

Eaton County Public Safety Radio Project Frequently Asked Questions

What is being requested?

The November 7, 2017 ballot question asks to allow the county to access a 911 surcharge of up to \$1.75/month for public safety radio equipment. The 911 surcharge would fully fund a new radio system for all first responders in the county.

What is the issue?

Public Safety in Eaton County operates on eight different radio systems, creating challenges for all emergency responders to communicate with each other. Some first responders carry multiple devices in order to talk to various responding agencies. This has led to lapses in communication, especially if information is transmitted on a wrong device.

Additionally, the system is aging and experiencing failures. This outdated technology poses many challenges and risks to public safety users including limited coverage, interference (some service-impacting), limited interoperability, and system failures. Major components of the current system will not be supported beginning April of 2018, three quarters of our tower radios will no longer be readily available. Having equipment that is no longer supported will provide challenges when it comes to acquiring parts which could lead to system vulnerability and extended system outages. The system is at the end of its serviceable life and has been experiencing an ever-increasing number of failures that require immediate resolution.

Why join the Michigan Public Safety Communications System (MPSCS)?

For the past two years, the Radio System Advisory Workgroup (RSAW) has been diligently collecting information, identifying options, and performing site visits to determine the correct solution for the County. Ultimately, the RSAW unanimously recommends that Eaton County join the Michigan Public Safety Communication System (MPSCS) by expanding their network into Eaton County. This will provide a robust solution including enhanced voice communication coverage, increased security of the system, reduced interference, and a reliable and serviceable system to protect persons and property. This solution will provide better interoperability both within Eaton County, and with neighboring counties. Additionally, by being part of the MPSCS, the agencies in Eaton County will be able to utilize towers outside of the county, which will expand range for mutual aid, prisoner transports, or other activity that may extend outside our geographic boundaries.

This solution also provides financial benefits as the MPSCS already has their main tower located in Eaton County, which would be utilized to for coverage in the northeast corner of the county. Additionally, users of the system benefit from MPSCS network monitoring maintenance services at cost. The MPSCS also has a strong and respected track record of upgrading all of the equipment at the tower sites (including locally owned) located on the network, which would eliminate significant long term costs to the county for the replacement of aging equipment.

Who will benefit from the system?

Every community within Eaton County would benefit from the system. All local police, fire, and EMS agencies would receive new radio equipment and benefit from the improved coverage.

Will there be additional costs?

The proposal was developed in a manner to reduce the risk of unexpected expenses. For that reason, the proposal includes a 10-year warranty on all user radios and a 10-year battery replacement program.

How does a 911 surcharge work?

The 911 surcharge would be assessed on all devices subscribed to an Eaton County address which are capable of placing a call to 911. The fee is assessed per line, per month. The exception being pre-paid devices, which are subject only to a state surcharge of 1.92%. If approved, the Board of Commissioners will annually set the surcharge rate, not to exceed \$1.75.

What if my home or business has multiple phones or lines?

Every phone number will be assessed. For landline users with multiple lines (such as a business), the surcharge is only assessed on the first ten lines individually, and then for every ten lines (or portion thereof) owned thereafter. For example, if a business owns 100 phone lines, the surcharge would be assessed based on 19 phone lines (the first 10 lines are counted, leaving 90 lines remaining; 90 divided by 10 = 9 lines; 9+10 = 19 total lines assessed).

How many counties have a local surcharge?

As of July 1, 2017, 69 counties and the four Wayne County service districts assess a local 911 surcharge. The full list and surcharge rates can be found here:

http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mpsc/911charges_557570_7.pdf

How can the surcharge money be used?

911 surcharge funds in general are restricted for the specific use of building, operating, and maintaining 911 systems. The ballot proposal in Eaton County is worded to restrict it specifically for funding the radio project.

How does this affect the county budget?

The project would be completely funded by the proposed 911 surcharge and therefore would not pull any resources from the existing county budget. Additionally, 911 funds are restricted so this funding source is not available for general county operations.

What does a surcharge mean for the 911 millage?

A surcharge would only generate enough money to pay for the new radio system. The current 911 millage would still need to be renewed by the end of 2018 to pay for the operation of Central Dispatch.

If approved by voters, when will it be operational?

This project includes a large investment in infrastructure. The project is expected to take 24 months to complete, once the funding source is approved by the voters.

Does FirstNet affect the need for radios?

FirstNet is a public safety broadband network (data for smartphones, tablets, etc) being planned throughout the nation. However, FirstNet is not being built for primary public safety radio/voice. Local jurisdictions will still be responsible for providing public safety radio systems.

If you have additional questions, please contact:

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