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News Release

City commissioners authorize purchase of new telephone system

City officials urge calling 441-4444 until fire-EMS, police phones are replaced

ARKANSAS CITY, Kan. (January 4, 2017) — The City Commission of Arkansas City voted 4-0 on Tuesday night to authorize City Manager Nick Hernandez to spend up to \$20,000 for a new telephone system for the Arkansas City Police Department and the Arkansas City Fire-EMS Department.

The emergency purchase is necessary because the phone system at the fire-EMS department has been completely inoperable for the past week and a half, while the police phones have been intermittent.

Hernandez said many components of the system have been in place since the 1980s. The City was notified in November 2013 that maintenance would be discontinued for the system by early 2015.

The breakdown in the landline system has not affected the 911 system, nor has it affected the (620) 441-4444 number for the police department, which connects directly to dispatchers in Winfield.

Citizens who need to report a police, fire, medical or other emergency always should call 911.

For non-emergency calls to the fire-EMS department, such as to report a controlled burn, please call (620) 441-4444. A dispatcher then will be able to connect you to on-duty personnel via cellular phone.

Hernandez said the City had gathered quotes during the past four business days on what it will cost to replace just the police and fire-EMS phone systems with a Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) system.

Police Chief Dan Ward said the new system will be analog initially, but it is much cheaper and simpler to transition it to an all-digital system in the future. The cost is up to \$20,000 for both departments.

Hernandez said Information Technology Manager Matthew Metzinger also is pricing the cost of a citywide conversion. Hernandez said switching to such a service could save the City up to \$2,000 a month in the long run on its AT&T bill, which could pay for the cost of a new system in several years.

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But the two emergency departments need to be brought online as soon as possible. "We have to get them done immediately," Hernandez said.

"Basically, I'm going to move forward once I get the low bid so they can get their phone systems up and running, because they need them. It's not like they can wait two more weeks. I will send the three bids to you and tell you which one I've selected."

Whichever system is selected ultimately will determine what the rest of the City eventually is upgraded to, since the systems will have to be compatible with each other, Hernandez indicated.

The priorities for a citywide system are City Hall, plus the water and wastewater treatment facilities, he said. It's less imperative to include outside facilities such as the Northwest Community Center, Parks and Facilities shop, Recreation Center, and Senior Citizens Center, which can maintain separate service.

The new VOIP phones also will be able to provide backup internet service if the dedicated fiber line that runs from City Hall to the police department, and then to the fire-EMS department, ever goes down.

"Right now, it's the phone system in the (police department) that's failing, so it's not feeding through the fiber to the fire department," Hernandez explained. "So we have to replace the phone system in the police department in order for (the fire-EMS department's) phones to work."

Hernandez said staff is concerned that trying to turn off the police system and reboot it also could knock all of the police phones offline, as well. Replacement thus is the best and most practical option.

The purchase will include all-new handsets for both departments that are both analog and digital compatible, with caller ID. They have to be able to speak to both the old and new telephone systems.

Mayor Duane Oestmann asked if \$20,000 would be sufficient and Hernandez assured him it will be. Oestmann then made a motion to authorize the purchase, which Commissioner Karen Welch seconded.

Commissioner Charles Tweedy III asked how long it might take before the new phones are up and running. Ward said it still could be a month or more, but Hernandez said the new handsets and system might be operating sooner than that. The cost savings on bills by going to VOIP is what will take longer.

The funding for the new system will come from the police and fire-EMS portions of the General Fund.

Commissioner Jay Warren was absent from Tuesday night's meeting due to a medical procedure.

In other business Tuesday night, the City Commission:

- Witnessed the swearing in of new Arkansas City Police Department Officers Cori Deill and Ivan Velasquez. The commissioners also were introduced to new Public Service Officer Sky Chapman, who will be handling animal control duties.
- Heard a financial report from South Central Kansas Medical Center. SCKMC chief financial officer Holly Harper is projecting a smaller operational loss in 2017 due to the hospital's new Geriatric Psych Unit. Once the two sales taxes are added in, she projects a positive balance.
- Unanimously approved the Dec. 20, 2016, regular meeting minutes as written.
- Held six public hearings regarding and unanimously approved a resolution declaring six structures as unsafe and dangerous, and directing that they be demolished, repaired, shored or otherwise made safe within 120 days. The buildings are located at 413 W. Madison Ave., 421 W. Madison Ave., 608 S. Fourth St., 614 S. Fourth St., 617 S. Fourth St. and 1419 S. Summit St. Additionally, the resolution directs Brett Martin, owner of 617 S. Fourth St., to have a mold remediation company submit a report to Neighborhood Services Superintendent Richard Brown within the next two weeks, prior to the next City Commission meeting. Martin attended the meeting and requested more time to make improvements. The commissioners gave him one more week to remove the rest of his personal belongings from the house and instructed him to provide a specific timeline for improvements, pending the mold report, at the Jan. 17 meeting.
- Heard a first reading of and voted unanimously to approve an ordinance authorizing the rezoning of 1401 S. Sixth St. from a Public Use District to an R-3 High-Density Residential District. The move makes possible a low-income senior housing development at that location.
- Heard a first reading of and voted 3-1 to approve an ordinance modifying Article 25 of the Zoning Regulations to remove duplicative provisions and amending Municipal Code accordingly. Commissioner Dan Jurkovich cast the lone dissenting vote, but gave no reason.
- Discussed a possible ordinance to modify Municipal Code and allow the consumption of alcohol at the Agri-Business Building, even if minors are located inside, but ultimately decided to discard that option and instead instruct staff to develop a comprehensive special events permitting process that will apply equally to all City facilities. Hernandez said it could take a month or more.

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