

*City of Alexandria, Virginia*14
6-26-01

MEMORANDUM

DATE: JUNE 21, 2001

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: PHILIP SUNDERLAND, CITY MANAGER *PS*

SUBJECT: APPLICATION FOR AN EQUIPMENT GRANT FOR A CITIZEN NOTIFICATION SYSTEM

ISSUE: Consideration of an application for an equipment grant from Dialogic Communications Corporation (DCC) for a "Communicator" citizen notification system for the Police Department.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council approve submission of the application for an equipment grant from Dialogic Communications Corporation for a citizen notification system for the Police Department.

BACKGROUND: DCC is offering a new systems grant opportunity for law enforcement. The DCC2001 grant program will award a turnkey, high-speed automatic notification system for the purpose of improving communications with the public. This grant will be awarded annually to one law enforcement agency. Citizen notification systems cost from approximately \$33,000 to \$36,000. The Alexandria system would involve the use of 24 telephones which could be programmed to dial automatically the telephone numbers of businesses or residents in certain areas when there was a specific need to get out a public safety-related message.

Examples of the possible uses of such a notification system include the following:

- Alerts citizens about major (crime) incidents;
- Disseminates neighborhood-based crime information;
- Notifies citizens of missing persons including children and persons with disabilities;
- Notifies businesses of business specific crimes (for example, all banks can be notified of suspects passing bad checks);
- Accepts inbound calls to a community bulletin board. (Citizens can receive press releases neighborhood watch updates, etc); and
- Notifies Police Department employees when it is necessary to report back to work in emergencies.

DISCUSSION: The “Communicator” notification system offers the Police Department an excellent opportunity to enhance its community policing efforts and its methods of providing citizens and business owners with timely information about police related issues. For example, when the Shifflett homicide occurred, the surrounding neighborhood residents, businesses and local cab companies could have been told of the incident and would have been on the lookout for the suspect within minutes. The system has the capacity to communicate in multiple languages and would make it possible to reach diverse populations in the City more quickly when necessary.

The Police Chief could also make the system available to other City agencies for critical incidents on a case-by-case basis. For example, the system could assist the Fire Department in notifying citizens about a hazardous materials incident that requires evacuation and notification of large numbers of citizens.

Similar notification systems are used by the Arlington County and Prince William County Police Departments and have been found to be extremely helpful in improving communications with the community. The Baltimore Police Department has the “Communicator” system in operation and has had a very positive experience with it.

FISCAL IMPACT: If the grant is awarded, the Police Department would be responsible for the installation and maintenance of the 24 dedicated phone lines needed for at least two years (approximately \$6,300 per year). There is no cost for maintenance and support for the “Communicator” system for the first year. Maintenance and support for subsequent years would be approximately \$5,300, including \$1,000 for telephone data base and map updates. Therefore, after year one the annual operating cost is approximately \$11,600. The Police Department will include these costs in subsequent budget requests for FY 2003 and FY 2004.

STAFF: Charles E. Samarra, Police Chief
Lieutenant Tim Dickinson, Commander, Crime Prevention Unit