

Richardson County switching to regional 911 dispatching

(KLZA)-- Following another lengthy discussion with input from representatives of Falls City and more information from the Southeast Communication 911 Center in Beatrice Tuesday morning, Richardson County Commissioners voted unanimously to move forward with having the Southeast Communications Center provide the emergency service.

Beatrice Police Chief Bruce Lang provided Commissioners with information on costs Richardson County will incur by making the change. A 198 foot radio tower will be necessary at a cost of \$325-thousand along with \$75-thousand for new radio equipment. The unknown costs at this point will be determined by the amount of technology local officials want to include in the new system.

Lang said that if Falls City did decide to join the regional dispatch program, the costs could be shared. The annual cost for Richardson County to be part of the system will be \$180-thousand. If Falls City were to join, the annual cost would increase, but would not double in price. Again the annual costs could be shared by both Richardson County and Falls City.

Lang said that by joining the regional dispatch the costs would be less due to a reduction in staff and he said by sharing staff and resources the regional plan would provide better service to Richardson County. Lang also pointed out that the population in Richardson County does not justify the costs of having a 911 dispatch center. He said all of Southeast Nebraska just does not have a lot of population so sharing costs makes sense.

Falls City Council members, Police Chief Jamie Baker and City Administrator Gary Jorn attended the meeting along with Falls City Rural Fire Chief Mike Ramsey and Emergency Management Director Brian Kirkendall.

Following several months of discussion between the City and County about combining 911 and a breakdown in those negotiations, Jorn said he feels a new conversation should be started before the County took action to join the regional dispatch program. Jorn urged the Commissioners to take a hard look at what is best for the County as well as the City of Falls City.

Jorn said the disconnect between the City and County need to be put in the past and the money for dispatch not be a determining factor. He suggested a new committee should come up with a proposal for both the City and County.

Jorn said while he thinks eventually 911 will be a regional program, he feels moving the dispatching out of the county is premature and that they would be

taking jobs out of the county. Jorn said that he feels the County has lost sight that Falls City is part of Richardson County.

Commissioner Rick Karas made the motion to approve the Southeast Communications proposal. Commissioner John Caverzagie said he felt the City had made their decision when they were going to continue serving as the Public Service Answering Point for 911 calls in Richardson County and stop negotiating.

Following the Commissioners decision, Falls City, City Council President Mitch Merz said the regional dispatching idea should be researched, but was a premature decision rushed by the Commissioners, saying for short term pains, the Board made long-term decisions.

Many Signals Communications