

CAPITAL FACILITIES PLANNING & BUDGETING COMMITTEE

PRELIMINARY DRAFT

Public Forum Meeting Minutes

Monday, December 12, 2011, Tracy Hall - Multipurpose Room

This set of minutes has not been reviewed or approved by the Committee

Members Present: Ed Childs, John Lawe, Barry Rotman, Evan Pierce, Tom Gray, Neil Fulton

Members Absent: Tom Sterling

Tom Gray called the meeting to order at 7:04 pm.

1. Introduction of Committee. Gray introduced the Committee members present and outlined the purpose of the forum. He thanked those in attendance (about 30, including Police Chief Doug Robinson, Fire Chief Steve Leinoff, and Director of Public Works Andy Hodgdon) for participating.

2. Presentation on Consultant's Report on Communications. Fulton presented a slide show summarizing the contents of the consultant's draft report on upgrading the Town's public safety and public works communication systems. The report is available on the Town website at <http://reports.norwich.vt.us/NorwichDraftRadioReport.pdf> and the slide show is at <http://reports.norwich.vt.us/CommunicationsPlanPPoint.pdf>. Chief Robinson, Chief Leinoff, and Director Hodgdon also provided some real-world examples of difficulties their departments have encountered with communications in recent months, including during Tropical Storm Irene. The audience offered a number of questions and comments during the presentation, and considerable discussion ensued.

3. Summary of Frequently Asked Questions. Detailed notes were not taken during the forum. However, the Committee members have attempted to summarize some of the principal questions raised and answers as follows:

FAQ'S From the Public Forum on Communications System Upgrade

1. What exactly is the problem we are trying to solve? **The issue at hand is the ability of Police, Fire and Public Works personnel to communicate with each other and the dispatch center. Currently, the three departments communicate on a wideband use of radio spectrum, but there are significant gaps in coverage due to Norwich's hilly terrain. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has mandated that as of January 1, 2013, such departments must operate on a narrowband use of radio spectrum that is 50% of the wideband use of radio spectrum, making an already compromised situation even worse.**

2. What measures are proposed to address the problem? Communications would be shifted from a transmitter on Hurricane Hill in Hartford, which is not well situated for line-of-sight transmission into Norwich's valleys, to a transmitter on Hayes Hill in Hanover (Etna). In addition, a 180-foot tower (with an 18-foot antenna) would be installed on Norwich Town property on ground above the Public Works facility on New Boston Road.
3. Shouldn't Police and Fire Departments use cutting edge technology rather than radio? No. The mission of those departments is public safety, and they need to have equipment that has been field tested and is known to be 100% reliable.
4. Why must the tower be so tall (180 feet)? In order to solve such coverage problems in the hilly terrain of Norwich, maximum height is essential. The tower and antenna, at a total height of 198 feet, are as tall as possible without reaching the 200-foot level at which the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) requires aircraft obstruction lighting.
5. Why the location at the Public Works facility, and not Gile Mountain or a more remote location higher up? Getting access to Gile Mountain would be virtually impossible due to the location. Construction would be too difficult. Other locations would not offer the coverage needed and may require the Town to purchase land.
6. Why is this so important now? Even in a best-case scenario, we probably wouldn't be able to get the tower done by January 1, 2013, so the longer we wait, the greater the potential for the bandwidth change to negatively impact public safety communications.
7. What are the ongoing costs to maintain the tower and the system? When bids are received on the system we will have a better answer, but the current estimate is less than \$5,000 per year.
8. Will this improve cell phone service? We would be applying for grants to help fund the tower, and if we receive that money there may be restrictions on the tower's use. If we do not receive grant money or if the funds are not restricted, then looking for a carrier to partner with would be explored.
9. Where do we find the consultant's report regarding this project?
<http://reports.norwich.vt.us/NorwichDraftRadioReport.pdf>.
10. How high above the trees will the tower be? The surrounding trees are approximately 60 feet, so about 120 feet above the tree line. There will be a balloon test to visually illustrate the height of the tower.
11. Can't we coordinate this with surrounding towns to help offset costs and perhaps mitigate the need for such a large structure? Yes. We are coordinating with area towns, and the system proposed will use a tower in Hanover that serves communities in New Hampshire. In addition, the Norwich tower may help communities in New Hampshire and some communities north of Norwich and there may be some cost sharing. However the problem is basically one of topography. Norwich resembles a hand, with the village in the palm and valley "fingers" extending to the north and west. Hayes Hill in Hanover is well located to transmit to locations in the valleys, and the new tower would provide simultaneous transmission to strengthen coverage and make it more reliable. Our studies were not able to find a solution without a tower in Norwich.
12. What about fiber optics? Fiber optics provide land-based communications capability. The three departments are mobile and need radio-based communications.

4. Adjournment. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:50 p.m.