved in June were based on estimates of state funding and enrollment. Now that we know our enrollment and the level of state funding, we can adjust our budgets to better match the revenue we will receive."

Lewis-Lakin said because the budget adopted in June included a deficit, board members have engaged in "a line-by-line analysis of the budget," looking for areas to trim expenses.

" This process led to a reduction in our projected general fund deficit to \$202,000 from a deficit that was at \$235,000 in June," he said. "We continue to look for areas where we can be more efficient, with the goal of being sure that each dollar with which we are entrusted does as much possible good to improve student learning."

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