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Wednesday, 15 August 2012 16:42

Alarm company tells village officials basic service could cost $12,000; federal funds may be available

In this age of heightened sensitivity to security risks, Village of Fredonia officials think it is inconceivable that the Fredonia Government Center is protected by little more than a lock and key.

The village's Public Safety Committee recommended last week that this deficiency be corrected, calling for an alarm system that will guard against fires and break-ins.

The committee met with Richard Gerou, a sales representative with Tyco Fire & Security, the parent company for the residential alarm system vendor ADT.

Gerou said he presumes the government center, which opened in 2008, was designed, at just under 1,800 square feet to fall under the threshold where the state building code requires sprinkler systems.

"Putting in a sprinkler system would cost between $200,000 and $250,000. If you look around, you'll see tons of buildings at this size precisely to avoid that expense," he said.

A much more cost-effective alarm system can be installed in the building for between $10,000 and $12,000, Gerou said, that would send out alerts when fires or security breaches are detected.

An annual service contract for the alarm system would cost about $400.

Alarms could also be installed at other municipal buildings, including the police station and water plant, at about $5,000 per location, he said.

"Nobody gave security at these facilities much thought until 9/11. Now there is a ton of terrorism-prevention money out there," Gerou said.

Since those terrorist attacks, he said grants have routinely been awarded for alarm systems through the federal Department of Homeland Security.

Those grants can cover as much as 70% of the cost of installing an alarm system at a facility that serves the public.

Municipalities that put in fire alarm systems also typically see an 8% reduction in there liability insurance premiums, Gerou said.

The security system he recommended would involve small keychain fobs with unique access codes, so that a database would show when authorized personnel are entering and leaving the building.

Village officials liked that approach, because it would eliminate the risk of employees making copies of keys which might not be turned in when they stop working for the municipality.

If the Village Board supports the committee's recommendation, the security system would still need to be approved by the Town of Fredonia, which shares the municipal building.

"It is not like we could alarm only half of the building," said Trustee Jill Bertram.

The operation of the building is governed by the Fredonia Government Center Board, which is evenly divided between village and town officials.

"My main concern is that we don't have alarms in (Village Hall), but this is a lot of money for us to spend. I can't in good conscience say we don't need to have a fire alarm system," said Trustee Fritz Buchholtz, chairman of the committee.

Trustees also asked Gerou to weigh in on the issue of security cameras in local parks, a heated topic among village officials.

Gerou said low-tech surrveilance cameras have little value to law enforcement, but sophisticated systems have been effective deterrants in areas where vandalism and crime have occurred.

Communities as small as Lone Rock and Stoughton have deployed cameras in problem parks, he said.

If the village can do its own electrical wiring, Gerou said cameras with motion sensors can be installed in parks for about $400 a site.

"Do I think they make a difference? I would say so, 100%. When I talk to law enforcement people, the thing they always say is 'Give me a picture,'" he said.

If cameras are deployed, signs should be posted warning people that they are being watched.

However, he said communities can open themselves to lawsuits if they use dummy cameras and post signs saying cameras are being used.