

MARIN EMERGENCY RADIO AUTHORITY

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APPROVED: 5/14/14

GOVERNING BOARD

Minutes of April 2, 2014 Special Meeting

A. Call to Order and Introductions:

The meeting was called to order by President Pearce on April 2, 2014 at 3:31 p.m. in Marin Civic Center – Conference Room 324-A, San Rafael, CA 94903. Self-introductions followed.

Governing Board Members & Alternates Present:

City of Belvedere	Mary Neilan
Town of Corte Madera	Roger Sprehn (Alternate)
City of Larkspur	Robert Sinnott
City of Mill Valley	Angel Bernal; Jacqueline Graf-Reis (Alternate)
City of Novato	Jeanne MacLeamy
Town of Ross	Tom Gaffney
Town of San Anselmo	Kay Coleman
County of Marin	Matthew Hymel
City of Sausalito	John Rohrbacher (Alternate)
Town of Tiburon	Michael Cronin, David Hutton (Alternate)
Inverness Public Utility District	James Fox
Kentfield Fire Protection District	Ron Naso (Alternate)
Marin Transit	Amy Van Doren
Marin Municipal Water District	Bill Hogan (Alternate)
Marinwood Community Services District	Thomas Roach
Novato Fire Protection District	Kevin Johnston (Alternate)
Southern Marin Fire Protection District	Martin Langeveld, Jim Irving (Alternate)
Stinson Beach Fire District	Kenny Stevens
Tiburon Fire Protection District	Richard Pearce
Central Marin Police Authority	Todd Cusimano

Governing Board Members & Alternates Absent:

Town of Fairfax
City of San Rafael
Bollinas Fire Protection District
Marin Community College District
Ross Valley Fire Department

Staff Present:

MERA Executive Officer	Maureen Cassingham
MERA General Counsel	Trisha Ortiz
MERA Special Project Manager	Dave Jeffries
County DPW/MERA Operations Officer	Craig Tackabery
MERA Special Project Administrative Assistant	Alex Anderson

Guests Present:

Indie Politics	Dan Mullen
Price Campaign Solutions	Terry Price

**B. Recommendations from MERA Executive Board and Project Oversight Committee –
Second Public Opinion Poll Reports and Revised MERA Outreach Plan and Budget**

Pearce noted MERA's Executive Board and Committees have been working tirelessly on the submittals before them. The Governing Board approved the Next Gen System Feasibility Study in December, which recommended System replacement earlier than anticipated due to cessation of manufacturers' support, required Frequency giveback and other infrastructure reasons. This dovetails into our fiduciary responsibility for our emergency communications system. There are two funding options for replacement including the usual and customary way we funded the current system and a parcel tax. Other options considered but rejected were a Mello-Roos CFD and a sales tax. He said MERA embarked on its Outreach Plan for the Project which included public opinion surveys. While survey results in support of System replacement are strong, the 2/3 threshold has not been met. We are now revising our outreach approach and budget and this is what is before the Governing Board today.

Cassingham said MERA has been working on plans for MERA's future and the replacement System for about 4½ years. Thousands of hours have been invested and nearly 100 meetings have been convened to this point. All this has been funded by MERA's Replacement Fund which is its intended use. Two action items are on the agenda to be preceded by a Second Poll results presentation by MERA's Outreach Consultants. Those results have triggered proposed revisions to the Outreach Plan and Budget.

Cassingham introduced Price and Mullen who have worked with MERA on outreach since 2011. She summarized their extensive public affairs experience, most notably on the Twin Cities Police Authority and Sausalito public safety facilities bond measures. They have been very active in Marin County with a variety of campaigns, and we are in very good hands with them in our public education efforts.

Price presented Second Poll findings noting the First Poll was conducted at the same time in 2013 for baseline numbers. Little has changed in the mood of the electorate. There was marginal increased support for the proposed ballot measure. We fall under the 2/3 threshold which is what we need. Strongest arguments in favor are the need for communications during a natural disaster and improvement of 911 response times. Strongest criticisms are that the last Bond is still being

paid off and numerous other local taxes that have been approved by voters along with proposed future measures. Another key finding was establish the need to establish reliable emergency communications as a priority and diminishment of replacement urgency. To increase support for the proposed measure, language changes included improvement of 911 response times, addition of a citizens' oversight committee, exemption for low-income senior homeowners and reduction of the parcel tax from \$45 to \$29. These changes did not move the poll numbers as much as expected. Of concern is that voters are not that concerned about emergency communications. San Rafael voters are supportive and Novato voters not so much. Price said we will be focusing on persuadables County-wide. He noted support lags in Supervisorial Districts 5 and 3. In reviewing the demographic slides, he noted swing voters are the ones we are most interested in. Support in San Rafael may reflect a recent public safety measure wherein a lot of information was disseminated on its importance. The 8% of the electorate identified as positive movers may be persuadable with additional information.

Price said the poll could not identify specific demographic groups in particular areas to target so education needs to be County-wide. He reviewed the Poll questions again, noting disaster communications and 911 response items as having high numbers of persuadables for related messaging. Other messages were less compelling like day-to-day use and coverage. More complex arguments do not resonate with the public. While they will be discussed, they will not be emphasized in outreach efforts. The Poll also tests possible criticisms of the proposed tax like current system debt and the cumulative effect of other taxes which are the two most compelling. These can be mitigated by messaging.

Price presented the Pollsters' conclusions that an active education and communications effort will be required to increase public awareness about the critical nature of emergency communications and this must be undertaken before the measure is on the November ballot. He addressed MacLeamy's questions about poll methodology and reasons for voters voting no against the tax. He said voters were asked awareness and general opinion questions, then asked about ballot language, tested for positive and negative arguments, then represented with a second measure reading followed by position questions. We did not poll for support for using taxes already collected for public purposes. Pension and benefit questions did not generate major concerns. This will nonetheless be countered by no parcel tax proceeds going to employee pensions.

Price said Novato voters would be given additional information and attention, noting Southern Marin has a higher number of positive movers that could join the yes column. In general, the entire County will be provided with additional information. MacLeamy confirmed this would include District 5.

Mullen addressed where we go from here in terms of mobilizing support and educating the public. He summarized that Round One member presentations in 2013 were effective from an informational standpoint, which did not affect polling results. The 2013 Poll did, however, lead to the lowering of the parcel tax amount and development of a more compelling ballot statement. The 2014 Poll results were improved but at 63%, we are still four points short of passage. To make up the four points, we will need to educate the public on the urgent need for reliable emergency communications. This is directly related to how citizens prioritize the need for these communications. An expanded public education effort is required, stressing the urgent need for

reliable emergency communications. This includes enlisting Police and Fire Chiefs, police officer and fire fighter support in telling the 911/MERA story, expanding public education through earned media, presentations, direct mail and cable TV and asking for MERA Member and BOS support and engagement.

Mullen presented the Revised Outreach Budget to accomplish this. An increase of \$197,450 is needed over the prior approved budget. Price noted the elimination of the third poll that was planned after the public education program in light of the commitment to go forward. Mullen said this is a savings of \$12,250.

Irving asked about the use of these funds and related timeline in association with a citizens advocacy campaign for the ballot measure. Mullen said the BOS will likely act in July to place the measure on the ballot. No public funds can be used once this action is taken. We are proposing to educate the public over the next two months about this Project. This is separate from a campaign effort. Ours is a county-wide public education program which will be more efficient on TV than just mail. Coleman clarified that these funds will be expended before the measure goes on the ballot. Pearce referenced the timeline in the Revised Plan for program activities and milestones. Mullen reviewed the Page 5 timeline through November.

Mullen summarized that the time is now, stating we have updated and refined the Next Gen System Project that will win voter support, we have momentum with our engaged team, we cannot afford to wait any longer, System replacement cannot wait and we know educating the public is required for a successful bond measure. He concluded that with the Governing Board's support and help, we will educate the public on MERA's mission to provide reliable emergency communications, implement the Next Gen System that improves 911 response, provides greater coverage and is reliable during natural disasters, raise \$40M for the project via a parcel tax and preserves MERA member general funds for other critical services.

Van Doren asked for clarification on the mailers. Mullen said two are planned County-wide with one in between to Southern Marin. MacLeamy asked what happens if it doesn't pass and whether we look to 2016. Hymel said the Executive Board and MERA Committees have been dealing with this question. As MERA Board members, we are solely responsible for a fully functioning system. Given the one-year deferment already, if we are not successful in November, we will have to approach the members in 2015 to fund the replacement system. We do not have the ability to defer or not start the Next Gen System after that. MacLeamy said every member agency must know the financial impact on them for funding the project. Hymel said Round Two presentations will include this information.

Jeffries provided an update on Round Two which begins next Monday. Round Two will be preceded by a presentation to Member Finance Directors. Staff reports, proposed resolutions and member-specific financial information will be provided one to two weeks before the presentations. The member estimated financing spreadsheets will include smoothing or interest-only payments bridging current and Next Gen System debt which defers costs to remaining years. Estimated O&M information per agency will also be provided. The hope is to obtain member resolutions of support of the parcel tax to present to the BOS for placing the measure on the November ballot.

Neilan commented on the proposed messaging, noting that many do not know what MERA is and that 911 calls were answered before it existed. We need to explain the benefit of MERA since it has been in effect and what it has been doing to keep the System functioning well. She said the Polly Klaas tragedy brought to light the importance of public safety communications and suggested we use the story to make a point. Jeffries explained the background on this and how the suspect was not detained because of lack of knowledge. Price agreed with this excellent point and that we need real stories to emphasize the connection of 911 to MERA. In two months, raising MERA's name identification will not be doable, but we can speak to 911 and its connection to MERA and how it saves lives and protects safety personnel.

Cronin agreed that people will not understand MERA six months from now but 911 does connect. He suggested using the Vision fire as an example. Fortunately, there has been no recent disaster to highlight the need for critical communications. Price said the example of drought-related fire danger can be used. Cronin said as with the original system, which was on the verge of collapse, we need to highlight aging of the current system which must also be replaced due to recent legislation. This system is 911 critical. Cronin added that we will need the help of local elected officials who voters trust and who put them there. Coleman said as an elected official, her experience is that mailers will have a greater impact than the voters she can reach. Using mailers with a brief explanation and first responders' photos, the more souls will be saved. Naso urged the reworking of the Round One video into 30- to 60-second PSAs. He suggested the Lagoon as an accident setting and first police and fire responders and USAR with narration. Price concurred that with the help of experts, this needs to be done to get the necessary attention without scaring viewers. Stevens suggested using Stinson as an example of where the current System does not work on the coast, which is why we need this replacement system. Price concurred that coverage and response times really resonate with voters in those areas and beyond.

Neilan inquired about what happens after August. Pearce said this is when the campaign committee begins its work. Price said the committee will begin advocating for the measure. He noted the transition from public education to citizens advocacy committee with the Twin Cities Police Authority bond measure as an example. Rank-and-file safety personnel will be very important at this point. MacLeamy asked if a base of citizen support is being built. Price said this is occurring but not in relationship to MERA. The citizens committee will create its own organization and hire the assistance needed for its own campaign. Tackabery encouraged early on public information briefings of rank and file regarding the Next Gen Project.

M/S/P Cusimano/Stevens to approve, based on Project Oversight Committee and Executive Board recommendations, the Revised MERA Outreach Plan and Budget including an additional \$197,450 in Plan expenditures based on Second Poll results, without a third Public Opinion Poll, to be funded from the Replacement Reserve.

AYES: Neilan, Sprehn, Sinnott, Bernal, MacLeamy, Gaffney, Coleman, Hymel, Rohrbacher, Cronin, Fox, Naso, Van Doren, Hogan, Roach, Johnston, Langeveld, Stevens, Pearce and Cusimano

NAYS: NONE

ABSTENTIONS: NONE

Motion carried.

C. Open Time for Items NOT on Agenda

None.

D. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 4:17 p.m.

Meeting of MERA Governing Board
Wednesday – May 14, 2014 – 3:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Cassingham
MERA Executive Officer