

CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION

Public Safety Emergency Radio Network (PSERN) system progress and Operator Interlocal Agreement

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DIRECTION NEEDED FROM COUNCIL**DIRECTION**

King County staff will provide an update of the status of the PSERN project and will explain the Operator Interlocal Agreement (ILA), which will create a new non-profit government agency that will operate PSERN. Staff is seeking direction from Council to return with a resolution authorizing execution of the Operator ILA on a future consent agenda.

The Operator ILA was negotiated with among the 12 stakeholder jurisdictions. PSERN is seeking legislative approval of the Operator ILA by all parties by this Fall. Tonight's presentation is an opportunity to ask questions and learn more about the PSERN project and Operator ILA.

RECOMMENDATION

Move to direct staff to bring back a resolution authorizing execution of the PSERN Operator Interlocal Agreement for final adoption at a future meeting.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

The City of Bellevue entered into an Interlocal Agreement (ILA) with five other cities in 1992 to form the Eastside Public Safety Communications Agency (EPSCA) for part ownership and operation of its 800 MHz radio system. EPSCA's primary responsibilities are to maintain the 800 MHz radio system in the north and east King County area and to maintain the handheld radio sets and public safety dispatch consoles that communicate via the radio system.

The EPSCA portion of the 800 MHz system is interoperable with the Seattle, King County and Valley Communications Center (ValleyCom) portions, but maintenance decisions are separately controlled by each of the four owners. The analog technology underlying the regions emergency radio system is 20 years old and at the end of its technological useful life. Key components of the system are no longer supported by the manufacture and vendors.

The Puget Sound Emergency Radio Network (PSERN) is the successor to the current emergency radio communications system and is currently under construction. The PSERN system anticipates being fully



operational in 2023. Voters approved the funding for the new emergency radio system through a property tax levy in April 2015 with a total budget for the project of approximately \$281 million. The City of Bellevue entered into the PSERN Implementation Period Interlocal Cooperation Agreement in February 2015 as a future member of PSERN. The Implementation Period Interlocal Cooperation Agreement designates King County as the lead agency for planning, procurement, financing and implementation of the new PSERN system.

PSERN will consolidate operations of the current countywide emergency communications systems into a single, independent agency providing operations and maintenance of the new system. PSERN was created in 2015 through a memorandum of agreement (MOA) and an initial interlocal cooperation agreement providing for the implementation of the new PSERN system (Implementation Period ILA). The Implementation Period ILA committed all parties to the adoption of a subsequent Operator ILA.

Like the proposed Operator ILA, the Implementation Period ILA consists of 12 parties, including Bellevue. In addition to King County and the City of Seattle, PSERN is made up of (1) the five member cities of the Eastside Public Safety Communications Agency (EPSCA); namely, Bellevue, Issaquah, Kirkland, Mercer Island and Redmond; and (2) the five member cities of the ValleyCom; namely, Auburn, Federal Way, Kent, Renton and Tukwila.

The Implementation ILA was approved by the legislative bodies of all 12 of its members. Since then, PSERN has been governed by a Joint Board, with one voting representative each from King County, the City of Seattle, EPSCA and ValleyCom. Deputy City Manager Nathan McCommon has served as the EPSCA representative on the Joint Board. EPSCA was also created by interlocal cooperation agreement and will continue for purposes of designating its Joint Board member under the Operator ILA and the close-out of the Implementation Period ILA.

PSERN Technology and System Improvements

The PSERN system will transition the region from an analog to digital emergency radio system increasing coverage throughout the region and greatly expanding interagency communication abilities in an emergency. PSERN will serve nearly 200 separate police, fire, emergency medical and other governmental agencies in the county, including Bellevue. PSERN will allow these agencies to communicate with one another during E-911 activities, from small incident responses to large scale emergencies.

There are many benefits to the new PSERN system in addition to simply replacing the existing system which has reached the end of its technological useful life. The new system includes advanced digital

technology and improved capacity, capability and connectivity as part of a new 20 plus year contract with the vendor, Motorola. PSERN will be a single billing agency with uniform rates, operational standards and system performance requirements. The system will improve coverage throughout the county to accommodate population growth in the previously less densely populated portions of the county, including along I-90 and Highways 2 and 410. PSERN will include updates, upgrade and repairs to both system and dispatch consoles, and includes the purchase of up to 19,000 new end use radios and infrastructure support 24 hours per day, seven days per week.

PSERN Project Status, Budget, and Potential Challenges

There will be a period of transition between PSERN's implementation activities and its operation of the new system upon final system acceptance, which is anticipated to occur in 2023. Key work programs at this time include:

- Radio site leases (95 percent complete)
- Radio site construction (91 percent of sites constructed or under construction)
- Motorola equipment installation (approximately 58-60 percent of mobile radio and microwave equipment installed).

The estimated cost of PSERN is \$288.4 million, with currently anticipated property tax levy revenues at just under \$300 million.

The King County Auditor has monitored the County's progress in the contracting, design, and construction of the PSERN system. The King County Auditor has raised a number of concerns with costs and pace of the project. Currently, the project is several years behind schedule increasing the total cost of the system. Additionally, a significant portion of the reserves for the project have been exhausted leaving only \$10.7 million in the contingency budget. How Covid-19 will affect levy revenue has yet to be determined potentially further straining PSERNs budget. Given the work that remains to be done and potential revenue shortfalls the Auditor has begun to suggest looking for additional revenue sources such as leasing transmission space on PSERN tower and recommends keeping the King County Council apprised.

Operator ILA for Council Approval

The PSERN Joint Board, including its EPSCA representative, Kirkland City Manager Kurt Triplett, have unanimously recommended that all member legislative bodies, including the Bellevue City Council approve execution of the PSERN Operator ILA.

Key Elements of ILA
Created pursuant to Interlocal Cooperation Act and will be formed as non-profit
Board of Directors with 4 voting members (King County, Seattle, EPSCA, ValleyCom) and 2 non-voting members (one each for police and fire).
Project debt not transferable to parties.
Establishes service level requirements and operations board.

No authority to levy new taxes
Strict limitations on withdrawal of a party (two-year notice and responsible for costs of leaving) or dissolution of PSERN (affirmative vote of majority of parties and then unanimous BOD approval).

PSERN is seeking legislative approval of the Operator ILA by all the parties by this fall. PSERN would then file articles of incorporation and bylaws as a non-profit corporation and appoint its initial board of directors.

The new board would then retain an executive director, who would hire staff and stand up the organization. There will be a short period of overlap between the Implementation Period ILA and the Operator ILA. Complete implementation of the new PSERN system is currently anticipated for 2023.

POLICY & FISCAL IMPACTS

Policy Impact

The City of Bellevue's participation and input into the management of PSERN will be through its vote as an EPSCA member. The City will not have direct input into the management of PSERN.

Fiscal Impact

The costs of PSERN to each of its members, including Bellevue, will be determined initially in accordance with a Cost Allocation Model that was adopted (Attachment B) with the Implementation Period ILA. These costs are based on the number of end user radios and dispatch consoles per member. This model is similar to the structure the City currently pays to EPSCA. For comparison in 2019 Bellevue paid \$25.25 to EPSCA for similar service. Final rates for PSERN have not been determined but have been estimated to be \$26-27 per radio. Notably, setting the per radio operation rate will require a unanimous vote of the new PSERN Board.

OPTIONS

1. Direct staff to bring back a resolution authorizing execution of the PSERN Operator Interlocal Agreement for final adoption at a future meeting.
2. Provide alternative direction to staff.

ATTACHMENTS & AVAILABLE DOCUMENTS

- A. About PSERN
- B. PSERN Operator Rates and Cost Allocation
- C. PSERN Operator ILA Summary
- D. Draft Resolution

AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL LIBRARY

PSERN Operator ILA