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

GRAND RAPIDS, MI – By a 3-1 margin yesterday, residents in Kent County approved the 911 Public Safety Dispatch surcharge increase.

The measure will allow the County to assess an additional 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.

“This is more than a quick fix. This is an investment in our future, in the safety of our first responders, and the ability to respond quickly and efficiently to residents who call 911,” Kent County Sheriff Larry Stelma said. “We can now provide communications towers and new radio equipment that will place all Kent County dispatchers and first responders on the Michigan Public Safety Communications System. This will improve our ability to communicate with most of the state’s 911 call-taking centers, including Michigan State Police, and Ottawa, Allegan, Ionia and Newaygo counties.”

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. The 70 cent increase will address issues with current 911 technology and fire dispatch operations. New technology will allow for inter-agency communication and other upgrades.

Part of the surcharge covers costs associated with countywide fire dispatch, which has become more complex technologically and more labor intensive than in the past.

“We are very pleased that voters saw the need and responded positively to the surcharge request,” said Curtis Holt, director of the Kent County Dispatch Authority and Wyoming City Manager. “Their vote for public safety will allow us to invest in new technology and equipment that will improve the safety of all County residents – including those who regularly put themselves in harm’s way.”

Several cities and townships in Kent County adopted resolutions urging the County to place a surcharge question on a ballot in 2016.

“Kent County cities, townships, and villages, law enforcement, firefighters and emergency response communities, as well as various community stakeholders have been very supportive of this plan,” said Jim Saalfeld, Chair of the Kent County Board of Commissioners. “Now the voters have spoken as well. I am proud that our community pulled together at all levels to improve the lives our citizens in the most effective and efficient way possible.”

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

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