



Council Communication

Office of the City Manager

Date July 9, 2007

Agenda Item No. 74
Roll Call No. 07-
Communication No. 07-399
Submitted by: Phillip C. Vorlander.
Chief of the Fire Department

AGENDA HEADING:

Discontinuance of Alarm Monitoring Services.

SYNOPSIS:

The City of Des Moines has for some time provided central station alarm monitoring services for approximately 190 public and private sector facilities at nominal fees. The workload this system places on Des Moines Public Safety Communications is significant and the equipment required to provide the service is obsolete, problem-prone, and in need of replacement. Fire Prevention Code does not require a fire department to provide this service and it is provided by several private sector companies, however Chapter 46 (Fire Prevention and Protection), Section 1 (e) that addresses fees for Fire Department monitoring of alarm systems will require deletion upon approval of this action. The Des Moines Fire and Police Departments and the Finance Department recommend discontinuance of this service after providing subscribers with an adequate sixty-day notice so as to provide the opportunity to obtain service from a private sector vendor.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Amount:

Loss of gross budgeted revenues of \$35,000 annually if the service is discontinued as recommended; versus an investment in excess of \$250,000, plus additional staffing, if the service is continued.

Funding Source:

2007-08 Operating Budget, GE001, FIR040700, Fire Department Operations, Page 165

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

The City currently owns three 1970's vintage Osborne-Hoffman Quick-Alert Model II analog telephony-based alarm receivers (colloquially referred to as "gold boxes"). One of these devices has failed beyond repair and the remaining devices are problem-prone and in need of replacement. Another failure will result in reliance on only one device. In addition, the dedicated server that supports the service is also in need of replacement. Capital investment would be required, estimated to be between \$250,000 and \$1 million for technology expenses alone, and realized revenues would be nominal.

The current system negatively impacts Des Moines Public Safety Communications Center staff, who report constant malfunctions – the computer not working, trouble alarms coming in when the system is on test, missed alarms, invalid alarms, etc. – that consume time and distract dispatchers from 9-1-1 calls and radio transmissions. Additionally, dispatchers spend time working with alarm companies during installations and repairs and with employees putting systems on and off test. The employees of the

companies we monitor often don't understand their systems so dispatchers have to educate and guide them through the processes. Dispatchers often find themselves in the position of helping these customers determine whether or not they want to place their systems on test in order to deal with alarm malfunctions. Failure to receive an alarm or disabling a private alarm system at the suggestion of City staff may expose the City to significant liability.

The City lacks expertise in the engineering of alarm monitoring systems. If Council wishes to continue providing alarm monitoring services, the Fire Department recommends that a request for proposals (RFP) be developed for system design, equipment specification, system installation, user training, and estimate of costs. There is no funding in the current operating or capital budgets for system design and capital acquisition; therefore, a decision to continue this service will require additional appropriations in the next budget process.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION(S):

Date: March 10, 2003

Roll Call Number: [03-545](#)

Action: Amending Chapter 46 of the Municipal Code regarding fire protection systems and equipment, connection to fire department communication center for fire alarm monitoring and removal of underground storage tanks. Moved by McPherson that this ordinance do now pass, [#14,213](#). Motion Carried 6-1.

BOARD/COMMISSION ACTION(S): NONE

ANTICIPATED ACTIONS AND FUTURE COMMITMENTS: NONE