

2008 Millage fact sheet

Ottawa County Central Dispatch Authority

Background:

The Ottawa County Central Dispatch Authority (“OCCDA”) was established as a separate legal entity through an agreement approved by the cities of Grand Haven and Holland and the County of Ottawa in 1989. At that time, all three of those parties merged their dispatch operations into a centralized dispatch center to cover the entire County from its location in Grand Haven. OCCDA had two funding alternatives in 1989—a fee to be paid by all dispatched organizations based on annual call volume or a millage to be approved by a vote of the citizens of Ottawa County. Given those two alternatives, the units of local government requested that the County place a millage question to the voters as an alternative to the fee; the County agreed; and the voters overwhelmingly approved a 20 year millage at the rate of .5 mills in 1989. All revenue from the millage is annually appropriated by the County to the Authority and spent exclusively on 911 call answering and dispatch purposes.

OCCDA performs emergency call handling and dispatching for all of Ottawa County, and the entire City of Holland, including the portion located in Allegan County. Dispatching services are provided for 7 Law Enforcement, 21 Fire, and 4 EMS agencies.

In addition to 911 lines, we have a toll free non-emergency number for use by all callers, which helps dispatch employees prioritize incoming calls.

Measures:

	1992	2007
Call volumes	207,607	422,812
Incidents	89,156	131,412
Percent 911 cell phone calls	0%	55.4%
Employees	18	41

Funding:

	2007	Percent
Millage	\$ 3,642,889	78%
State Wireless Surcharge	347,843	7.5%
Allegan Revenue	231,600	5%
State Training Funds	27,104	½%
Other revenues *	435,207	9%
Total	\$ 4,684,643	100%

Expenses:

Wages & Benefits	\$ 2,424,996	70%
Non-personnel	1,017,237	30%
Total	\$ 3,442,232	100%

* Includes interest & dividends, refunds / rebates, and employee health & dental contributions

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Over the past several years, budget surpluses have been put into the technology capital fund for future projects. Currently, OCCDA is in the process of building a new facility in West Olive to meet increased workload and accommodate additional employees on the dispatch floor. The building and technology will be paid for from the technology capital fund, and will not require outside financing or additional funding from taxpayers.

Millage renewal:

The Ottawa County Central Dispatch Authority Policy Board and Ottawa County Board of Commissioners have approved ballot language requesting a renewal for 20 years at the current rate of .4400 mills. The millage has rolled back over the years based on the Headlee Amendment to the Michigan Constitution.

As it has for twenty years, the renewal of the millage will provide stable funding for 911 dispatch operations in Ottawa County, will provide funds for future technology upgrades required for public safety communications across Ottawa County, and will enable the County to avoid a dispatch fee to dispatched entities.

Future projects:

2009 – Complete replacement of the MCT's (mobile computer terminals) used by Law and Fire County wide, approximate cost \$ 1.3 million.

2012 – Complete change out of existing radio network County wide, based on FCC requirements, approximate cost \$15 to \$20 million. This project will require issuing bonds, and with the millage renewal approval, the OCCDA will be able to service the debt for the bonds from millage revenues, and should not have to seek additional funding from individual agencies or municipalities.

Alternatives: If the millage is not renewed, OCCDA would either have to return to a dispatch fee for local dispatched entities or ask the County Board of Commissioners to impose a surcharge on phone bills. There are several reasons why OCCDA has not asked for either of these alternatives. Local dispatched entities are struggling with their own financial challenges and are not a logical funding choice. The operational surcharge is not authorized beyond 2008 and this year, required approval of the Michigan Public Service Commission, which rejected the requests of 44 counties. The operational surcharge has been deemed too unstable to be relied upon as the foundation for 911 funding in Ottawa County and it could not be used, at present, to support any bonding for capital projects because of its short term nature.

1) Why a millage and not a surcharge?

A millage is a much more stable form of funding for 911 operations. Currently legislation addressing surcharges for 911 operations expires in February 2009, and the legislation is subject to political influence that creates uncertainty for future funding of 911 operations. Additionally based on research, in order to maintain the current level of funding for Ottawa County 911 we would need to assess approximately \$1.40 per month per device in the county (land line, cellular, VOIP etc.)

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Our legal counsel has opined that a \$1.40 surcharge would require voter approval as in a millage, although that vote would have to be renewed every 5 years, which makes bonding on larger capital projects problematic. Moreover, the way the 911 legislation is structured, the MPSC would have had to have approve the amount of the levy. 2/3rds of Michigan counties had their surcharges reduced through that process in 2008, forcing half of them to appeal to the Courts for relief.

2) Why is this going to the August primary and not the November election when a larger turnout is assured?

Based on our establishing agreement and by laws, the Director is required to present a budget for approval by the Policy Board in August of each year for the next fiscal year. The current approved millage expires at the end of 2008. The August election outcome will provide enough time for the finalization and adoption of the 2009 budget. It would be impractical to adopt a 2009 budget in August without knowing if the millage will be in place for future years.

3) Why is the millage sought for 20 years and not for a shorter timeframe?

The current 911 infrastructure nationally is based on 30 year old technology. Challenges facing the industry include mandated changes from the FCC and Next Generation 911, which will address current and future technology with the ability to access 911 (land line, cellular, On Star, VOIP, streaming video, text messaging etc.). A 20 year millage will allow us to continue operations, and meet the future changes coming to the 911 industry with a stable funding mechanism in place.