MERA:
WHEN SECONDS SAVE LIVES
Funding the Next Generation Public Safety Communications System of the Marin Emergency Radio Authority
What Is MERA Today?

The Marin Emergency Radio Authority (MERA) is a Joint Powers Authority in Marin County to plan, implement and manage a countywide public safety and emergency radio system for the use of all member agencies.

It includes:

• Seven 911 Dispatch Centers, with 28 dispatch consoles
• Nearly 2,900 radios deployed across the county
• Uniform radio communications shared by every major safety agency in the county
Why the MERA Gen I System Must Be Upgraded

RELIABILITY: The existing system is aging and approaching obsolescence. The system is experiencing component malfunctions causing system reliability to decrease. Replacement equipment is being phased out by the manufacturer, with certain elements already no longer manufactured and increasingly difficult to source.

CAPACITY: MERA has nearly 2,900 users today on a system built for 1,580. The system must expand capacity to eliminate busy signals during major emergencies and to add additional mutual aid partners. The Next Generation system is planned for 5,000 potential users.

COVERAGE: Coverage must be extended to high priority areas that have limited coverage today. The Next Generation system will expand coverage with the addition of new tower sites.

OUT OF COMPLIANCE: The Gen I system does not meet new FCC technical requirements that will be in place in 2017.

FREQUENCY GIVE BACK: Currently enacted federal legislation will require that we give back our current UHF-T band frequencies in 2021.
MERA’s Proposed Gen II System: Faster and More Reliable = Safer

- **Reduce 911 response times** with an upgraded radio network, better technology and more capacity.
- **Expand coverage** to high priority areas of County.
- **Increase reliability** during nature disasters.
- **Move to the 700 MHz** band allowing use of the UASI mutual aid frequencies, existing 800 MHz frequencies and others – which are especially needed in a disaster situation.
- **New radios** with the state-of-art technology will be provided to every safety personnel (Options that could be selected include GPS tracking).
Direct Benefits

• The people you serve will be safer

• Your first responders and safety personnel will be safer

• You will meet your responsibility to maintain a reliable emergency communication system that is compatible with all other systems in the Bay Area.

• You will comply with all Federal and State laws and regulations.
How Do We Fund The Next Gen System?

Traditional Funding Method:
Member contributions to fund bonds – same as Gen I System funding.

Parcel Tax Funding Method:
Seek voter approved parcel tax to fund bonds – saving MERA members from funding the Next Gen system from their general fund.

Secure Grant Funds (to date): $6,157,701

Other Options That Were Considered and Discarded:
1/8 cent Sales Tax – Polled at 49% support
General Obligation Bonds – Polled at 28% support
Two Possible Capital Funding Budgets for Members

Traditional Method –
Shows MERA Member funding of Gen II Capital in addition to paying off of Gen I Bonds with smoothing provided by use of interest only payments thru FY 20/21.

Parcel tax wins voter approval and MERA member agencies pay off Gen I Bonds as scheduled.

All figures are in thousands.
• O&M Budget for FY 13/14 is based on the approved budget.
• All other FY’s are estimates.
• FY 13/14 to FY 22/23 predicts an annual 7.4% increase.
• This increase impacted by Inflation and an Expanded System.
• A Service Upgrade Agreement (SUA) could increase O&M by $450,000 annually for 10 years starting in FY19/20. (SUA is an Option)

All figures are in thousands.
Comparing Total Costs Thru FY 22/23

Traditional Method
Graph depicts total MERA Member costs for Gen I & Gen II with estimated O&M costs thru FY 22/23 if members pay for all contributions. This assumes smoothing through Gen II interest only payments thru FY 20/21.

Parcel Tax Wins Approval
Graph depicts total MERA Member costs for Gen I Bonds and estimated O&M costs thru FY 22/23 if the Parcel Tax wins approval in November 2014.

All figures are in thousands.
Parcel Tax Proposal Overview

- Requires 2/3 vote of Registered Voters.

- Can be placed on the November 2014 ballot by BOS.

- Includes Exemptions for Income Qualified Senior Homeowners and Citizens’ Oversight Committee.

- Shares tax burden throughout the county.
Latest Polling Data

• Support for a $29 parcel tax measure is slightly higher in the January survey than the $45 measure tested in 2012. However, the 62% support still falls just short of the two-thirds vote threshold required for passage.
• The lowering of the parcel tax to $29 was offset by the diminished concern about the need for reliable emergency communications among respondents.
• The two strongest arguments in favor are the need for communications during a natural disaster and a decrease in 911 response times.
• A public information effort is needed to raise awareness.

Survey conducted Jan. 26-29, 2014 with 400 surveys. Margin of error: 4.5%.
The Public’s Perception of the Necessity For Emergency Communications

We learned from the survey that our citizens’ willingness to support a parcel tax is directly related to how they prioritize the need for an emergency communication system. MERA is undertaking a greatly expanded public education effort to tell voters about the urgent need for a reliable emergency communication system, including:

- Enlisting the support of more firefighters and police officers to tell the 911/MERA story
- Expanding our public education through earned media, presentations, mail and TV
- Asking for your support and involvement
If Successful, A Gen II Project Timeline Would Look Like:

- **11/2014**  
  Parcel Tax Election
- **11/2015**  
  Contract Negotiations
- **6/2016**  
  Implementation
- **1/2018**  
  System Acceptance
- **3/2015**  
  Request for Proposal
- **1/2016**  
  Detailed Design Review
- **9/2017**  
  Cutover
- **3/2018**  
  Completion

Note: Assumes successful Parcel Tax passage.
Parcel Tax Gen II Capital Budget

- Site development and upgrades, environmental compliance, licensing and leases $10.6 M
- Radio communication system, site equipment and dispatch consoles $13.9 M
- Microwave system $5.0 M
- Mobile and portable radios $10.5 M

-------------------------------------------------  ------------
= SUBTOTAL CAPITAL COSTS*  $40.0 M
* (includes contingency)

+ Capitalized Interest $2.3 M
+ Reserve Fund $3.6 M
+ Issuance Costs $0.4 M

---------------------------------  ------------
= BOND ISSUE TOTAL  $46.3 M
## Parcel Tax Overview: Residential and Agricultural Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property Description</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Maximum Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single Family Residential</td>
<td>Per Parcel</td>
<td>$29.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Family Residential</td>
<td>Per Unit</td>
<td>$26.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural – Up to 5 Acres</td>
<td>Per Parcel</td>
<td>$29.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural – Over 5 Acres</td>
<td>Per Parcel</td>
<td>$58.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parcel Tax Categories</th>
<th># of Parcels</th>
<th>Tax Units</th>
<th>Total Parcel Tax</th>
<th>Average per Parcel</th>
<th>Median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single Family</td>
<td>81,107</td>
<td>81,107</td>
<td>$2,352,103</td>
<td>$29</td>
<td>$29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Family</td>
<td>4,986</td>
<td>24,551</td>
<td>$640,781</td>
<td>$129</td>
<td>$52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural</td>
<td>715</td>
<td>1,361</td>
<td>$39,469</td>
<td>$55</td>
<td>$58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Parcel Tax Overview:
### Commercial, Industrial and Utility Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property Description</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Maximum Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to ½ acre</td>
<td>Per Parcel</td>
<td>$87.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater than ½ acre and up to 1 acre</td>
<td>Per Parcel</td>
<td>$174.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater than 1 acre</td>
<td>$174 Per Parcel AND $29 for each acre over 1 acre</td>
<td>Up to $2,500.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of Parcels</th>
<th>Tax Units</th>
<th>Total Parcel Tax</th>
<th>Average per Parcel</th>
<th>Median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4,015</td>
<td>10,360</td>
<td>$585,193</td>
<td>$145</td>
<td>$87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

We need your support.
With Your Help, We Will:

• Continue to advance 911 and safety communications with a Gen II system that is faster, provides more coverage and remains reliable during natural disaster.

• Raise $40 million, or about $29 for a single family residence, or 7.9 cents per day, via a parcel tax (to be offset as much as possible by State and Federal grants).

• Educate the public on MERA’s mission and need for fast, reliable emergency communication to keep our residents and emergency personnel safe.
You’ll find in your staff report a “Resolution to Support” MERA’s Parcel Tax Measure that the BOS will consider for placement on the November 2014 ballot.

- Based on a $29 annual parcel tax for a single family residence.
- With the establishment of a Citizen’s Oversight Committee.
- And provides an exemption for income qualified senior homeowners.
- That doesn’t divert our precious general fund money to MERA that currently goes to the providing of other vital services.