

# County commissioners hold off on making 911 improvements

Oakland County Commissioners have approved an initial step to upgrade Oakland's 911 emergency phone system. But any decision on a proposed 56-cent surcharge has been deferred, possibly until a non-election year.

The county's 911 system — which police officials insist is outdated and unreliable — was the main focus of the Oakland County Board of Commissioners' Public Service Committee that met Tuesday in Farmington Hills.

The committee normally meets during the day at the county complex in Pontiac. But this meeting was held at night and in a local community as an experiment in making county government more accessible, said committee chair David L. Moffitt, R-Farmington Hills.

The committee's main point of business was adoption of a resolution to apply for a \$26 million federal grant to finance a variety of changes, including searching out and obtaining more radio frequencies and building the transmission towers needed to operate them.

That resolution will go to the board's finance committee and, if approved there, subsequently to the board of commissioners.

The committee took no action on a proposal to add a 56-cent surcharge to telephone bills, something that would raise an estimated \$4.5 million annually. Several police chiefs — including William J. Dwyer of Farmington Hills and Paul Vallad of Waterford — told commissioners the existing system does not enable individual police agencies to communicate directly with each other during emergencies such as the shooting rampage at the Ford Wixom plant or during a weather emergency.

Others, including Robert J. Daddow from the county executive's office, reported on other

problems, such as difficulty handling incoming 911 calls coming in over the telephones and subsequently relaying vital information to EMS or police units via radio.

Some of that difficulty comes from not being able to get replacement parts that are no longer manufactured, said Daddow, the county's director of management and budget.

Proposals for upgrading the 911 system have been under consideration for more than a year by an ad hoc committee including commissioner Donald W. Jensen, R-Birmingham, and various county and police personnel. "It's a very complicated issue," said Jensen, "and there are so many unanswered questions."

Commissioners and police personnel generally agree the 911 system needs upgrading. But cost estimates vary, and few agree on the best method of paying for them.

Perhaps the most frequently mentioned is a 56-cent telephone surcharge, something already in place in some other Michigan counties.

"But that surcharge is a tax," insisted former Farmington Hills Mayor Don Marks, "and people should have the opportunity to vote on it."

"Voters can be trusted to do the right thing," insisted Marks.

Commissioners admit there are no plans to vote on the surcharge — by the county board, or by voters on a ballot proposal. One reason, they acknowledged privately, is the reluctance to discuss any tax during an election year.

In other action, the committee approved spending up to \$26,000 to purchase as many as three heart defibrillators to be used exclusively in and around the court house, where many county employees work and hundreds of residents visit daily.

Commissioner Shelley Taub,

R-Bloomfield Hills, said the defibrillators should be available in case any workers or visitors suffer heart attacks — as the commissioner Lawrence R. Pernick, D-Southfield, did last year. He died within moments.

The defibrillators would not have helped Pernick, according to EMS personnel who responded within minutes, because his attack was massive. But Taub said the machines should be purchased on a pilot basis — and personnel to operate them be trained — so they would be available for rapid response.

If the availability of defibrillators proves feasible, said the

commissioner, others could be purchased for the individual sheriff's department squad cars that patrol much of Oakland.

The resolution calling for the purchase of the defibrillators is referred to the Finance Committee and the entire board of commissioners.

Commissioner Moffitt estimated more than 50 people attended some portion of Tuesday's four-hour meeting. The session was televised live on the municipal cable system, and the tape will be available in other communities. "The potential viewing audience is tremendous," Moffitt said.

## Kidney Foundation walk set

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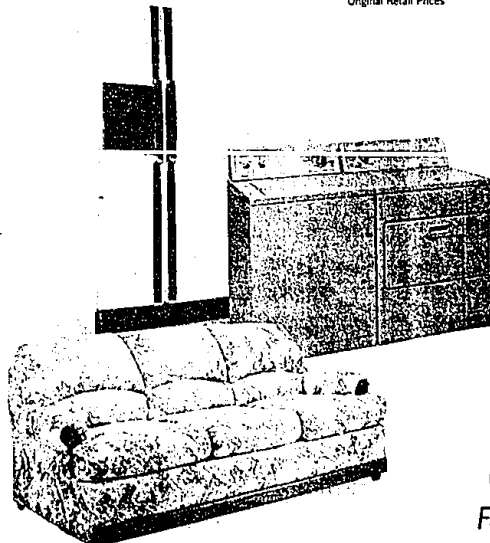
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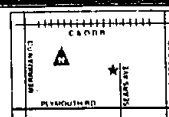
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