



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 28, 2016

For additional information contact:
Lisa LaPlante at (616) 632-7567

Kent County to Request Increased Public Safety Dispatch Funding
Funding would pay for 911 Technology and Fire Dispatch Operations

GRAND RAPIDS, MI – The Kent County Board of Commissioners this morning approved ballot language asking residents for a Public Safety Dispatch surcharge increase.

The measure, slated to appear on the November ballot, will ask voters for an increase of 70 cents per month, per line for phone service in Kent County, making the new monthly levy \$1.15 per phone. That works out to \$13.80 per year per phone.

The 70 cent increase would address shortcomings with current 911 technology and fire dispatch operations by investing in next generation technology that allows for inter-agency communication and other upgrades. The funds would allow authorities to streamline emergency communications that currently can be patchwork in nature because not every agency is on the same radio system.

Kent County 911 dispatch currently operates on eight different radio systems, which hampers public safety efforts in some situations because emergency responders cannot communicate directly – even if they are working on the same incident.

“Some first responders carry multiple devices in order to talk to various responding agencies, which has led to lapses in communication,” Kent County Sheriff Larry Stelma said. “In incidents involving these agencies, Kent County dispatchers use telephones to communicate with other dispatch agencies, then the dispatchers communicate to first responders, which takes more time to complete.”

The funds would allow Kent County to purchase communications towers and 800 MHz equipment that would place all Kent County dispatchers and first responders on the Michigan Public Safety Communications System. This would improve communication with most of the state’s 911 call-taking centers, including those with the Michigan State Police, and Ottawa, Allegan, Ionia and Newaygo counties.

“Increasingly, law enforcement officials from multiple agencies are being called on to respond to mass shootings and other events that threaten public safety and require an all hands-on-deck approach,” said Curtis Holt, director of the Kent County Dispatch Authority and Wyoming city manager. “From the Dantzler shootings in Kent County five years ago to the mass shootings earlier this year Kalamazoo, we have seen time and time again the critical importance of multiple agencies coming together and working as a unified team in times of crisis. The surcharge proposed by Kent County provides the public an opportunity to address this concern.”

The Kent County Board of Commissioners sees this proposal as a means to both enhance 911 dispatch operations and improve the safety of our community.

ADMINISTRATOR'S OFFICE
NEWS RELEASE



“The work leading up to this proposal has been significant and time-consuming, but extremely rewarding,” said Jim Saalfeld, chair of the Kent County Board of Commissioners. “This proposal demonstrates efforts and work by all units of government – Kent County, cities, townships, the law enforcement community, and the fire and emergency response communities – as well as various community stakeholders. It underscores yet another example of how our community pulls together at all levels to improve the lives our citizens in the most effective and efficient way possible.”

The ballot language comes after much collaboration and study of the current dispatch system by many in the communities served by it. “Strong and safe neighborhoods along with responsive public safety services are top priorities,” Grand Rapids Mayor Rosalynn Bliss said. “This proposal gives us the opportunity to serve our residents and taxpayers through collaboration and new technologies.”

Part of the surcharge will cover costs associated with countywide fire dispatch, which is more complex technologically and more labor intensive than in the past. Most of the cities and townships in Kent County adopted resolutions urging the County to place a surcharge question on a ballot in 2016.

A surcharge is more of a “user-based” fee, directly charging devices that use 911 service. Even with a surcharge increase, County residents will continue to pay on the low end for dispatch services compared to other, like-sized counties within the state.

###