

**Penobscot County Commissioners' Budget Committee Meeting**  
**Radio Communications Referendum**  
**June 22, 2020     5:30 PM     81°**

Present via ZOOM were: Commissioners Peter Baldacci, Andre Cushing & Laura Sanborn, Administrator Bill Collins, PRCC Director and Deputy Chris Lavoie and Josh Lilley, Finance Director Judy Alexander, Treasurer John Hiatt, Brenda Kennedy-Wade and Christopher Grotton

Commissioner Baldacci opened the presentation for Penobscot County on the proposed Radio Bond Referendum.

We are asking the citizens of Penobscot County to vote on a proposed \$6 Million bond on July 14<sup>th</sup>. This will upgrade Penobscot Regional Communications Center's public safety communications system.

Director of PRCC Chris Lavoie presented the following information:

- In 2019 Penobscot RCC was the busiest Public Safety Answering Point in the State of Maine. In 2019, PRCC took in 63,830 9-1-1 calls; 289,301 Business Line Phone Calls and 1,523,360 Radio Traffic Calls. PRCC dispatches for 65 agencies covering a total population of 225,795. We are the 9-1-1 Center for Penobscot County and landlines in Aroostook County.
- PRCC began in 1997
- In 2004, a Radio study was conducted by a private consultant on our Land Mobile Radio Communications system in our coverage area. It revealed the following:
  - Poor Coverage
  - Interference
  - Unreliable Paging
  - Complete loss of communication on occasion

The estimated cost to fix the system in 2004 was \$ 26,725,376. It was determined the cost of the recommendations were too great to afford.

- As communications continued to get worse, we requested the Commissioners once again look into upgrading the system.
- In 2017, Penobscot County hired an independent consultant to do an updated study on our Land Mobile Radio system. The study Group included the consultant and ten members of the Radio Committee (end user agencies). Our goal was to identify the most fiscally responsible solution for Penobscot County while improving coverage and system reliability. That study has many of the same findings as in 2004: poor coverage; interference; unreliable paging and complete loss of communication on occasion.

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- Penobscot County utilizes a combination of analog repeaters with microwave hops to communicate between tower sites.
- Our Microwave radio made by GE was discontinued in December 2012.
- Kenwood analog repeaters were discontinued in September 2017.
- Last year we experienced an outage in Medway with our microwave radio. It took a number of months to repair. This is due to the equipment no longer being manufactured. We are faced with purchasing equipment from third party suppliers and/or off auction sites such as eBay for parts. These parties are not certified to sell this equipment.
- There is no redundant backup for our microwave and no system alarm to notify us of an outage. The only way to know if there is an outage is if after multiple attempts are made to contact a first responder we do not receive a response back. Since there is no alarming system, it is very dangerous for not only the responders but the public too.
- Receiver/transmitter sites are not “simulcast” meaning responders may have to manually switch between towers when responding to an incident.
- The Commissioners authorized funding to approve the program “I AM RESPONDING” last year. This is a 5-year contract. This is to assist fire and EMS paging. This e-mail system is sent to responder’s cell phones to alert them of an emergency. This works very well as a back up to our radio system when we have communication issues to get the message out. This is a band aid until we are able to fix our core radio communications system.
- Penobscot County Radio Bond Referendum Vote is on July 14, 2020 for \$ 6 Million to upgrade the equipment of our emergency communications infrastructure. The current system is no longer viable. It is time to fix this problem. If this bond is approved it will take 12 to 18 months to complete this project.
- We plan to fix two towers – one northern and one southern. We have responders that have absolutely no communication in spots of our County.
- Director Lavoie shared the costs of the radio system upgrade which does not cover any problems with the towers or structural engineering studies that will need to be completed before the new equipment is placed on a tower:
  - Radio Systems - \$1,079,292
  - Microwave Radio - \$821,893
  - Dispatch Console - \$659,157
  - Site Facilities - \$478,519
  - Services - \$464,747
  - Warranty/Maintenance for 10 years - \$1,103,507

**Total: \$4,607,205**

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Additional costs include:

- Structural analysis for 14 towers - \$84,000
- Tower upgrade estimate – 6 towers - \$330,000
- Tower replacement estimate – 3 towers - \$750,000

Tower Contingency - \$1,164,000

**Total Estimated Project - \$5,771,205**

- Additional monies are to cover other expenses such as project manager and for end users.
- July 14, 2020 is the Vote on the Referendum bond for \$ 6 Million. This annual cost equivalence is \$3.50 per hundred-thousand-dollar property based upon our 2020 evaluation.

Committee member Brenda Kennedy-Wade commented that she is in full support of this project.

Committee member Christopher Grotton fully supports this project. He is very pleased with the presentation and appreciates the efforts of Director Lavoie in putting this together. Mr. Grotton feels it is public safety that is involved. First responders need the right equipment to protect the public. It is time to time to upgrade this system. In its current state of disrepair, the first responders need to have a mean of communication in good working order.

Commissioner Baldacci and Treasurer John Hiatt are fully supportive of this project. Commissioner Baldacci elaborated that we have a strong case for the need to Upgrade and that this is not something that the County rushed into. It is time to upgrade our Radio Communications Infrastructure.

**Certified By:**

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Administrator, William Collins

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Peter K. Baldacci, Chairman

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Laura J. Sanborn, Commissioner

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Andre E. Cushing, III, Commissioner