

A Sedgwick County Accomplishment

By Karl Peterjohn

Sedgwick County successfully completed an upgrade of the public safety communications system early this year. This multi-year project was a substantial technological achievement that did not receive very much attention at the time.

This new system wide replacement enhanced the communications system for 53 governmental bodies including, cities, school districts, and several county agencies by moving from analog to digital communications. This system also improved transmission reception across all 1,008 square miles of this county.

This communication upgrade was also a large fiscal success. That also did not receive much attention either. That is ironic since we live in an age where government excess and cost overruns are commonplace and a success should receive some attention.

When Sedgwick County's new, digital communications system came on line earlier this year the final bills were paid. Replacing the existing analogue system that had been in place for decades was expensive, but the cost was less than half of the proposed \$25.3 million price tag. The final cost was \$11.8 million.

Let's put that into perspective. One mill in county wide property taxes generates \$4.3 million. The county's mill levy is 29.3 mills in 2014, and this is about two mills lower than it was in 2008.

While this construction project is bonded, the costs will eventually have to be re-paid just like homeowners have to make mortgage payments. The county has roughly \$157 million in bonded indebtedness.

How did the county accomplish this technological and fiscal achievement? Sedgwick County located a vendor eager to enter this communication market but still had a performance record of meeting their technological objectives. Sedgwick County went with the low bidder and the result was a major saving of tax dollars.

The 21st century is the microprocessor era. Technology is on the move and this project came in at a cost that was way below initial estimates. This project began before I joined the county commission in 2009. The savings from this project are going to allow Sedgwick County the resources to fund other improvement without raising the county's mill levy. Here's another example where the county is upgrading its facilities for public safety.

The county has also been able to upgrade of the emergency sirens. In replacing old, obsolete, and often non-functioning equipment, the county's upgraded siren system now allows the county to turn the sirens on in select areas. If there is a storm coming into the southeast part of the county, there is no need to turn on the sirens 35 miles away in Cheney. The old system required everything to be turned on or nothing.

While we live in challenging economic times, it is important that the public knows that it is possible for government to make good use of our local tax dollars in Sedgwick County.