

MARIN EMERGENCY RADIO AUTHORITY

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C.O.C. 9/16/15 Agenda Item A

Measure A Citizens Oversight Committee

Minutes of June 8, 2015 Special Meeting

DRAFT: 6/30/15

Call to Order and Introductions

The meeting was called to order by Cassingham (in lieu of the Chair to be elected later in the meeting) at 3:41 p.m. in CAO Room 315, Marin Civic Center, San Rafael, CA. Self introductions followed. Cassingham added her appreciation for the Committee members' willingness to serve and hoped this would be both a responsible and enjoyable assignment. NOTE: Minutes reflect the order of the agenda.

Committee Members Present:

District #1	Elizabeth Greenberg
District #2	Bill Levinson
District #3	Chuck Reite
District #4	Larry Luckham
District #5	Paul Herrerias

Staff Present:

MERA Executive Officer	Maureen Cassingham
MERA Deputy Executive Officer – Next Gen Project	Dave Jeffries
MERA Administrative Assistant – Next Gen Project	Alex Anderson

A. When Seconds Save Lives – An Overview for the Citizens Oversight Committee – Presentation by Dave Jeffries, MERA Deputy Executive Officer - Next Gen Project

Jeffries summarized his professional law enforcement and emergency operations background and 31 years of user experience with pre-MERA communications systems and the current System. He also noted his post retirement outreach work with the Next Gen Project. He provided the PowerPoint presentation that was included in the agenda packet, which recapped public safety communications before MERA, the current MERA system and the Next Gen Project.

With the presentation came comments and questions from the Committee members. Greenberg inquired about busies and downtime. Jeffries clarified that the system generates queues by user priority, which can very infrequently block certain users. Greenberg confirmed the operation of parallel systems during the cutover to the new system. Jeffries explained the testing and patching that occurs before and with the cutover process.

Levinson noted major prior County project experiences like the SAP system that didn't work well. He encouraged taking the time needed to do the due diligence. Jeffries acknowledged the scrutiny that comes with major projects and that this Project will benefit from early-on user involvement and input, which will be beneficial to users in the future. Site visits of like systems before vendor selection was a great benefit to the current System, along with development of work-arounds ahead of any potential system failures.

Greenberg commented on the remaining current debt service and the need for requirements to address re-routing options if towers fail. She emphasized the importance of picking the best vendor for emergency radio systems and the future of these technologies. Herrerias confirmed that the MERA members are responsible for retiring the current bonds. The remaining debt of \$14M reflects repayment of bonds issued, plus interest. Jeffries said members have discussed the continuation of debt service payments after retirement of the Bonds to fund a Gen III reserve. Herrerias and Greenberg echoed support for commitment to this set-aside. Greenberg said good engineering of Next Gen should be able to reuse some of the current infrastructure and plot an upgradeability path for Gen III. Jeffries said much had been learned from the development of the current system including tower siting issues, timing of radio purchase and longer than anticipated useful radio life. Luckham noted the rapidity of technological change with these systems and software improvements. Jeffries confirmed Next Gen will be much more software driven and that no unnecessary features will be considered that do not enhance safety services based on cost/benefit analysis.

Jeffries confirmed that O&M costs will continue being the member agencies' responsibility. Levinson asked if consultant services had been budgeted for the Project. Jeffries said MERA is currently in the process of contracting with a wireless communications consultant to develop the vendor RFP and provide Project management. Levinson asked if bonds had been sold. Jeffries said no and that MERA's Finance Committee was addressing timing of Project financing. He added we were looking at phasing bonds, consistent with Project cash flow needs. Levinson said bond interest rates were anticipated to increase next year and it might be to our advantage to sell now. Cassingham said we are working with a Financial Advisor to strategize the timing of bonds and defer paying interest for as long as practicable.

Jeffries noted the potential of adding new members or assessing Non-member system users some costs beyond the purchase of their radios and related training. Mutual-aid benefit to MERA is an offsetting cost consideration. Reite asked about like systems elsewhere from where MERA could benefit from their experiences. Jeffries confirmed that the DPW team was looking at other systems in the Bay Area, emphasizing the move to 700MHz was national. Alameda and Contra Costa Counties were operational with 700MHz. San Mateo is ahead of us and San Francisco is at 800MHz and moving to 700MHz. MERA will be able to add these areas to Next Gen as part of our regional mutual aid overlay. Jeffries confirmed for Reite the number of qualified consultants and vendors will assure MERA will have effective choices. He added that the system vendor may be different than the radio vendor which was not a choice with the current system. Greenberg added that consultants need frequency and narrow-banding expertise. Jeffries provided further technical explanation on frequencies.

Herrerias inquired about capitalized interest in the Project budget. Jeffries said this cost of funds used to finance Project construction was included by the MERA Finance Committee, noting this line item, if not needed, will be expended on other Project costs like additional tower sites. Herrerias said the COC is here to protect these public funds. Jeffries reminded the Committee that the \$29 parcel tax is a cap which can be reduced if Project costs are less. The MERA Governing Board would have to weigh the public benefit of adding more sites to enhance the system if estimated costs were less versus reducing the tax. In response to comments on the cost of a System Upgrade Agreement, Jeffries said this is an estimate for this service option and that MERA could also approach it by establishing a self-funded reserve to address periodic upgrades.

In addition to the Parcel Tax overview, Cassingham noted that 118 Low-Income Senior Exemption applications were received by the deadline and 117 were approved. Applications are filed annually. Jeffries added that the county-wide tax covers all the MERA member agencies which are diverse in terms of services provided, size, service areas and populations.

During the PPT, Committee Members were invited to share their professional backgrounds and any other information they wanted to share, including reasons for applying. Committee members expressed their interest in representing and protecting the taxpayers. Levinson added his interest in the superintendents' and schools' use of the MERA System.

Regarding MERA's organizational structure, Jeffries clarified that MERA's Boards and Committees are composed of member agency representatives who are not paid by MERA and that staff are MERA paid part-time contractors. He added that Next Gen is not a County project but the Authority's project.

Levinson confirmed the core contract administrative staff as Cassingham, Jeffries and Anderson, with Tackabery, Nelson and Chuck as contract technical staff. Jeffries said he and Anderson are assigned solely to work on Next Gen. He said this group will be augmented with technical and project management consultants to address the Next Gen Project. Herrerias asked about MERA sources of revenue for the current system. Jeffries said member debt service funded construction and enhancements and member contributions fund day-to-day system operations. Some grants have been received for system enhancements preceding Next Gen.

In response to the PPT slide on COC duties under the Tax Ordinance, Levinson inquired about field trips and observing the work to be done. Cassingham clarified the Committee's scope as being limited to reviewing expenditures of tax revenues, annual audits and revenue and expenditure annual reports to the MERA Governing Board and Board of Supervisors. Jeffries said a tour of the System's Prime Site might be helpful; however, site visits are not a COC charge. Reite said the thrust of their charge is fiscal; Luckham said the Committee could request the Governing Board for site visits. Anderson said in addition to staff, there are more than 50 MERA member representatives that provide oversight for current operations and the Next Gen Project on MERA's Boards and Committees. Levinson said he was less interested in numbers than in the accountability framework for Next Gen. Jeffries said MERA is contracting with the County to provide Next Gen implementation services. Cassingham said the MERA Governing Board bears the ultimate responsibility for Project implementation.

Luckham requested a larger print organization chart, a more readable timeline, and Committee and Staff contact information lists. Herrerias asked for inclusion of staff names on the org chart. Cassingham and Jeffries will respond to these requests electronically.

B. Measure A Citizens Oversight Committee

- Membership Information
- List of Members
- Member Résumés

Cassingham noted that the agenda packet included a history of the formation of the COC, the contents of the MERA Governing Board Resolution establishing COC requirements, duties, and qualifications, a membership list and member applications. She stressed the importance of timely filing of required FPPC Form 700s on assuming office. This can be done electronically with Marin County.

C. Review of Measure A Tax Ordinance

Cassingham noted inclusion of the Ordinance in the Committee's agenda packet for Committee member reference. Also included is the wording of Measure A. Levinson asked what the product of the Committee's reviews are. Cassingham said they are in the form of reports with comments to the MERA Governing Board. Jeffries noted, MERA has, throughout Project planning and implementation, stressed transparency and accountability. Cassingham said in addition to comments on expenditure reports, both MERA Boards will receive COC meeting minutes.

D. Review and Adoption of Citizen Oversight Committee Bylaws

Cassingham provided a brief history of the development of the COC Bylaws adopted by the MERA Governing Board and she reviewed their contents. She noted the Committee can recommend changes to the Bylaws to the MERA Governing Board. The Committee, by consensus, approved the Bylaws as presented.

E. Election of Chair

By acclamation, Herrerias and Greenberg were elected to serve as Chair and Vice Chair, respectively.

F. Initial Appointment Terms

By the drawing of lots to provide for staggered terms, Greenberg received a 4-year term, Levinson a 4-year term, Reite a 2-year term, Luckham a 2-year term and Herrerias a 4-year term.

G. Confirmation of Meeting Schedule

After some discussion, the members by consensus, agreed to an initial quarterly meeting schedule until the flow of parcel taxes commences and expenditures follow and the next meeting dates of September 16 and December 16. Luckham suggested bi-monthly meetings thereafter, which should be sufficient.

Cassingham said initial FY15-16 Next Gen expenses will be covered by a surety substitution, which frees up the current Bond Reserve and other MERA Reserve Funds.

Cassingham clarified for Luckham that the issuance of bonds is tentatively planned in FY16-17; however, parcel taxes will be received and expended in FY15-16.

H. Other Information Items

None.

I. Open Time for Items Not on Agenda

None.

J. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:18 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Cassingham
Executive Officer and Secretary

NEXT: Measure A Citizens Oversight Committee Regular Meeting

Wednesday – September 16, 2015 – 3:30pm