



City of Richmond

Report to Committee

To: Community Safety Committee **Date:** December 2, 2013
From: John McGowan **File:** 09-5000-01/2013-Vol
 Fire Chief 01
 Anne Stevens
 Senior Manager,
 Community Safety Policy and Programs
Re: **Province-wide 911 Levy in British Columbia**

Staff Recommendation

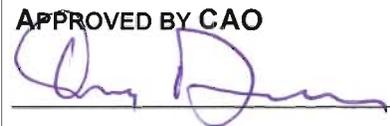
That the staff report titled "*Province-wide 911 Levy in British Columbia*" be forwarded to UBCM.

That UBCM be advised that should the Province establish a province-wide CAL, the City of Richmond would request the following:

1. Municipalities would continue to be included in the discussion, development, implementation and funding allocation of a province-wide 911 CAL.
2. The province-wide levy would be cost neutral for municipalities and any new additional revenue sources (such as from mobile phones) would be used to fund system improvements and integration.
3. Scope for the province-wide 911 CAL levy be strictly for the provision of 911 services, and administrative overhead from the telephone companies would be limited to a minimal amount.


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REPORT CONCURRENCE	
CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER 	
REVIEWED BY STAFF REPORT / AGENDA REVIEW SUBCOMMITTEE	INITIALS: 
APPROVED BY CAO 	

Staff Report

Origin

The UBCM has circulated a report titled “9-1-1 Services in British Columbia” and requested comments from local municipalities.

In 2004, UBCM endorsed a resolution¹ that requested the provincial government introduce legislation/regulations, in cooperation with industry that would allow a levy to be placed on cell and wireless services to contribute to the costs associated with the delivery of 911 emergency services in those areas of the province where the service is available. Two other resolutions in 2009 and 2011, sponsored by Nanaimo City² and Cariboo RD³, were also endorsed on the establishment of a similar Call Answer Levy (CAL) for 911 services.

The Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General is currently reviewing options related to 911 emergency services, including a Call Access Levy on wireless phones. Introduction of a Call Access Levy on wireless phones will be considered by the Province if a consensus on a recommended model can be achieved between local authorities and industry. Such a model will be required to provide improved public safety, contain costs for all stakeholders and meet public expectations regarding 911 services and funding.

In January 2013, a Steering Committee was formed comprising representatives of local government, the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) and the Province, to examine the issues surrounding the introduction of a uniform, province-wide CAL to support and improve 911 services in British Columbia.

In July of 2013, a 911 service report commissioned by the UBCM was released. The report highlights a number of service gaps and technological changes in the delivery of 911 services that would require new revenue sources to meet public demand (i.e. video, pictures, text etc.). The UBCM is requesting municipalities to provide comments and suggestions in support of the CAL initiative.

Analysis

911 is a first contact response system which connects the public to the appropriate emergency services or dispatch agency. The 911 report commissioned by the UBCM indicated that six Canadian provinces have established, or are introducing, a province-wide CAL: Alberta, Saskatchewan, Québec, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia. In five of those provinces, the CAL applies to all devices which can connect to 911 services. Alberta has also introduced a CAL which is limited to wireless devices.

The Maritime Provinces and Saskatchewan approach 911 services as a provincial responsibility. In Québec and Alberta, 911 services remains the responsibility of local governments. In the

¹ 2004 SR1: Wireless Levy for 911 Emergency Service; Sponsor: UBCM Executive

² 2009 B10: call answer levy for wireless service providers; Sponsor: Nanaimo City

³ 2011 B13: 911 Call Levy; Sponsor: Cariboo RD

Québec system, the provincial government set detailed requirements ranging from location and infrastructure, to operational requirements, procedures and quality assurance processes. The allocation of funding from the CAL, however, rests with an agency which is operated by local government.

Perspectives of a Province-wide 911 Call Answer Levy

The Steering Committee established a series of strategic objectives and principles in relation to the establishment of a practical and sustainable CAL model in British Columbia. From the Province's perspective, the following three criteria need to be met:

- I. the CAL needs to be province-wide and harmonized with other jurisdictions (if possible);
- II. the establishment of a CAL must offer improvements to public safety (e.g. enhanced capabilities, additional training, enhanced capacity to meet future demands, etc.); and,
- III. the CAL needs to feature a consensus funding formula based on industry and local government leadership.

The local government's perspective on a province-wide CAL must:

- A. provide new revenue to assist in the development of local 911 services;
- B. ensure that all users of the local 911 service help pay for the service, both wireless and landlines; and
- C. respect the delivery of 911 services by local government.

In principle, the above provincial and local government perspectives are sound. The establishment of a province-wide 911 CAL would enhance public safety and it is envisioned that the system would improve the integration of the province's emergency response strategy.

Current 911 Services in the City of Richmond

The 911 initial call answer service for the City of Richmond is under the authority of the Metro Vancouver and is funded by property taxes. The actual service delivery is contracted out to a non-profit regional emergency communications centre or E-COMM (Emergency Communications for Southwest British Columbia Incorporated). The current 911 service delivery under Metro Vancouver authority covers 21 municipalities within the region as well as the community of Whistler and the Sunshine Coast Regional District. The annual cost of the 911 service, collected through property tax, is approximately \$3.8M and this amount is a direct flow-through from Metro Vancouver to E-COMM with no administrative overhead.

The telephone landline companies also collect a "911 fee" and this is to help fund and maintain the local physical infrastructure of the 911 network. There is currently no landline CAL collected for Metro Vancouver from the telephone companies. Wireless mobile telecommunication providers (e.g. Telus Mobility, Rogers, Bell Mobility, etc.) also charge a "911 fee". However, this wireless "911 fee" is an add-on fee charged to consumers and does not provide funding for local 911 service delivery or infrastructure.

All 911 calls placed in Metro Vancouver are received by E-COMM. E-COMM is one of the 12 Public Safety Answering Points (PSAP) in the province. The 911 call volume for all 12 PSAPs in 2012 was approximately 1.6 million. In the same year, E-COMM handled approximately 910,000 of those calls in the Metro Vancouver region – approximately 57% of all the 911 calls in BC⁴. Larger PSAPs tended to be more cost-efficient when measured on a “per-call” or per capita basis through economies of scale and shared administration. It costs approximately \$1.55 per capita or \$4.00 per 911 call, to operate E-COMM’s 911 service, whereas in smaller centres the same would cost approximately \$3.50 per capita or \$10 per 911 call.

In addition to the 911 service, the City contracts the services of E-COMM for police and fire dispatch. Ambulance dispatch is provided by the BC Ambulance Service (BCAS) as it is under provincial jurisdiction.

The City of Richmond did not identify any issues relating to the services currently provided by E-COMM. The costs incurred for the 911 call answer service, are funded by Metro Vancouver but recouped through the tax payers of Richmond.

The Province-wide 911 Call Answer Levy

The 911 report identified foreseeable challenges both in technology and the operations of PSAPs. There are currently 12 jurisdictions that use a combination of property tax and landline CALs to fund PSAPs.

Metro Vancouver does not receive landline CALs to fund the local 911 services.

The amount collected from landline CALs has been falling annually as users move to wireless devices. Telus reported that for 2011, residential landlines declined 6.4% from previous year. As well, 65% of 911 calls are currently made from cellular phone. The report also noted that transition to Next Generation 911 (NG911) will involve significant capital and training for the operations of PSAPs, which are unknown at this time.

There is currently no proposed framework or information on how a province-wide 911 CAL would be implemented in British Columbia. The UBCM is working with municipalities and regional districts to gather comments and input on this initiative. In the event that a province-wide 911 CAL is to be implemented, it is envisioned that devices that have access to 911 services would be charged. This would increase the funding sources to not only property tax and landlines but also to mobile or internet-based phones. The collection of the 911 CAL would be the responsibility of the telecommunication service providers that is overseen by the CRTC. Under this proposal, the telecommunication service provider has the ability to claim \$0.07 per line per month⁵ for the administration of the program.

⁴ Source: E-COMM Website – 911 Call Statistics

⁵ This amounts to approximately \$4.2M additional revenue for telecommunication service providers (based on estimated 5 million subscribers provided in the UBCM 911 report, p.27)

The City of Richmond Perspective on the Province-wide 911 Call Answer Levy

Should the Province establish a province-wide CAL, the City of Richmond would request the following:

1. Municipalities would continue to be included in the discussion, development, implementation and funding allocation of a province-wide 911 CAL.
2. The province-wide levy would be cost neutral for municipalities and any new additional revenue sources (such as from mobile phones) would be used to fund system improvements and integration.
3. Scope for the province-wide 911 CAL levy be strictly for the provision of 911 services, and administrative overhead from the telephone companies would be limited to a minimal amount.

Financial Impact

None.

Conclusion

The Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM), with the Province, are in the process of examining the issues surrounding the introduction of a uniform, province-wide Call Answer Levy (CAL) to support and improve 911 services in British Columbia. The UBCM has requested that the City provide comments and feedback to a report published in July 2013 highlighting the review of the current 911 services in British Columbia. Presently, the City of Richmond contracts the service of E-COMM to provide 911 service, as well as police and fire dispatch – for an integrated approach to emergency communication in the City.

The City has provided three comments with respect to the 911 initiative which should be forwarded to UBCM for consideration.

The UBCM will be presenting the province-wide 911 CAL initiatives to Metro Vancouver in the next couple months for their concurrence on this initiative. City staff will continue to provide necessary updates to Council on the progress of this initiative.



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