

Report on Emergency Services Radio Upgrade

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LeeCares.org (Lee County Texas ARES)
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This weeks training updates a previous mention I made some months ago about proposed system enhancements that could greatly affect local public safety radio communications and, potentially, our own Lee county ARES radio capabilities.

My initial research into the proposal hit a bit of a dead-end back in March. The fire chiefs of Blue, Lincoln and Tanglewood VFD's all reported being contacted by Motorola Solutions as potential sites for new communications towers in northern Lee county. Each of them had differing recollections of the discussions with Motorola representatives. The proposed towers were described from 250' to 400' tall, sitting on sites anywhere from a small plot adjacent to the fire station to an acre located on private property in the general vicinity of the fire station. Construction was to begin immediately, or in three years, depending on the source. The only consistent piece of information was that CAPCOG (Capitol Area Council of Governments) would be the funding source for the several millions of dollars this construction will require.

I contacted county Judge Fischer and found that he had never heard of such of project. I contacted CAPCOG, speaking to Betty Voights, the Executive Director of that organization. She also reported having never heard of such a project. But, she referred me to a lady at the General Land Office (whose name I have since misplaced) who is responsible for reviewing all communications-related grants for CAPCOG. She also confirmed that she had not heard of any such project slated for Lee county.

At that point I reported to this net that the idea, as helpful and badly needed as it is, appeared to be a bit of fantasy.

Two weeks ago, however, I was able to get a name and a phone number for the Motorola Solutions manager who had visited with the three fire chiefs back in March. This past week I had an hour long telephone conversation with Mr. Ben Zotyka, Area Sales Manager for Motorola Strategic Projects. He followed up with a hard copy of a powerpoint presentation on the proposed project. I will email that report to all LeeCares members shortly.

Additionally, he informed me that he would be presenting the details of the proposal to the county Judge and Sheriff this upcoming Thursday, September 8, 2022. I will contact the Judge's office tomorrow seeking an invitation to the presentation on behalf of Lee County Fire Fighters Association, so that I can relay the information to that group at our October quarterly meeting.

The bare bones of the proposal are that it is a scalable project, not an all or nothing proposition. At maximum build-out it consists of three 400' freestanding towers: one located adjacent to Tanglewood VFD, one located within a block of Lincoln VFD and a third tower located on private property approximately a mile and a half west – southwest of Blue VFD. Projected cost is \$12.286,000.

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The money would come be from a HUD Community Development Block Grant – Mitigation Fund set up after Hurricane Harvey came through Texas several years ago. You might recall that one, it rained sideways for three days for a total of 22 inches at my property in Fedor.

The proposed grant is processed by the General Land Office of Texas, then administered by CAPCOG as overseer of the use of the funds, at the express direction of the governmental agencies who are members of CAPCOG. Our own county commissioner Richard Wagner sits on the CAPCOG Board of Directors and Lee County EMC Greg LeBlanc was recently appointed as a member of the Homeland Security committee of CAPCOG. Mr. Martin Ritchey is Director of the Homeland Security division of CAPCOG.

As you know, our main ARES repeater is attached to the only tower of comparable size in Lee county, located at the county Sheriff's office. The prospect of having one or two more ARES repeaters placed on such tall structures on much higher ground in northern Lee county is tantalizing, to say the least.

I hope to be able to attend the presentation at the Judge's office next Thursday and will share whatever information I can gather at our September 18th meeting.

This concludes tonight's training, back to net control, this is KI5HHI.