CITY COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM
CITY OF SHORELINE, WASHINGTON

AGENDA TITLE:	Automatic Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) Program – Council Direction for Suburban Cities Association's (SCA) Public Issues Committee (PIC)
DEPARTMENT:	CMO
PRESENTED BY:	Scott MacColl, Intergovernmental Relations Manager
ACTION:	____ Ordinance ____ Resolution ____ Motion __X__ Discussion ____ Public Hearing

PROBLEM/ISSUE STATEMENT:

The Suburban Cities Association's (SCA) Public Issues Committee (PIC) is considering taking a position on the potential renewal of King County's Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS). The AFIS levy was passed in 2006 and expires at the end of 2012, and the County is considering placing renewal of the levy on the fall ballot.

The PIC will consider whether to take a position at the July 11th meeting, and Shoreline's PIC representative, Councilmember Roberts, is looking for Council direction to guide his vote.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that Council provide direction to Councilmember Roberts to support putting the measure on the ballot and continue funding the program.

Approved By: City Manager __DT____   City Attorney __IS____

INTRODUCTION

The SCA PIC discusses regional issues and provides policy recommendations to the SCA Board that guide SCA staff and SCA appointed officials on regional committees. Elected officials that serve on the PIC generally seek direction from their Councils in advance of voting on issues at the PIC.

The potential renewal of the AFIS levy was discussed at the June 13th PIC meeting, and will be brought back as a potential action item at the July 11th meeting. Renewal of the AFIS levy has been discussed at King County's Regional Policy Committee, and it appears likely to place this measure on the ballot for the fall election. The PIC as a committee will decide on the language they will vote on at the meeting.

Councilmember Roberts, as Shoreline's PIC representative, is looking for Council direction regarding taking a position on the potential AFIS levy.

BACKGROUND

The AFIS program is levy-funded, and provides a technical platform for fingerprint identification services throughout the county with links to other state, regional, and federal databases. The program allows the King County Sheriff's office, its contract cities, Seattle and suburban police departments within the county access to fingerprint identification information.

The current AFIS Levy was began in 2007 and expires at the end of 2012. This levy was a renewal of the original levy which ran from 2000-2005 (with an extra year using higher than expected revenues). The AFIS program will require either renewal of the levy or another dedicated funding source for continuation after December 31, 2012.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that Council provide direction to Councilmember Roberts to support putting the measure on the ballot and continue funding the program.

ATTACHMENT: AFIS Program FAQs 2012

AFIS Program FAQs
2012

1. What is an AFIS?

An Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) is a searchable database of finger and palm print records used to verify identity or link unsolved crimes.

In King County, the AFIS serves two primary purposes:

- To search fingerprints and palmprints collected from crime scenes to identify unknown suspects and aid in convictions;

- To quickly identify arrested individuals, preventing the wrongful release of those using false names to evade arrest warrants or hide criminal records.

2. What is the AFIS levy?

In 1986, King County voters approved a property tax levy for the purchase of a shared, regional AFIS computer, and have renewed their support four times over the last 25 years.

This technology and regional approach enhanced the limited criminal identification services previously handled by individual police agencies or provided by the Washington State Patrol (WSP).

The levy funds not only the technology, but also the staff behind the scenes who fingerprint in the regional jails, respond to major crime scenes, and identify individuals as they are arrested throughout the county, 24 hours, seven days/week.

The King County's AFIS program is nationally recognized for its high standards, quality of services, and exceptional expertise. It also recently received international accreditation from Forensic Quality Services, which assesses every aspect of the crime laboratory operations including procedures, technical qualifications, and competence.

3. What is the benefit of having a shared regional AFIS?

At the city level AFIS and biometric technology is costly, and too great of an investment for most local agencies to support on their own. Similarly, fingerprint examiners require specialized training and experience, and the volume of work generated by a single agency would likely not support the expense to retain experts. Although criminals tend to commit their crimes in the same geographic area, they frequently cross city boundaries. Having separate local systems could result in missed identifications, or require additional time and effort to search other systems.

At the state (or federal) level State and federal systems are built to serve as repositories that retain arrest and conviction information. Many counties throughout the nation choose to implement their own AFIS for a number of reasons.

- Most crime scene prints are identified to criminals in the same geographic area. State and federal systems must search a significantly larger database, which can 'dilute' the results returned, taking more time and producing candidates who have never been in the King County area.

AFIS Program FAQs
2012

- The quality of images in a countywide database can be more tightly controlled than at a state or federal level, resulting in a higher quality database and increased matching potential.
- Decisions regarding technology, procedures, and workflow are made at a local or regional level, as opposed to depending on a state's or federal priorities.
- State services are often subject to funding limitations that reduce operating hours and limit the types of services available. These can be critical factors in quickly and successfully identifying suspects.

A regional, countywide AFIS provides enhanced criminal identification technology and services, for an investment that local police agencies would not be able to fund on their own. The sharing of resources and information lends to greater efficiency in crime-solving efforts.

Similar models can be seen in other large metropolitan areas such as Los Angeles County, San Francisco, and New York. Another successful regional system is the Northern Virginia Regional Identification System (NOVARIS), which also cites the importance of local control and quality of database and services.

Although most crime scene prints are identified to criminals in the same geographic area, it is important for agencies to have the capability to search other agencies' AFIS computers when no local hit is found. This interoperability is being driven by many agencies at the local, county, state, and federal levels, and is continually improving.

4. **Why isn't this program funded in the County's current expense budget?**

   The current expense budget funds the basic identification services for unincorporated areas of the county. By state law, local police agencies representing incorporated cities are required to handle their own identification services or depend entirely upon the state for basic services.

   Through King County's regional AFIS program, services are provided to all police departments within the county. There is no county- or state-level mandate or funding mechanism for a shared regional program of this nature.

5. **What would happen if the levy failed and there was no further funding?**

   Without sustained funding, the responsibility for criminal identification would revert to each local city's police department, or the Sheriff's office for unincorporated areas, per state law.

   The elimination of AFIS funding would likely result in a severe reduction or elimination of county-supported crime scene and arrest identifications. Most cities would not be able to fund their own examiners or technology. The King County regional jails would likely need to hire additional staff to handle the fingerprint, mugshot, and DNA collection processes performed by AFIS staff today.

   A city's options would be to fund its own staff and services or rely upon WSP's minimal identification services. Another option may be for cities to contract with the County for what remained of AFIS services.

WSP's absorption of the high volume of work performed in King County, the largest in the state, would result in tremendous backlogs. Due to low staffing levels, WSP limits the types of cases worked. WSP is also not staffed 24/7 to provide immediate identification upon arrest; therefore, some individuals giving false identities would be released into the community prior to positive identification.

6. How much does the levy cost? What does it include?

The proposed renewal levy rate is $0.0592 per $1,000/assessed valuation (AV), which will continue program funding for the next six years, 2013-2018. The AFIS levy would cost the owner of a $350,000 home about $20.72 per year, or $1.73 per month.

The proposed legislation would continue funding current services, including the new palmprint-matching AFIS installed in 2011. This maintenance levy would also replace an aging and inadequate regional processing lab and continue technology improvements started in the current levy cycle such as remote fingerprinting in the field by officers and/or in the courts.

Efficiencies in the proposal include a reduction of 11 positions through attrition over the life of the levy, estimated to save $6.75 million.

7. Isn't fingerprint technology getting old? What about DNA, iris scanning, or facial recognition?

The use of *both* fingerprints and DNA are important in evidence collection, but one does not replace the other. Many times, only fingerprints are left at crime scenes, and no DNA evidence is found.

DNA cannot distinguish between identical twins, but fingerprints can.

Iris scanning is primarily used for access control and does not have much application in crime scene evidence recovery.

Facial recognition is limited to surveillance and investigations where photos or video are available.

Investigators use any and all forensic science disciplines available: again, one does not replace the other. However, fingerprints remain the 'bread and butter' of criminal identification.