

# Update on North Lee County Emergency Communications Tower Project

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Two weeks ago at the Firefighter Phase 1 training course Blue Fire Chief Rick Isaacks announced that he has been contacted by representatives from Motorola concerning potential locations for three large emergency communications towers to be placed in north Lee county. At last week's training class he elaborated a bit about the project.

He met in person with Motorola representatives visiting Lee county to scope out locations for the proposed towers. From that discussion he learned that the preferred sites would be at Blue fire station, Lincoln fire station and Tanglewood fire station. Chef Isaacks said he had been informed that the proposed towers would be 250' tall or higher and constructed on 80' by 80' concrete pads. Additionally, all fire department radios in the county would be replaced with dual band radios capable of receiving and transmitting on both VHF and public safety 800 systems. Total cost of the project is said to be about \$30,000,000.

The purpose of the towers is to eliminate well known radio communication dead zones in the north eastern part of Lee county. We identified those areas with during our signal report tests during 2021. The Lee county sheriff's office and both Tanglewood and Dime Box fire departments have complained about poor or non-existent radio communication capability in these areas for many years.

Chief Isaacks indicated that funding for the project would potentially come via a grant from CAPCOG, the Capitol Area Council of Governments, one of twenty-four (24) regional organizations in Texas tasked with insuring open communication between all levels of government from cities to counties to state agencies. I visited the CAPCOG web site and discovered the Lee county representative is Lee county Precinct 4 Commissioner Stephen Knobloch, who some may remember visited with us at our outreach display in Lexington last year.

Wishing to know more detail about the proposed tower project, I contacted Lee county Sheriff Casey Goetz, Lee county Judge Paul Fisher and Lee county Precinct 4 Commissioner Knobloch. Only the Sheriff had any knowledge at all about the proposal. After my conversation with Commissioner Knobloch he reached out to his liaison person at CAPCOG for more information just this past Friday. I spoke with Commissioner Knobloch again this morning and was informed that CAPCOG is not currently considering any grant applications for communication towers in Lee county, though the deadline for application this year is March 13, so there is still a little time left for Motorola to work some magic.

In my research I also found out that communications grants initiated through regional Councils of Government are reviewed and approved by the Texas Statewide Interoperability Coordinator, a division within Texas DPS. Today I spoke with the deputy director of that office to find out more about the grant application and funding process for emergency service radio purchases. It was a very interesting conversation and I look forward to speaking with her again as a resource if we pursue state funded grants in the future.

Ares Net Training 2-28-2022

Update on North Lee County Emergency Communications Tower Project

Page Two

At this point it seems the cart has been placed firmly in front of the horse, meaning that none of the local parties or state offices whose support would be needed to initiate and push along funding for such an ambitious project have been approached about the idea. I hope to keep these lines of communication open in the future and will report back to LeeCares members as any additional information becomes available.