

MARIN EMERGENCY RADIO AUTHORITY

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PROJECT OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Draft: 5/21/14

MINUTES OF MARCH 7, 2014

A. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chair Cusimano at 3:00 p.m. on March 7, 2014 in Marin Civic Center, CAO Room 315, San Rafael, CA.

Committee Members Present:

Central Marin Police Authority	Todd Cusimano
City of Larkspur	Robert Sinnott
City of Novato	Jim Berg
County Fire	Mark Brown
City of Sausalito	Jennifer Tejada
Tiburon Fire Protection District	Richard Pearce
County of Marin	Matthew Hymel
Town of Ross	Tom Gaffney

Committee Members Absent:

City of San Rafael	Diana Bishop
Marin County Sheriff	Robert Doyle
Novato Fire Protection District	Gerald McCarthy

Staff Present:

MERA Executive Officer	Maureen Cassingham
MERA Special Project Admin. Assistant	Alex Anderson
MERA Operations Officer	Craig Tackabery

Guests Present:

Indie Politics/Price Campaign Solutions	Terry Price
Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates	Curt Below

B. Approval of Project Oversight Committee Minutes – Meeting of October 9, 2013

M/S/P Sinnott/Berg to approve the minutes from the October 9, 2013 meeting as presented.

AYES: All

NAYS: None

ABSTENTIONS: Tejada, Gaffney

C. Second Public Opinion Poll Presentation (Below and Price)

1) Proposed Revisions to Outreach Plan and Budget

Chair Cusimano opened the meeting by noting the importance of the discussion regarding the public opinion poll results and how it may affect MERA's Gen II Project.

Price explained that this is the second public opinion poll MERA has commissioned. This poll was used to determine where MERA is at in terms of likelihood of success of the potential parcel tax measure, given the changes made since first polling was conducted. Price introduced Below from Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates, the public opinion research firm that conducted the poll.

Below discussed the methodology and key findings of the public opinion poll. He explained that the poll was somewhat shorter than the first poll, a common practice for tracking polls. The poll had a margin of error of roughly plus or minus five percent.

Below explained that overall the big picture regarding the mood of the county did not change much from the results of the first poll. He went through the changes to the ballot measure language and how it differed from the first poll, including lowering the parcel tax amount from \$45 per parcel to \$29 per parcel and including exemptions for low income seniors and a citizen's oversight committee. Below then went through the positive and negative messages tested in the poll. He also discussed the polling results in terms of demographics and geography.

He concluded that, while we did see some improvement in the polling results after lowering the parcel tax amount to \$29 per parcel, we did not reach the 66% or higher threshold we were hoping for. He said this may correlate with the lowered concern for emergency responder's ability to respond to an emergency found in the second poll.

Below said that it is going to be challenging to reach the need 66% threshold, noting the lack of urgency around emergency services issues found in the poll. He stressed the need for a broader public outreach program in order to reach that goal.

Cusimano said that he believes that it is crucial for MERA agencies to come together and get behind the parcel tax and outreach effort in order to ensure the measure's success. He expressed concern about the lack of urgency within MERA member agencies. He also asked if, as a group, MERA felt it was truly necessary to move forward with this project now to replace the system by 2018.

Hymel said that he felt that MERA members have a fiduciary responsibility to ensure that the system continue to deliver reliable service. He noted that MERA has already delayed, and that, in all conversations within MERA to date, there has been detailed discussions of the need to replace the system before potential system failures and FCC give back deadlines. He concluded that, given MERA's members fiduciary responsible and the need to move forward in 2015, the real question becomes how we fund the new system.

Tackaberry said that the reason MERA is moving forward now is that a lot of the components of the current system are no longer being supported. Sinnott asked how it was possible for Motorola to stop supporting component parts for a system only 10 years old. Tackaberry responded that it is important to ask vendor support questions during the RFP process for the next system.

Tejada noted that MERA was given a presentation two years ago about the state of the system and the need to upgrade. She said that MERA has known for some time that the need to replace the system was impending. She also said that her understanding was that the new system will be a platform that you can build on, and will not run as great a risk of obsolescence.

Pearce pointed out that MERA has already committed a significant amount of funds to the outreach project for the new system. He also said that there has been a great deal of effort put in to educating current MERA members, and that a delay in moving forward with the system now could mean having to reeducate many new members on the state of the system and the need for replacement. He said that the poll numbers may not be where MERA would like them to be, but that the numbers are close to achieving a successful result for the parcel tax ballot measure. He said he believes MERA should commit to a broader public outreach program to ensure the success of the parcel tax measure.

Brown said that it will be difficult to truly convince people MERA needs a new system until we actually have catastrophic failures, at which point it would be too late. He said that MERA is fighting a constant battle with the continuous changes in technology.

Price said there are two options for funding the new system. The first option would be the traditional method of asking MERA member agencies to pay for the capital costs of a new system. The second option is to ask the voters to support a parcel tax to pay for the capital costs. He noted that each option requires a different approach for two distinct audiences.

Tejada said that MERA has thus far done very little public outreach. The only outreach that has been done has been to city managers, councils and various boards of MERA agencies. She said she believes waiting another two years will put MERA even further behind and in a very poor position. She concluded that MERA needs to step up the educational effort to move this project forward.

Cusimano raised concerns again about the support within MERA for moving forward with the project. He asked if MERA truly is facing catastrophic failure within two years if MERA does not start funding of the new system by next year. Hymel said that the understanding he has developed is that MERA does need to replace the system starting next year, and that MERA members have a fiduciary responsibility to do so. Tackaberry said that, while difficult to predict, there is a potential for failure anytime and that the risk increases the longer MERA delays.

Gaffney asked if the MERA parcel tax measure failed in 2014 would that preclude going back to the voters in 2016. He said, given that it has taken MERA two years to get to the point of requesting a parcel tax measure, he is concerned starting over would cause further delays and make it difficult to get a parcel tax measure passed in the future.

Berg asked how strong the sentiment in the survey was around the issue that MERA is still paying off the first generation bonds. He wondered if waiting until the first generation bonds were paid off to ask voters to support a parcel tax would make a significant difference in the possibility of success of a parcel tax measure. Below responded that it would not make a difference waiting one year or four years, as long as the first bonds were still being paid off. He also noted that someone would have to spend money to get that message out to the public, and he said he did not believe that was likely.

Gaffney noted that the first bonds paid for the radio towers, a significant investment MERA is still using and will continue to use into the life of the second generation system. He feels that this is a strong response to the argument that people will not support a new system because we are still paying of the bonds for the first system. Below also noted that none of the negative messages in the survey caused a significant hit in the final results.

Cusimano asked Price to share the proposal for boosting public outreach campaign.

Price stated that MERA still needed to decide how and when to move forward with implementing and funding the new emergency radio system. If the decision is made to move forward with the parcel tax measure, he recommends an extensive public outreach campaign to better educate the public about the importance and function of the MERA system.

Price stated that 60-65% is actually strong support, but that it just fails to meet the needed two-thirds threshold to pass a parcel tax measure. He said that after the public education program he proposed following up with a smaller tracking poll to gauge the effectiveness of the effort heading towards Election Day.

Price recommended a three part strategy for the expanded public outreach campaign. The first part of this strategy would be to ensure that MERA still has the support of the Board of Supervisors to place the parcel tax measure on the ballot. He noted that a discussion has already taken place with Supervisor Kinsey, who suggested meeting again with the Board of Supervisors in a public meeting to update the board on the MERA Next Gen Project progress.

The second part of the strategy would be educating and motivating Police and Fire Chiefs and the rank and file to support the new system. This would consist of an aggressive campaign to reach out to the emergency personnel associations to bring them up to speed with what is happening with the MERA system.

The third part of this strategy, representing the bulk of the effort, is educating the public on importance and function of MERA. He said, in his experience, a concerted public outreach effort absolutely can move numbers and result in putting a parcel tax measure such as the proposed MERA ballot measure in a position to win. He asked Below if he had similar experience. He cited a number examples of recent bond measures he had worked on that faced similar polling numbers that were ultimately successful with the aid of a public outreach effort.

Price discussed the proposed changes to the project outreach budget. He noted that there was no significant increase in consultant costs. He said there were some additions made for legal counsel to ensure that the public education campaign was executed in the right way. He also pointed out that the bulk of the increase in costs to the budget consisted of direct mail and television spots. The mail and television spots would focus on the importance of emergency communications during natural disasters and reduced response times. Price said that the public outreach campaign would begin in April and May, and the tracking poll would be conducted in late May or possibly early June.

Price asked that the Project Oversight Committee to decide whether or not to move forward with the expanded public outreach effort and recommend approval of an increase in the project outreach budget to \$341,000. He noted that the recommendation would then move on to the MERA Executive Board and MERA Governing Board.

Cassingham said that MERA would need to convene a special meeting of the Governing Board. She also said that the additional funds for the MERA outreach project would come from MERA's reserve funds.

Sinnott said he does not feel like the public safety labor groups are enthusiastic about the MERA Gen II system because the system has not failed to date. Price responded that if MERA decides that the system needs to be replaced, than the funding will either come out of each agency's budget, or be raised with a parcel tax. He said that if funds come out of MERA agency's budget, it could mean a significant impact to each agency's operating budget.

Sinnott responded that he did not think a budget hit would be an argument that would generate a lot of enthusiasm for MERA Gen II Project. Sinnott said he did think that the coverage issues in some areas of the county would be convincing for rank and file members.

Price said that MERA project staff is also updating the Round II presentations to better highlight the need for the new system and the possible effect of traditional method of funding on MERA agency budgets.

Cassingham provided an overview of MERA reserve funds. She said Fund 32, the New Project Financing that supplemented the bonds, will have a balance of \$180,000 as of 6/30/14. She said Fund 36, the Replacement Fund MERA has been using to implement the Strategic Plan, has a projected balance of \$675,000 as of 6/30/14. She said that the

public outreach program Price is proposing for MERA would cost an additional \$210,000 which would reduce the Replacement Fund balance to \$465,000. She added that in Fiscal Year 14/15, an additional \$100,000 would be transferred to the Replacement Fund out of MERA's Operating Fund. She said that there is \$180,000 worth of projects planned that will benefit the current system in Fiscal Year 14/15. The transfer of additional funds and planned project costs would bring the balance to roughly \$375,000 in Fiscal Year 14/15. Additionally, if MERA continues with outreach in July through November, there would be an additional cost of \$256,000 bringing the balance down to \$130,000.

Cassingham said that Fund 37, MERA's Emergency Fund, balance is currently at \$500,000. She noted that all fund numbers discussed were rounded off.

Cusimano asked if the numbers in MERA Reserve Funds were low within historical context. Cassingham answered that they were, given increased costs associated with Strategic Plan implementation and outreach for system replacement.

Hymel asked if we really needed to do the second tracking poll if we had already committed so much to going forward with the parcel tax measure. Price said that it may be better not to do the second tracking poll considering the resources already committed and just push forward.

Hymel said that believed that his fiduciary responsibility as a MERA board member is to ensure that MERA agencies have a functioning and reliable communication system. He said that ultimately the MERA Executive Board and MERA Governing Board will need to make the final decision regarding moving forward.

Cassingham asked Hymel when it would be appropriate to revisit the Board of Supervisors to update them on the progress of the project. Hymel responded that it was important to get through upcoming MERA Board meetings before revisiting the Board of Supervisors to update them on our progress. He also suggested that MERA members come to the Board of Supervisors to speak to importance of implementing the new system.

Cusimano asked if there were any more questions regarding expanded Public Education Program. Hearing none, he asked if it was the will of the group to move forward with the expanded plan. Hymel suggested eliminating the second tracking poll from the plan.

Cusimano called for a vote on expanding Public Education Program.

M/S/P Sinnott/Gaffney to convey Project Oversight Committee support of a MERA Executive Board recommendation of the Revised Outreach Plan and Budget, including an additional \$197,450, to the Governing Board for approval at its special meeting.

AYES: All

NAYS: None

ABSTENTIONS: None

Motion Carried.

Cusimano asked all remaining items attached in section D of the agenda be presented as informational, barring any questions or comments. All members present agreed.

D. Member Outreach Update – Jeffries, Price, Mullen

- 1) Report on Round Two Presentations – Jeffries
- 2) Report on Round Two Presentations to other organizations – Jeffries
- 3) Report on MERA Newsletters – Jeffries
- 4) Status Outreach to School Districts - Tackabery
- 5) Update on Potentially Competing Ballot Measures
- 6) Discussion of Tentative Master Calendar Before November 2014 Election

E. Other Information Items

None.

F. Next Meeting

The date and time of the next meeting is to be determined.

G. Open Time for Items Not on Agenda

None.

H. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 4:43 p.m.

Minutes prepared by:



Alex Anderson,
MERA Special Project Administrative Assistant