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York County expects to save about \$667,000 over the next 10 years by changing up its countywide telephone system. The current landline system is comprised of Nortel Networks devices. That network is "at the end of its useful life," according to a news release, and because the company folded a few years ago the phones are no longer supported. "I think it's long overdue and something that will carry us through the next 20 years and save money," said Joseph Sassano, the executive director of information technology for the county.



The \$1.4 million transfer will change roughly 1,500 of the county's telephones from landline service into a voice over Internet protocol, or VoIP, system with Cisco software and hardware, Sassano said. The funding will come through a five-year, no-interest loan, according to a news release. Tim Morder, the vice president of sales and marketing for Link Computer Corporation, of Bellwood, said his company has

implemented the phone systems in several counties in the commonwealth.

The current services run approximately \$336,000 a year, more than double the projected \$146,000 to \$151,000 the new system will cost. "This change continues our efforts to leverage technology to modernize the way county government does business," said Steve Chronister, the president of the county Board of Commissioners, in a prepared statement.

Due to the way the VoIP system will be set up, Kent Walter, a technical consultant with Link Computer Corporation, said there will be very few outages "at worst." There will be minor exceptions to the rollout, said Carl Lindquist, the county spokesman. Prisoners at the York County Prison will still largely be using standard landline handsets. Likewise, the emergency phones in elevators will be landline phones and credit card processing machines at district courts will use traditional telephone lines. The county already has VoIP in place at the Department of Emergency Services — including 911 — and in

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some county offices in the Hanover area. – *York Daily Record*

For the month of May, there will be free public Wi-Fi on the Gettysburg circle thanks to a pilot program approved by the Adams County commissioners April 8. The program, a result of a county partnership with Destination Gettysburg and four local businesses, will help to determine if there is a demand for free public network service, especially during the upcoming summer tourism season, said Steve Scherm, county IT director.

The Wi-Fi will have four access points — the Blue and Gray Bar & Grill, the Cafe on the Square, T & S Men's Wear and the Gettysburg Hotel — that will create a ring of Wi-Fi access around the circle similar in function to cell phone towers, Scherm said. An antenna on the roof of the Adams County courthouse will project the signal to the access points around the circle, allowing broadband access, he said. The Wi-Fi is separate from the internal network used for courthouse business, so there is no possibility of a security breach, Scherm said.

The network software allows the county to place certain restrictions on the internet access in hopes of preventing misuse, he said. Adult content sites and streaming services that consume large amounts of broadband space will not be available, Scherm said. People wishing to access the free internet service will be prompted by a terms of use agreement, written by county solicitors' office, when they connect to the network.

Commissioner Marty Qually told board members at the meeting that the project will have no additional cost to the taxpayers since the broadband width has already been sponsored through the Adams County Connected broadband board. "Evenings and weekends, we are still paying for data access at the courthouse but not using it," Qually said.

The four businesses will only need to pay the cost of electricity to power the wireless transmitters. Though the devices used to run the network have been lent by Cisco Meraki Cloud Networking Solution, Destination Gettysburg has pledged to purchase up to \$4,000 in equipment should the program continued past the pilot phase, Qually said. "These are the types of services that our visitors expect when they travel," said Destination Gettysburg President Norris Flowers in a news release. "With today's mobile use to search for additional in-market opportunities, providing free Wi-Fi will encourage our visitors to do more while they are here. This tool serves as part of our visitor services efforts."

At the conclusion of the one-month pilot program, the IT department and commissioners will decide whether to extend the service for a year. "This has the ability to attract more people to Gettysburg, plus it is a tool for public service," Qually said. "It's the natural next step in what we're doing in America right now." The Wi-Fi service could also function as a marketing tool. In order to gain internet access, users will need to click on a logo of one of the four businesses sponsoring the project. Users will then be directed to the business' website or Facebook page, Scherm said. "We've seen economic case studies where this has drawn in business," Scherm said.

Similar programs are currently in use in the Gettysburg Area School District and the City of Lancaster, according to the news release. If local businesses express interest, Scherm said he could see the Wi-Fi service extending down Baltimore Street or even along Steinwehr Avenue in the future. – *Hanover Evening Sun*

The first budget salvos have been launched in the state's annual verbal and ideological spending wars of spring. Will summer and Christmas suffer as a result for the governor, lawmakers and their employees? On Tuesday, Democratic Gov. Tom Wolf fired the first shot when he told The Philadelphia Inquirer he does not expect a 2015-16 budget to be passed by the June 30 close of the current fiscal year. "I'm planning on spending the summer here, and the fall and the winter," Wolf told the newspaper.

On Wednesday, Republican legislative leaders returned fire. In a conference call with reporters, House Majority Leader Dave Reed, R-Indiana, said Wolf's remarks were premature and do not jell with his campaign promise to be a "different" leader in Harrisburg. The administration and legislative caucuses will not have their first joint meeting until next week, Reed said, and a deal can get done by June 30.

In an interview with The Morning Call, Sen. Pat Browne, R-Lehigh, Appropriations Committee chairman, said Wolf's new comments do not bode well for compromise among the administration, the Senate and House. But he pledged to work to get a budget done on time. Wolf won election by beating Republican incumbent Gov. Tom Corbett, who was historically unpopular due to education cuts Wolf vowed to restore. At the same time, voters elected more Republicans to the House and Senate. Both sides think they have a mandate from voters: Wolf to increase spending for public schools and universities; Republicans to control spending. "Both can make claims to have the will of the people behind them," said Chris Borick, Muhlenberg College political science professor and pollster. "But the reality is both are going to have to be willing to compromise."

Last month, Wolf proposed a \$33.8 billion spending plan that raises education spending and cuts business taxes and local property taxes while raising a slue of other taxes by a combined 16 percent. Republicans blasted it as excessive and "dead on arrival" and then acted rather diplomatic during two weeks of budget hearings that wrapped up last week. Highlights of Wolf's budget plan, which requires legislative approval, include:

- \$500 million more in basic and special education to school districts and a long-term \$675 million bond to support economic development programs. Both initiatives would be paid for via a 5 percent tax and a fee on Marcellus Shale drillers.
- \$2.1 billion fund to reduce school property taxes by an average of \$1,000 per homeowner across the state. It would be paid for through a 21 percent increase in the personal income tax (from 3.07 to 3.7 percent).
- \$1.75 billion teacher pension payment removed from the general fund and put into a lockbox to ensure it is paid in full, unlike in previous years. Covered by a 10 percent bump in the sales tax (from 6 to 6.6 percent) and an expanded list of taxable items lawmakers would have to approve to cover the rising pension payment.
- \$3 billion bond to help cover pension costs that the sales tax hike cannot. Paid for via more state liquor stores opening on Sundays and agreeing to other Liquor Control Board changes to pay for the pension debt.

Halving corporate net income tax over three years and eliminating a levy on corporation's physical assets. The cuts would come while the state reduces the amount of negative profit businesses can write off annually and institutes more expansive accounting rules, known as combined reporting, to capture more business tax money. Some of those ideas have support among Republicans and Democrats. Before any of those ideas are considered in the Legislature, House Republicans want Wolf to privatize the state liquor store system and the Senate Republicans want big changes to debt-ridden state pension systems. Wolf opposes both ideas – for now. Browne, who is leading the Senate's pension change plans, said his bill will be done soon.

The House already passed a bill to sell state liquor store system, Reed said. A lot of GOP lawmakers support reducing or eliminating property taxes, he said, and plans are being drawn up to present property tax relief legislation using a combination of higher sales and incomes taxes. The key to any budget talks, Reed said, is to see how much tax money the state generates through June. But Reed said there is no way the Legislature will approve nearly \$5 billion in additional spending in one year as Wolf has proposed. "That's completely unrealistic and I think the governor is aware of that," Reed said, adding he does not fault Wolf for putting those options on the table in hopes of getting approval on some items. "If I was in his shoes, I'd put everything on the table," Reed said. "We put liquor on the table and the Senate put pensions on the table and

we'll see how all the puzzle pieces come together.”

The Legislature also might have to consider another key issue in a long budget battle: Its own finances. In July, Corbett cut a combined \$72 million from the budgets of the House, Senate and ancillary offices and operations for both chambers. Corbett made the cuts after lawmakers voted to raise their own budget while declining to vote on his plan to change pension systems. The cuts have caused the Republican and Democratic caucuses in both chambers to dip into their reserve funds by varying degrees.

House Democrats have said they are hurting financially. Senate Republicans also have said a projected budget fight would hurt their caucus. Senate Democrats have been more tight lipped about their finances. House Republicans are in good shape financially due to previous internal cost savings, Reed said. But it is hard to tell how a projected budget fight will that lasts more than “a couple of months” before staff layoffs and operational cuts are considered.

Staff pay would not be the only thing affected in a long budget fight. Without a budget, lawmakers would lose out on meal and lodging per diems, mileage reimbursement and other financial perks that allow them to charge taxpayers for virtually any expense they incur in the course of their elective duties. Wolf, on the hand, doesn't need to worry about any of that. He is independently wealthy, is not taking a salary and can either bunk at the governor's Harrisburg mansion or go home to his own bed at his York County home. The administration also has access to more money and can pay its staff longer than the Legislature can without the infusion of money Wolf has proposed to bring the chamber's budget back to the level it was before Corbett cut it.

Wolf can wield Corbett's cuts as a sword or an olive branch, Borick said. “All the caucuses would like to make sure their budget lines are re-established at rates they think are necessary,” he said. “The governor, right now, has some ability to use that issue as a bargaining chip. But it's tricky. He, of course, needs the Legislature to pass anything he wants. He has to be judicious in how he uses it.” It could be a long fight. – *Allentown Morning Call*; more from [Philadelphia Inquirer](#) and [pennlive.com](#)



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