

Amity's radio system costs could increase

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Amity Township taxpayers could end up paying more for a new, county-wide emergency radio system. Township police chief Kent A. Shuebrook said the increased costs are due to the proprietary nature of the Motorola system. The contracted \$40 million radio system is for all emergency agencies in Berks.

The county has said that the new radio system is to be operational by January 2013.

Shuebrook provided a copy of his "Review of the Motorola Architecture based Berks Radio System" report to the Amity Township Board of Supervisors at its April 6 meeting.

He will also speak on the subject at the April 19 Berks County Police Chiefs meeting.

County Emergency Management Director Brian Gottschall said the new system is a P25 compliant 700 Mhz Phase II trunked system that is state-of-the-art and provides features that can enhance communications in myriad ways.

The county has proposed to fund 20 percent of municipalities' base costs for their end-user products that include portable/mobile radios and encryption and will provide interest-free financing for seven years.

In some municipalities, base stations will also be required.

Shuebrook said Amity's new end-user products will cost approximately \$80,000 to \$85,000, and possibly an additional \$20,000 for future upgrades or repairs to the system.

He told the board that Philadelphia purchased the Motorola 800 MHz trunked system in 2002 at a cost of \$61 million and needed to fix the system six years later in 2008 at a cost of \$34 million, after the deaths of two firefighters when emergency buttons failed to function properly.

"This vendor, therefore, has a monopoly over all hardware, installation and any other service necessary to see that the end-user products function properly. This condition exists because the Motorola system is proprietary," said Shuebrook in his review.

"This conclusion is bolstered in that the Berks County decision maker(s), to date, respond with obfuscation when queried if other manufacturer radios will work with the Motorola system. If this conclusion is accurate, then it means that end-user products must be Motorola to function properly with the system architecture."

Shuebrook questions the existence of other manufacturers' quotes for the end user products; he said municipal agencies may want to decide who gets their taxpayer money.

He said there should be contractual agreements between the end users and Berks County as well as with "the vendor with the monopolistic hold on all end user products/services."

"These contracts should spell out yearly cost and fees for at least seven years, and should clearly delineate who will be financially responsible for problems/upgrades that attach to end user products because of system deficiencies," said Shuebrook.

"Who will be accountable if this becomes a boondoggle as happened to Philadelphia?" asked Shuebrook.

In other business:

The board unanimously approved the April 6 resignation of Officer Justin Schlottman without any further comment or explanation.

The police department will purchase 13 new "jewelry quality" police badges that will include the officers' badge numbers, the name of the police department and a mold of the Amity Township Building in the center.

Amity Township Crime Watch is funding \$500 of the \$975 cost. The cost per badge is \$75.

Shuebrook said the state Drug Enforcement Agency will schedule an upcoming date at the township building to collect and properly dispose of old and unused prescription drugs.

He said drugs should not be disposed of in toilets; the sewer system cannot properly treat the water, which contaminates streams and rivers within 24 hours.

The board unanimously approved paying a \$2,470 invoice for the initial herbicide treatment of Norway Spruce by Berks County Conservancy staff at Monocacy Hill Recreation Area.

Half of the cost will be reimbursed through the Schuylkill Highlands Grant Project.

The board also approved for a letter to be sent to nine residents on Slate Run Road, which borders Monocacy Hill, to inform them of upcoming herbicide treatments on a portion of Monocacy Hill land behind their properties.

Former secretary of the township Parks & Recreation Board, Risa Marmontello, said the herbicides are to kill the invasive species of Japanese Honeysuckle vine that are growing on trees and threaten the native plants and trees, as well as to kill the Multi-Flora Rose.