

November 30, 2005

TO: John Szerlag, City Manager

FROM: John M. Lamerato, Assistant City Manager/Finance & Administration
Cindy Stewart, Community Affairs Director

SUBJECT: AGENDA ITEM: Closed Captioning for Cable Channel

Councilman Lambert brought up the topic of offering closed captioning for our cable channel, WTRY. We researched this last year after receiving a resident inquiry related to closed captioning services. Research through the National Association of Telecommunications Officers and Advisors – Michigan Chapter shows that only two cities in Michigan (Clinton Township and Grand Rapids) provide Closed Captioning for their government access channels. They both have three-year contracts for closed captioning services and said that their companies provide about a 95% accuracy rate in the captioning.

There are some California and Arizona cities, as well as some State Senate hearings that offer limited closed captioning services and the State of Michigan offers closed captioning only for the annual Governor's State of the State address.

Companies we found that offer closed captioning are Communication Works for the Deaf in Farmington Hills, Closed Captioning Services in Grand Rapids and Rapidtext, Inc. in Newport Beach, California. We would need to purchase a Link Electronics Encoder/Decoder (\$3,000 – 6,000 depending on the company) for our cable office and have a telephone interface and two dedicated phone lines – one to receive the audio and one to send back to us to include on the tape. A translator would listen to our meetings via a phone line, type the conversations and route it back to our television screen. It would be live with a one – two second delay. We would also be able to tape the captioning for meeting playbacks.

The cost for the Realtime Captioning ranges from \$125 - 135 per hour. If we provided closed captioning for all City Council Meetings (minimum 31 meetings x approx. 5 hours per meeting), cost would be approximately \$19,375 - 20,925 per year. This would not include any Study Sessions or other meetings.

Current Services for the Hearing Impaired: We have installed a hearing assistance device in the Council Chambers. To date no one has asked to use this equipment. We provide audio and videotapes, which are available at the Library. We also have an interpreter resource, *Deaf Can!* which provides sign language interpreters for meetings at \$34 per hour (minimum two hours) plus mileage for the interpreter. We offer this service of a sign language translator at meetings when requested in advance by a resident. We had a request for this service only twice in the past six years.

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