

TO: CITY MANAGER

1996 October 23

FROM: DIRECTOR FINANCE

File: I53

SUBJECT: AUTOMATED PROPERTY TAX INFORMATION

PURPOSE: To provide funding for the purchase of an interactive voice response system (IVR)

RECOMMENDATION:

1. THAT a bylaw be brought down to appropriate \$70,000 from Capital Reserves for the acquisition of an interactive voice response system (IVR) as outlined in this report.

REPORT

The Property Tax Department has investigated the ability to provide the public access to specific property tax and other authorized information through the use of a touch-tone telephone. The technology is termed interactive voice response (IVR).

IVR systems allow the public to obtain information by responding to questions through the key pad of their touch-tone phone. For example, a caller phones in and selects a topic by entering its code number on the telephone keypad. If the caller requests the status of a property tax account, the system instructs the caller to enter the address or roll number of the property. The voice response system would then tell the caller the balance owing and whether or not the home owner grant had been claimed. For information of a more personal nature the system would require the caller to enter a personal identification number (PIN) before the information would be given.

Specific property information, such as whether a tax payment or home owner grant has been received is the most common question during peak tax collection periods. Attending the phone to answer these types of questions during tax time ties up a tax clerk from serving taxpayers at the counter.

Statistical reports of incoming telephone calls during the 1995 peak tax period indicate that 10,501 calls were answered by tax clerks and 698 calls were abandoned before they could be answered. In addition, many more calls would have been lost due to busy circuits. As IVR systems provide access to information 11 hours a day, seven days a week, many callers could get the information they want from the IVR system outside of regular office hours. Callers will also be able to leave messages, such as requesting a tax bill, giving a change of address or asking the tax office to call them back. Also, during business hours callers who do not want to use the IVR system would be provided direct access to a tax clerk, if desired.

The IVR system will also provide an automated mechanism for law and conveyancing firms to request and pay for faxed copies of Tax Information Certificates (TIC) without the involvement of tax office staff. This provides about \$30,000 worth of revenue to the city each year but ties up a significant amount of staff time dealing with each request, looking up the information and faxing it back to the caller. The IVR system will do this without tying up staff resources.

It has been conservatively estimated that the payback period for the faxback feature will be less than two years.

A future use of the system will be to provide a mechanism for the automated payment of parking tickets by credit card. The recently installed Parking Enforcement System has received a total of 1,073 credit card payments since December 1995. The IVR system is capable of handling most of these payments without taking staff away from their regular jobs.

The following cities and municipalities have installed IVR systems in the past few years and have given very positive feedback on the benefits both for themselves and for the public:

July 1994	Toronto
February 1995	Richmond
May 1995	Surrey
June 1995	North Vancouver District

The total estimated cost of the IVR system is \$70,000. The costs are broken down as follows:

Basic IVR system	\$ 50,000
Faxback feature	<u>20,000</u>
Total Estimated Cost	<u>\$ 70,000</u>

Funding

Sufficient capital reserve funds are available and \$50,000 is included in the 1996 Capital budget. A further \$20,000 for the faxback feature has been included in the 1997 Capital budget.



Rick Earle
DIRECTOR FINANCE