

Charlotte, N.C.'s CIO divulges why the city did not gain access to FirstNet spectrum

Fierce Wireless Tech By Tammy Parker

August 6, 2014

The CIO for Charlotte, N.C., said concerns about sustainability of the city's planned public-safety network ultimately led to a suspension of negotiations that could have enabled Charlotte to lease 700 MHz spectrum from the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet).

MissionCritical Communications reported that Jeff Stovall, Charlotte's CIO, said city staff felt sustainability concerns led FirstNet to pull the plug on talks to lease spectrum to Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, N.C.

The city had received \$16.7 million in federal funds during 2010 to build a public-safety broadband network through the National Telecommunications and Information Administration's Broadband Technologies Opportunity Program (BTOP). Alcatel-Lucent ([NYSE: ALU](#)) came on board to build the LTE network, which was slated for completion in July 2013.

But Charlotte was one of seven BTOP public-safety entities whose funding was halted during spring 2012 by NTIA due to concerns the BTOP projects might be incompatible with the national public-safety broadband network (NPSBN) being planned by FirstNet. The only way BTOPs could get their programs going again was if they completed a spectrum manager lease agreement (SMLA) with FirstNet to access its 700 MHz spectrum and had their rollout plan approved by NTIA.

However, Stovall said several changes during the funding freeze period--including stricter building codes and a lowering of cellular service rate by commercial mobile network operators--impacted the business plan for the Charlotte public-safety network, potentially leading to funding shortfalls for both deployment and operations.

Charlotte, the state of North Carolina, Alcatel-Lucent and tower company Crown Castle worked with FirstNet to resolve the issues and developed strategies to tackle the deployment challenges. However, Stovall said that "the city was unable to overcome the sustainable operations issues."

In addition to Charlotte, other BTOP recipients that FirstNet did not reach lease agreements with were the state of Mississippi and Motorola Solutions for the Bay Area in California. FirstNet completed spectrum lease agreements with four BTOP grantees: the Los Angeles-Regional Interoperable Communications System (LA-RICS), the state of New Mexico, New Jersey Department of Treasury and Adams County, Colo. However, Harris County, Texas, which was not a BTOP recipient but is operating multiple LTE sites and an evolved packet core (EPC), still has not signed a 700 MHz lease pact with FirstNet.

Charlotte donated equipment for its defunct BTOP-funded LTE network rollout, including microwave equipment, to FirstNet. However, the city still has \$8.8 million in BTOP funds left, which it is applying to upgrades of existing public-safety communications technology and infrastructure within the city and county. New equipment is being selected with an eye toward compatibility with FirstNet's planned NPSBN.

[Link to Article](#)

[Link to Fierce News Articles](#)