

Radio Communications Project  
Proposed Keep Tryst Tower Public Information Meeting  
Pleasant Valley Elementary School  
March 26, 2008 @ 7:00 PM

Attendees:

County Staff: Commissioners Aleshire and Baker, County Administrator Greg Murray, Public Works Director Joe Kroboth, Communications Maintenance Manager Pete Loewenheim, Sheriff Doug Mullendore, Real Property Administrator Joe Kuhna, Interim Emergency Services Director Kevin Lewis, 911/Emergency Communications Chief Bardona Woods, Colonel Randy Wilkinson, 911/Emergency Communications Deputy Chief Roy Lescalleet, Public Works Administrative Assistant Tina Rupert.

City of Hagerstown Police Department: Chief Arthur Smith, Captain Charles Summer.

Motorola: Ray Parker, John Breon, James Jenkins, and Heather Tinney

The Meeting began at 7: 00 PM.

Joe Kroboth, Washington County Public Works Director, welcomed everyone, introduced individuals participating in the public information presentation, as well as some attendees (Commissioner Kristin Aleshire, County Administrator Greg Murray, Sheriff Doug Mullendore, Colonel Randy Wilkinson with the Sheriff's Office, Communications Maintenance Manager Pete Loewenheim, Interim Emergency Services Director Kevin Lewis, and representatives from various other agencies such as City of Hagerstown Police, Maryland State Highway Administration, Maryland State Police, the National Fire Academy, Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services System, (MIEMSS) Motorola team members), and himself. Mr. Kroboth also announced that, as posted, the meeting was being recorded, pointed out fire escape directions and requested that everyone sign in for public record.

Mr. Kroboth stated that he understand attendees emotions, requested that everyone conduct themselves in a professional manner and explained that questions for clarification purposes would be answered, but that this was a Public Information meeting, not public hearing, and public comment would not be heard tonight, but would be accepted in writing for ten days or until April 7, 2008.

A PowerPoint presentation by Pete Loewenheim reviewed pertinent definitions, the process for site selection, the Keep Tryst site itself and what the county plans to construct on the site and how to submit comments.

Definitions:

System – series of strategically placed tower sites. Links from one tower to another are critical.

Tower site – piece of land or location where a tower is placed. In some cases, it might be on top of a building.

Mobile Radio – a 45-watt two-way radio that is permanently in a vehicle and connected to an antenna.

Portable Radio – a 4-watt two-way radio with antenna, worn on a belt or in a pocket, outside the vehicle, powered by rechargeable battery. These radios have 1/10 the power of a mobile radio, and as the battery goes down, the transmit power goes down.

Limitations – The signal from a radio antenna must be able to link to one of the towers in order for the radio to work. In some cases the signal from the radio may not be strong enough to reach a tower where distance is a factor. In other cases even if there is enough signal strength to overcome the distance, the path to a tower may be blocked. Radios must be able to connect to tower with an unimpeded signal to work.

Coverage Standard – 95% coverage 95% of the time. Washington County's coverage requirements are 95% of the area, 95% of time.

We need a new countywide digital communications system. County agency requirements were reviewed and showed serious deficiencies. Specifications were written addressing today's requirements and future county growth. The objective was and is reliable unrestricted portable outside coverage and in building coverage for some critical buildings such as the hospital, mall, Court House, and schools.

Selection of sites – Area need defines coverage requirements. Coverage requirement drives location. Location is impacted by terrain. Tower users determine tower height and design. Vertical separation is needed for antennas and dishes. There are (5) existing sites; most are shared with the State on state land that we help maintain. County owned sites were looked at, and then property that could be purchased was looked at making sure it suited us as well as state agencies. Leasing space is not viable, because the County would not have control and recurring costs.

Slide of sites, defining existing and new sites. There are five in use by the current system, two existing, but not used by the current system, and three entirely new.

Why Keep Tryst? The contractor performed computer modeling of seven different sites. Keep Tryst was the most viable site, allowing, in conjunction with the other sites, the 95/95 county coverage standard. The other sites either did not meet coverage requirements, some interfered with other sites causing loss of coverage, or they did not provide microwave connections. Using multi towers to replace this one was also researched and this did not work either.

The Keep Tryst tower is critical to the area of concern. The entire south county area has almost no coverage with the current radio system. With the 340 corridor, bridge accidents, and Washington County being responsible for the entire river, this coverage is necessary. This valley is very difficult to cover. Mr. Loewenheim presented maps of south county coverage with and without the Keep Tryst tower.

The Keep Tryst site plans are displayed showing the proposed location of the tower and equipment shelter. This a County owned site, just under an acre. The County proposes to add a 190 freestanding lattice (can see through) tower (needed for microwave), and a communications shelter.

Who will be using the tower? There will be no commercial for profit users. – Washington County law enforcement, fire, EMS, public works, State of Maryland (SHA, MSP, MIEMSS, DNR). Also, expect to see federal agencies in the future if there is room.

Why the tower is needed? Pete Loewenheim introduced Sheriff Mullendore.

Sheriff Mullendore – The Sheriff's Office has communication issues in South County. Deputies work as individuals and their only tie back to assistance is their radio. If the deputy is on their own and can't communicate, it is a very serious situation. If the deputy is out of car, they are dependent on a 4-watt portable radio. Currently, deputies cannot communicate back to the office without Keep Tryst and can't work off mobiles either.

If the recent Clear Spring incident where an individual pulled a gun on a State Trooper and was shot had happened in the Keep Tryst area, it could have been critical for the trooper.

In 365 days, the Sheriff's Office alone, not including fire and EMS, had 300 calls in the Keep Tryst area.

If a child walks away from home and a deputy is searching on foot, there are no communications; if the child is injured, a deputy cannot even call for assistance and would have to carry that child out to a road or house to get help.

There was a murder several years ago and deputies had to drive up the road to call for something/anything they needed. The same thing would apply to the new system without the Keep Tryst site.

What if someone was in your house and you were alone in your bedroom calling 911 and one deputy responded, however, because there are no communications to their back up, they will not come in until back up arrive because they don't have coverage? Officers want to come home after their shift the same as everyone else. Priority one is keeping ourselves alive, priority two is keeping you alive. No one will be able to communicate in this area without Keep Tryst.

The recent Nicholson incident in the Smithsburg area was handled by portable radios. Responders would not have been able to communicate in this area. The individual was able to be apprehended because responders were able to communicate with the radio.

The Brandon Morris scenario is another example; deputies were looking for a suspect in dark, communicating with radios. In this area, they would not have been able to communicate.

I am imploring you to support the tower. We realize there is an impact on the view shed, if we could minimize that we would.

Pete Loewenheim introduced Kevin Lewis.

Kevin Lewis – This committee has worked diligently and studied other sites.

This site will provide communications for all volunteer providers. Not only as Interim Director of Emergency Services, but also as a volunteer responder, I support this tower.

When I worked in Baltimore County, I could get medical support and contact medical facilities as needed. But, this is not about Baltimore County. This is about your need for emergency services and the ability to receive medical direction from a hospital to the EMS on the scene. A new paramedic may not be able to make contact. The difference in the level of care a victim receives can depend on communication with medical direction.

There was a vehicle accident some years ago at the intersection of Routes 340 and 67. All patients were transported with life threatening injuries. With the current system, we have to leave patients to get medical direction. As a result of this incident there was a second incident at Keep Tryst Road and Route 340, involving 10 vehicles. Patients were sent to one hospital, and then moved to another. Family members were not able to find patients/family members. This tower is necessary.

Summary – The Keep Tryst tower will improve communications for first responders and support statewide interoperability. It is one of ten sites required for operation of the system.

Who benefits from the tower? The citizens served by Washington County first responders, all local law enforcement, federal agencies, possibly homeland security, State of Maryland first responders.

Thank you for coming, Washington County welcomes all written comments with name and address included. Please submit comments to Washington County Division of Public Works, 100 West Washington Street, Room 238, Hagerstown MD 21740, or [towercomments@washco-md.net](mailto:towercomments@washco-md.net) or fax number 240-313-2251.

Attachments:

PowerPoint Presentation  
Sheriff Mullendore comments  
Kevin Lewis comments