

KITTCOM 911

Serving Kittitas County, Washington

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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County Commissioners pass ballot resolution to improve public safety

Sales tax measure will appear on the April 2024 special election ballot

ELLENSBURG, WASH. – The Kittitas Board of County Commissioners voted unanimously to place a ballot measure on the April 23, 2024, special election ballot to improve and secure a sustainable funding source for the countywide 911 communications system.

KITTCOM, a public agency and consolidated public safety communications center, answers and coordinates 911 services for all 17 public safety agencies in the county. Its emergency radio system and communications infrastructure are outdated and unreliable in many parts of the county, which makes it difficult for first responders and search teams to coordinate and communicate during emergencies.

There are many locations in the county where radio signals are not reliable or nonexistent including in the Cle Elum River Valley, Suncadia, Yakima River recreational areas, ski areas, rural schools and homes, and in the many new residential and recreational developments in the county. These “radio holes” or “dead zones” impact response times, patient care, wildland fire suppression, and rescue operations.

“We must secure a sustainable funding source to pay for critical improvements,” said Rich Elliott, interim director for KITTCOM. “We believe a small sales tax is a fair way to fund our countywide 911 communications system. This funding option means residents as well as second homeowners, visitors and people passing through contribute to the 911 system that all of us rely on.”

Visitors should also contribute to the 911 system

KITTCOM serves nearly 50,000 residents plus thousands more who come to recreate or attend festivals. Seasonal and weekend visitors can triple and, at times, quadruple the population. Approximately 33,000 vehicles pass through Kittitas County every day on Interstate 90 for food, fuel, and lodging. More people living and visiting the county are straining the outdated and aging 911 system.

The proposed two-tenths of 1 percent sales tax (two cents for every \$10 purchase) would apply to visitors and people coming to recreate or passing through. In 2022, visitor spending in Kittitas County totaled \$311 million. This spending included recreational supplies, food and beverage, gas, car rentals

and bus fares, and retail sales. Hotel stays through June 2023 totaled 258,125 rooms rented – 80 percent of hotel guests are out-of-towners.

KITTCOM currently funds its 911 system through cell phone and user agency fees paid for through local property taxes. In the last three years, user agency fees increased by 50 percent. When user agency fees increase, it reduces the amount of revenue they have for their daily operations to pay for the emergency personnel, equipment, ambulances, and fire engines all residents require. This funding source is not sustainable for the 911 system or user agencies.

Learn more at www.kittcom.org. KITTCOM Interim Director Rich Elliott also welcomes any questions at 509-925-8530 or fundingquestions@kittcom.org.

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KITTCOM answers and coordinates 911 service for all 17 public safety agencies throughout Kittitas County, including fire, emergency medical service, law enforcement and disaster response agencies. The agency serves both Kittitas County residents (population nearly 50,000), non-residents and visitors who come to the county for recreational opportunities. The agency responds to more than 48,000 calls per year.