

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 5, 2008

CONTACT: Heather Dawson
Hailey City Administrator
788-4221 ext 18

City of Hailey Seeks Solutions to Proposed County Dispatch Funding Formula

Under circumstances within the Wood River Valley prior to 2008, Blaine County property taxes have paid for county dispatch operators' salaries. Since an election in 2002, a one-dollar per phone line per month charge has been collected to pay for dispatch communication equipment and the salary of the dispatch center manager.

Under a new formula proposed by Blaine County, residents are asked to pay for county dispatch salaries through their city or district taxes, rather than through county taxes. The effect is shown in the table below:

Comparison of BCCC Dispatch Value against Taxing Districts' Property Taxes and Levy

Taxing District	2007 Property Taxes	Levy Rate	Dispatch Amount	Percentage of Tax Budget
WR Fire	\$ 672,600	.00057	\$ 25,517	3.8%
Blaine County	7,187,324	.00058	263,262	3.7%
Ketchum	2,909,521	.00079	223,252	7.7%
Sun Valley	2,286,939	.00086	93,527	4.1%
Carey	40,612	.00106	2,994	7.3%
Hailey	1,707,797	.00119	258,227	15.1%
Bellevue	470,115	.00130	63,644	13.5%

Hailey and Bellevue not only pay the highest property tax levy rate, their dispatch amount, under the county's proposed formula, equates to the highest percentage of their city taxes being turned back over to the county to pay for dispatch salaries. Hailey officials have stated that Hailey residents are also county taxpayers who should receive the same services, rights and protections for their county tax dollars as do county residents.

The Hailey City Council has offered three solutions which provide approaches other than this "double-taxation" formula. Hailey believes these solutions should be discussed in a public forum by elected officials whose responsibilities extend beyond those of the emergency response staff user's group, from which the funding formula recommendation was forwarded. The opportunity for full dialogue should not be reduced or diminished by Blaine County's willingness to assist cities unaccustomed to budgeting for county services with a reduced fee under the same formula.

Hailey's attempt to bring this matter to full dialogue began with Hailey City Council members' remarks to county officials during a May 12, 2008 discussion, which were followed by Hailey budgeting -0- dollars for this county service in its draft budget. On July 7, 2008, Hailey received the letter below from County Administrator Mike McNees (excerpts):

"...You asked that I define communications service levels to be provided to the City of Hailey under this non-participation scenario.... Given the reduced level of staffing necessitated by the absence of funding from Hailey, the first adjustment to the level of service would be that the communications center would no longer cover the city's police administrative calls during the hours that your administrative lines are

unmanned. In addition, the services of the dispatcher to access information from the NCIC/IELTS computer system or for general dispatch duties for law enforcement/fire would no longer be available.

What we propose beyond that is that the communications center would continue to receive all 911 emergency calls, determine the nature of the emergency, and forward the information to the City of Hailey for dispatching as you see fit. ... As I have stated before, we stand willing to discuss a workable phase-in to full participation by the City of Hailey..."

The Hailey City Council's suggested solutions are excerpted from a letter which the council instructed be sent to the Blaine County Commissioners by City Attorney Ned Williamson:

"...First, we suggested that the county review and readjust the emergency communications fee by increasing the \$1 fee/line/month to pay for operations of a communications system. See Idaho Code §31-4803(7)(a). It is my understanding (County Attorney) Tim Graves will be recommending that the county not increase the fee in excess of \$1/line/month. We believe that there is a legal interpretation allowing for such a readjustment and that the readjusted fee is equitable to all the users of dispatch.

Second, we suggested that the county continue funding dispatch service at the same level the county previously funded dispatch, but allow other governmental entities, such as Ketchum, to fund extra positions to raise the level of service it deems advisable. Under this proposal, the level of service is maintained at a safe level, though less than full double-staffing at all times, and funded in an equitable fashion. Any entity desiring greater service could then pay for that service.

Third, there has been discussion about a county-wide levy override election. Like the first option, this option would more equitably share the cost of dispatch among all the citizens by assessing the same county levy rate. It would also allow the citizens a greater voice in the matter.

Hailey maintains that the funding mechanism proposed by the county is not equitable to the taxpayers of Hailey. Under the county's proposal, citizens of Hailey would pay both county and city taxes for the same level of service provided to a tax payer in an unincorporated area of Blaine County. Moreover, the staffing levels are proposed to be increased. In difficult economic times, we do not believe expansion is prudent. To make matters worse, under the McNees letter, city residents would only receive minimal 911 service which unacceptably threatens lives and property. It must be emphasized that Hailey residents are also county taxpayers who deserve the same rights and protections as citizens who live outside of the city boundaries.

Hailey respectfully requests that the Blaine County Board of County Commissioners publicly discuss the three options contained in this letter and, as is your practice, provide advance notice to the public. For the third option, Hailey will fund a fair interim payment but only if Blaine County places a county-wide levy override election on the ballot.

We are willing to continue the discussions, but we feel it is time for the leaders of the county to address this issue in a public setting."

In a press release issued from Blaine County Commission Chair Tom Bowman and Hailey Mayor Rick Davis on July 24th, the two jurisdictions represented the situation as follows (excerpts):

"Commissioner Bowman states that 'We want and need Hailey in the system and will do our best to help them find a way to work this out. I am encouraged by the solution oriented approach taken by Mayor

Davis and (Councilman) Haemmerle. There are no agreements in place and Hailey certainly has not backed out of anything’.

Mayor Davis expressed that there may be other possible funding scenarios. ‘Although Hailey will place the largest demand on the dispatch system, the proposed amount we are being asked to pay is, compared to the other cities, the largest percentage of the property tax collected. We would like to explore other options with our partners’."

A meeting of elected officials from each of the jurisdictions which utilize county dispatch services, including largely city mayors as well as fire, EMS, and county commission chairs, will be convened this week to discuss solutions. The meeting will be held in the Blaine County Courthouse meeting room on August 6, 2008 at 4:00 p.m.

###

For more information please refer to the following websites or attached documents:

May 12, 2008 Hailey City Council discussion as reported in the Idaho Mountain Express on May 14, 2008 <http://www.mtexpress.com/index2.php?ID=2005120665> – excerpts below:

Bob Greenlaw of Blaine County Consolidated Emergency Communications also approached the council on Monday, seeking \$260,000 for a backup emergency dispatch facility and the salaries of its personnel. He said Hailey accounted for 27.8 percent of total calls for emergency services within the county and requested that the city pay a contribution based on this user share of dispatch services.

Councilman Fritz Haemmerle told Greenlaw that state law requires the county to pay its own salaries. Councilwoman Carol Brown suggested that Blaine County Consolidated Emergency Communications raise money through a levy override increase of its own, such as the one up for a vote on the May 27 ballot for the ambulance district.

Mayor Rick Davis agreed that the dispatch funding was a "countywide issue" and said the city of Hailey is struggling financially in any case.

"We are not flush right now, and we won't be for a couple more years," he said.

May 12, 2008 Council Discussion from Hailey City Council Minutes
http://www.haileycityhall.org/cityCouncil/minutes/2008/Council_Minutes_051208.pdf

July 28, 2008 Hailey City Council discussion as reported in the Wood River Journal on July 30, 2008
http://www.wrjournal.com/articles/2008/08/01/news/local_news/astory.txt