

COUNCIL COMMUNICATION

	Number:	26-071	Meeting:	February 23, 2026
	Agenda Item:	36	Roll Call:	26-0254
	Submitted by:	Jonathan Lund, Fire Chief		

AGENDA HEADING:

Approving application for the Prairie Meadows Community Betterment Program Grant to obtain specialized communication equipment for Des Moines Fire Department Special Operations Teams.

SYNOPSIS:

Funding from the Prairie Meadows Community Betterment Program Grant, if awarded, would be used to purchase specialized radio communication equipment that will enhance operability and safety of our Special Operation Teams, including Water Emergency Team (WET), Technical Rescue Team, and Hazardous Materials Team.

FISCAL IMPACT: NONE

Amount: None (receiving this grant will eliminate general fund costs for the associated equipment)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- Currently, the Des Moines Fire Department (DMFD) Water Emergency Team handles approximately 50 responses for water rescues per year. The City of Des Moines is entering a new era of river recreation with the opening of the Iowa Confluence (ICON) Water Trails at the confluence of the Des Moines and Raccoon Rivers. This \$100M+ project introduces wave shapers and whitewater features that will bring thousands of residents and tourists into the water. While this is a major economic win, it creates an unprecedented safety challenge. Similar cities with comparable whitewater parks have seen water-related calls for service surging from 50 to 500 annually.
- To meet the projected 1,000% increase in risk, we are launching a "Rescue Swimmer" program. However, our current communication equipment is fundamentally inadequate for this environment. Boat engines, rushing water, and river noise create "dead zones" where voice commands are lost, and our swimmers currently have no way to communicate with ground or boat teams once they enter the water. This lack of interoperability isn't just a tactical delay—it is a life-safety risk for both the victims and our firefighters. DMFD is seeking funding for INVISIO communication systems to bridge this critical safety gap. This technology utilizes patented bone-conduction microphones that capture speech directly from vibrations in the jaw and ear bone. This provides three essential capabilities that our current systems lack:

1. **Submersible Interoperability:** Allows rescue swimmers to maintain hands-free, mission-critical communication while swimming. Ground operations can guide swimmers in real-time as victims move downstream and provides a "safety net" to recover swimmers if they miss their mark.
 2. **Advanced Noise Cancellation:** For boat operators, the INVISIO system filters out high-decibel engine and water noise, ensuring every team member is on the same page during rapidly changing conditions.
 3. **Encapsulated Safety:** For Hazmat and Technical Rescue, it allows technicians to communicate hands-free without compromising the seal of their respiratory equipment while ensuring critical communication is uninterrupted.
- The grant application will not exceed \$99,000.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION(S):

Date: February 5, 2018

Roll Call Number: [18-0208](#)

Action: [Application](#) to the Prairie Meadows Community Betterment Program for a Water Quality Initiative Targeted Demonstration Watershed Project Grant on City-owned land. ([Council Communication No. 18-051](#)) Moved by Gatto to adopt. Motion Carried 7-0.

ANTICIPATED ACTIONS AND FUTURE COMMITMENTS:

- Work with procurement to obtain the equipment needed to improve communications for our Special Operations teams.
- Implement and install new equipment.
- Train all teams to effectively utilize new equipment.

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