



CITY OF WASHINGTON, ILLINOIS

Public Safety Committee Agenda Communication

Meeting Date: October 16, 2023

Prepared By: Chief McCoy and Deputy Chief Stevens

Agenda Item: Code RED Renewal

Explanation: The City's supplementary emergency notification system, known as CodeRED by OnSolve, serves as our federally-mandated public alerting mechanism for the Rolling Meadows North flood plain downstream of the School St. detention basin. Code RED offers versatile alerting options, including list-based and map-based alerts, with address-based granularity. It also provides quarterly updates to its public alerting contact list, which can be supplemented with internal lists and public sign-ups. Additionally, the opt-in and mobile app features allow us to reach guests and frequent visitors.

Regarding the broader value of emergency notification, discontinuing this service would necessitate an alternative flood warning system for Rolling Meadows North. Such an alternative would consume staff time and incur at least some of the basic CodeRED cost. Beyond this, while the emergency notification capability may not be frequently used, it can be a crucial lifesaver in times of necessity. It is worth noting that the City spends more annually to maintain outdoor warning sirens, which likely have less reach than CodeRED. CodeRED enables us to notify residents and others even when they are not actively monitoring social or other media platforms.

Washington has been a CodeRED customer for several years, benefiting from legacy pricing that has kept our costs lower compared to later customers, as reported by OnSolve. However, our costs increased by 6.5% in 2021 and by another 8.6% in 2022. The 2023 renewal would involve a cost increase for the same level of service due to recent technical developments. The same level of service, however, may not be efficient. Cellular carriers are changing their services to prevent spam and abusive contacts, necessitating a shift from SMTP protocol texting (email to text messages) to SMS texting to maintain communication with cellular customers who do not use the CodeRED app. While this change increases our costs, it is necessary for emergency messages to reach the coverage area effectively.

As an alternative to simply adding the SMS service, the Police Department recommends continuing with CodeRED but changing from an unlimited emergency and general notice package to an emergency-only package with SMS text enabled. This change means that the City will send only emergency alerts, specifically those related to potential injury or property damage, rather than general alerts, such as minor road closures or community events. In practice, the City predominantly uses the service for emergency alerts.

We maintain our recommendation for CodeRED based on previous years' analyses, which found that competing services are substantially more expensive and do not better suit the City's needs. Furthermore, changing vendors would require residents or visitors using the CodeRED app to switch to

a different product, resulting in inconvenience and communication challenges for both residents and the City.

Fiscal Impact: The recommended package is prepaying for unlimited emergency use only, making the renewal cost for Code RED \$4,642.00 (December 2023 – December 2024). This cost is significantly lower than the initial 2017 cost of \$6,000 and last year's renewal cost of \$7,286.52. Maintaining limited prepaid general alert capability would result in a total cost of \$5,460.40, an additional \$818.40 to use general alerts in some capacity. Both price options can be locked for three years with a contract, which is worth considering given the recent cost increases.

Action Requested: We request the Council's consideration and recommendation regarding the renewal of this service, with or without the general alerts capability, and whether to opt for a single-year renewal or a three-year contract. Note that up to three years of the basic recommended service falls within the City Administrator's purchase authority, while a three-year service including some general alerts would require formal Council approval.