



Emergency Communications System Bond Measure 34-243

When a person calls 911 for help, Washington County's emergency communications system is used to dispatch first responders to the scene as quickly as possible. As first responders, we think of the emergency communications system as our "lifeline." We use the system to get notification of a possible emergency, learn more about the situation as we travel to the scene, coordinate with one another as we arrive, ask for help if we need it, and alert other responders about the next steps in our coordinated response. The system is run by the Washington County Consolidated Communications Agency (WCCCA), also known as the 911 dispatch center.

Three key factors are prompting the need for the emergency communications system and facilities to be upgraded:

- **Changes in Emergency Communications Technology** – Equipment composing the current system is aging and reaching the end of its serviceable life. The system has worked for decades, but now manufacturers no longer make key parts because they have transitioned to newer technology, and finding quality used parts for the current system has become increasingly difficult.
- **A Growing Demand for Emergency Services** – Population and emergency call volume are anticipated to increase over the coming decades. Updated equipment and room for expanded facilities would enable the 911 dispatch center to remain effective.
- **A Need to Improve Reliability during Major Disasters** – The emergency communications system is designed, built and maintained to a much higher standard than consumer telecommunications. The system must continue to work reliably even when a storm, earthquake or other major emergency causes landline or cell phone networks to overload or fail. Updating equipment and strengthening facilities would improve the reliability of the system during severe weather, major earthquakes and other hazards.

For these reasons, Washington County voters will be asked to consider a funding measure to replace and upgrade the emergency communications system. With voter approval this May 17, Washington County would issue general obligation bonds to pay for \$77 million in capital costs for emergency and 911 equipment and facilities, including:

- Converting the existing system to current technology,
- Improving countywide coverage by installing more towers,
- Strengthening facilities for earthquakes, storms and other emergencies,
- Providing for efficient expansion of the 911 center and emergency facilities as our county's population grows, and
- Replacing approximately 3,000 analog radios currently used by first responders countywide.

The projected levy rate is not expected to be more than 8-cents per \$1,000 of assessed value over less than 21 years. The estimated cost for an average-valued home in Washington County would be \$20 in the first year of the levy, or about \$1.70 per month (based on a residential property with an assessed value of \$255,408 in 2016). Given potential changes in bond interest rates and assessed values, it is possible that the bonds could be completely paid sooner than estimated.

In summary, the technology and facilities improvements paid for through these bond funds would help our 911 dispatch center to serve our community reliably in the decades ahead. Transitioning the emergency communications system to current technology would help enable the public to continue receiving emergency assistance when a 911 call is made. More information about this measure can be found at <http://wcemergencycommunications.blogspot.com>.