

City sees need for new tower: Prefers other site for emergency radio improvement

By Gwen Guerke

HARRINGTON — Harrington City Council agreed there's a definite need for a new 800 MHz emergency communications system.

Thirty-six buildings in the city lack adequate radio coverage for police officers and firefighters, according to a report presented by the state Department of Technology and Information.

Deputy Police Chief Norman Barlow said he can't remember any major problems, but a new tower could prevent future issues.

"There have been little issues when the tower switches from Kent to Sussex. I don't recall any 911 failure," said Deputy Chief Barlow.

"I'm a greater supporter. Fire, police, highway department, EMS, we all need to utilize the system so we can better serve. It's preventive maintenance, and that's a real plus," he added.

Council members told state officials, who are funding the project, they would just like to see the radio tower placed in a location where it's efficient, but not an eyesore.

After looking at three possible sites for the project, expected to be completed by the end of the year, state officials recommended putting a tower on the site of Burris Foods.

Technology department project manager Gary Somma told council the communications system would not only benefit Harrington's police and fire departments, it would also assist Delaware State Police officers at Troop 3 in Woodside.

The new system would link with Milford and Kent County radio frequencies, with backup to Sussex County's 911 center if the Milford link is broken.

"This program is attempting to solve the inoperability between jurisdictions and agencies," Mr. Somma said.

"You will have communication with built-in redundancies," he added.

Councilman Anthony Moyer asked state officials to consider moving the 400-foot, free-standing tower to the east side of U.S. 13, on town property adjacent to the wastewater lagoons.

"We certainly see the need for this. We're trying to spruce up downtown," said Mr. Moyer.

"We need to look at all the possibilities. Wouldn't it make sense to have it next to an existing tower and have us get the leasing fees?" he said.

The existing Comcast tower near the site Councilman Moyer suggested does not have the structural support to accommodate the new system, Mr. Somma said.

He said he could not estimate the cost of the project because the design has not been completed.

Although he expects the tower and equipment to be in place by the end of the year, the system will still need to be tested before it becomes operational.

"It will not be on air by the end of the year. There is a period of testing the equipment after it is installed," he said.

In other business:

* A special election will be held May 16 allowing residents to vote on whether the city can borrow up to \$600,000 in general obligation bonds to finance improvements to the wastewater treatment facilities.

* Council held first readings on bills relating to annexation fees, developers providing for open space, prohibiting parking in residential front and side yards, a regulation of portable storage units, a regulation regarding open burning within city limits and a procedure for removing dead and damaged trees.

A public hearing on the proposed ordinances will be held at the May 1 council meeting.

Councilman Wayne Porter said all of the proposed regulations were prompted by citizen's concerns.

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