

Open meeting law complied with. Quorum verified.

Call to order:

The Finance & Budget Committee meeting was called to order at 1:00 P.M. in the Vilas County conference rooms by Chair Christopher Mayer with the following committee members present: Ed Bluthardt, James Behling, Mark Rogacki and Linda Thorpe. Other County Board members present at this meeting: Gary Peske, Ron De Bruyne and Lorin Johnson. Others present at this meeting: Sheriff Frank Tomlanovich, Dale Soltow, Jim Galloway, Steve Beil representing Northway Communications; Jeff Nelson and Dave Leack representing PSC Alliance; Ken Anderson, Joe Van De Laarschot and David Alleman. A number of town and city board members, along with many area fire and EMS personnel were present. Individual names are listed in the body of the minutes when they addressed the committee.

Approve agenda to be discussed in any order by the Chair:

Motion by E. Bluthardt, 2nd by L. Thorpe to approve the agenda with the agenda order at the Chair's discretion. All voted aye. Carried.

Fire & EMS Simulcast project scope and costs:

Refinancing/project financing update and concerns:

Both agenda items listed above were discussed concurrently.

C. Mayer allowed the Clerk to make a statement. The Clerk advised the committee and the audience that a spreadsheet, previously supplied to the Finance & Budget Committee, contained errors that incorrectly inflated the cost of proposed future debt service. The Clerk apologized for the error and presented the committee with corrected spreadsheets. C. Mayer opened discussion by stating that he needed greater clarification of the project scope. He also stated that he hoped that this project represented the final completion of the 7 year Communication Project. J. Nelson narrated a power point presentation describing the history of the Communication Project to date. The simulcast system had its genesis in the original 2003 Communication Project, with the planned replacement and upgrade of fire repeater and associated radio equipment. He also spoke about initial Fire/EMS paging issues that surfaced in 2010. Those issues were corrected. The current problems with Fire/EMS paging developed upon the narrow banding of radio frequencies in 2011. He also explained the difference between digital and analog radio systems. Fire/EMS paging frequencies remain analog due to the insufficiencies of digital paging devices. The proposed Fire/EMS Simulcast project will address two locations in Vilas County that are currently experiencing poor to non-existent reception of Fire/EMS pages. Furthermore, a simulcast system will allow all responders to receive all types of Fire/EMS pages, no matter where they located in the reception area. C. Mayer asked if this project could be completed in phases. J. Nelson responded that the first phase would be to update radio equipment at the existing tower sites. Tower construction would not be feasible until 2013 at the Conover and Presque Isle locations. J. Behling asked if digital radios would offer better coverage. J. Nelson replied that digital portable radios would perform better than analog pagers. Law coverage using digital radios is county-wide and reception is quite robust. J. Behling asked if the solution to the paging problem was the use of digital radios to page Fire/EMS personnel. J. Nelson replied that this was potentially possible; however,

all Fire/EMS analog radio equipment would need to be replaced. Much of the analog equipment has been already been updated at fire department expense. M. Rogacki took issue with the paging reception coverage maps presented by J. Nelson. The maps appear to indicate that some areas of Vilas County would remain poorly covered. J. Nelson explained that the colored portions of the maps indicated areas of adequate to better levels of reception; white areas on the map did not necessarily indicate an area without coverage. No system could guarantee absolute coverage and be cost effective, due to the topography and tree cover. E. Bluthardt asked if the proposed project costs of \$1.23 million were firm, and represented a complete and fully operational system. J. Nelson replied in the affirmative. M. Rogacki asked if this project would address all Fire/EMS paging issues. J. Nelson responded that all known operational issues were addressed in the project. E. Bluthardt stated that the Fire/EMS Simulcast project was approved unanimously by the County Board in March 2012. He also stated that the original Communication Project returned over \$300,000 in unspent funds back to project debt retirement. He favors bonding for the proposed project. G. Peske described any delay in beginning construction as counterproductive. The three sites identified with poor paging reception would continue to be adversely affected. The Clerk asked if the project could be funded over three annual budget cycles, in lieu of bonding. J. Nelson replied in the affirmative. C. Mayer is concerned about the impact to future tax levies if debt service costs are increased due to bonding. S. Beil presented an equipment lease proposal from Motorola. Lease terms could be extended out to seven years. R. De Bruyne favors leasing the equipment as a method to lower annual costs. C. Mayer asked the audience if their local municipalities or fire departments were able and willing to help fund this project. Lac du Flambeau Town Chair Mark Gaulke responded: The town is already strapped for funds. Lac du Flambeau contributed \$150,000 towards the LDF tower. Conover Town Chair Steve Rohde responded: Conover is also strapped for funds. Maybe some help will be available in the 2013 budget. G. Peske added that the Town of Conover is currently being asked to contribute town land, building space and a generator towards the proposed Conover communication tower. The Town of Presque Isle is also willing to contribute land and building space toward that proposed tower. Town of Phelps Fire Chief Steve Waier responded: The Township might be able to help next year. Phelps currently provides tower and equipment space to Vilas County on their tower. Cloverland Town Chair Scott Maciosek responded: Our town budget is tight. What about using surplus County general funds? Eagle River Union Fire Dept. Chief Pat Weber responded: The five towns making up the Eagle River Union Fire Dept. have spent over \$100,000 to update fire and EMS radios due to narrow banding. M. Rogacki recognized that the Towns were in the same financial position as the County; they can understand the concerns that the Finance Committee has regarding the funding of this project. J. Behling stated that he is not opposed to the project, but that the County needs the flexibility to explore alternate methods of funding. He is not in favor of bonding. C. Mayer asked S. Beil if the Motorola proposal was a lease/purchase agreement. S. Beil replied in the affirmative. M. Rogacki expressed support for the project but opposes bonding. He also wants much more technical information about the project. He asked if there was the possibility of initially scaling the project back to just the Conover and Presque Isle locations. He also asked about the consequences of not proceeding immediately. He read excerpts from the Communication Committee minutes, indicating that the committee had prior knowledge that narrow

banding would occur. G. Peske responded that the committee knew in 2003 that a narrow banding mandate was a possibility in 2013. The committee didn't see the need at that time for a simulcast system. The decision was made to delay consideration of a simulcast system until the impact of narrow banding was determined. E. Bluthardt stated that local fire and EMS agencies have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to update their radio systems due to the narrow banding requirements. Vilas County now needs to move ahead on the county portion of the project. C. Mayer asked the committee to take action. **Motion by M. Rogacki, 2nd by J. Behling to refer the issue of a Fire/EMS Simulcast system back to the Communication Committee for further deliberation. 4 voted aye. 1 no vote: E. Bluthardt. Carried.** Stating that time was of the essence, Communication Committee Chair G. Peske set a meeting time and date of 1:00 P.M. Thursday, May 10, 2012 for that committee. J. Nelson will develop a project expense plan for consideration at that meeting.

Letters and Communications:

Nothing presented.

Future meeting dates:

C. Mayer announced that the Finance & Budget Committee would meet Thursday, May 17, 2012

Adjournment:

C. Mayer adjourned the meeting at 2:37 P.M.

Respectfully submitted by:
David R. Alleman
Vilas County Clerk.

Minutes reflect the recorder's notations and are subject to approval by the appropriate board or committee.