Note from the Attorney General’s Office:

OPINION NO. 95-004

Syllabus:

1. Pursuant to R.C. 307.63, a board of county commissioners may enter into an agreement with the townships and municipal corporations located within the county whereby the townships and municipal corporations use the countywide public safety communications system to dispatch their police officers, firemen, and emergency medical personnel. A board of county commissioners that establishes a countywide public safety communications system pursuant to R.C. 307.63 may not require municipal corporations and townships that use the system to pay the board for the costs it incurs in connection with the operation, maintenance, and management of that system.

2. R.C. 307.15 authorizes a board of county commissioners to enter into an agreement with a municipal corporation or township located within that county whereby the county dispatches the police officers, firemen, and emergency medical personnel of the municipal corporation or township. The allocation of costs incurred by the county in providing dispatching services to the municipal corporation or township is a matter that may be negotiated by the county and the municipal corporation or township as a
part of the agreement for dispatching services that they enter into pursuant to R.C. 307.15.

3. Pursuant to R.C. 311.29, a township or municipal corporation may enter into a contract with the county sheriff whereby the sheriff dispatches the police officers of the township or municipal corporation, and the township or municipal corporation pays the county for the costs it incurs under the contract.

4. Pursuant to R.C. 505.43, a township may enter into a contract with the county sheriff whereby the sheriff dispatches the police officers of the township, and may negotiate as part of the contract the allocation of costs incurred by the sheriff under the contract.

To: Lowell S. Petersen, Ottawa County Prosecuting Attorney, Port Clinton, Ohio
By: Betty D. Montgomery, Attorney General, March 28, 1995

You have requested an opinion concerning the authority of a board of county commissioners to dispatch the police officers, firemen, and emergency medical personnel of townships and municipal corporations located within the county. Your request presents the following questions:

1. May a Board of County Commissioners provide dispatching services for police departments, fire departments, and emergency medical service units operated by municipalities and townships within its boundaries without a contract providing for reimbursement to the county by the said political subdivisions and may the county expend county general fund money for that purpose?

2. If the answer to the first question is in the affirmative, is the county required to provide said service at county expense?

3. May a board of township trustees contract with and pay the county for dispatching services for its police department, fire department, and emergency medical service units?

4. May a city or village contract with and pay the county for dispatching services for its police department, fire department, and emergency medical service units?

I. A Board of County Commissioners May Dispatch the Emergency Personnel of Townships and Municipal Corporations

For ease of discussion, this opinion will consider your first two questions together. These questions concern the authority of a board of county commissioners to use county general fund moneys to dispatch the police officers, firemen, and emergency medical personnel of townships and municipal corporations located within the county.
A. Authority of a Board of County Commissioners

A board of county commissioners, as a creature of statute, possesses only those powers that are expressly granted by statute or necessarily implied thereby. *State ex rel. Shriver v. Board of Comm’rs*, 148 Ohio St. 277, 74 N.E.2d 248 (1947); 1994 Op. Att’y Gen. No. 94-060 at 2-293; 1989 Op. Att’y Gen. No. 89-087 at 2-413. Moreover, with respect to financial transactions, the authority of a board of county commissioners "must be clear and distinctly granted, and, if such authority is of doubtful import, the doubt is resolved against its exercise in all cases where a financial obligation is sought to be imposed upon the county." *State ex rel. Locher v. Menning*, 95 Ohio St. 97, 99, 115 N.E. 571, 572 (1916); accord Op. No. 94-060 at 2-293; Op. No. 89-087 at 2-413; 1983 Op. Att’y Gen. No. 83-042 at 2-162. It is, therefore, necessary first to determine whether a board of county commissioners is statutorily authorized to dispatch the police officers, firemen, and emergency medical personnel of municipal corporations and townships. If the board of county commissioners is so authorized, it then must be determined whether the municipal corporations and townships must reimburse the county for any expenses incurred in operating the dispatching system, or whether it is permissible for the county to use general fund moneys to operate the system.

B. A Board of County Commissioners May Establish a Countywide Public Safety Communications System

R.C. 307.63 authorizes a board of county commissioners to establish a countywide public safety communications system. That section reads, in pertinent part, as follows:

(A) As used in this section, "countywide public safety communications system" means a system of communications facilities, equipment, and services that helps to provide immediate field exchange of police, fire, and emergency medical services information between the county and participating states, political subdivisions, and other public entities, without regard to which jurisdiction holds title to real or personal property used in the system or employs the persons responsible to dispatch emergency personnel using the system.

(B) A board of county commissioners may establish a countywide public safety communications system. The system shall be operated in accordance with division (B)(1), (2), or (3) of this section.

(1) In any county with a population of less than seven hundred fifty thousand, the county sheriff shall operate the countywide public safety communications system unless, before commencing operation of the system, the sheriff gives written notice to the board of county commissioners that he chooses not to do so. After the board of county commissioners receives such written notice from the sheriff, the board shall operate the system. Once the sheriff gives notice that he chooses not to operate the system, neither he nor any person occupying the office of county sheriff in the future may choose to operate the system at a later date, except as provided in division (B)(3) of this section.

(2) In any county with a population of seven hundred fifty thousand or more, the board of county commissioners shall operate the system, unless the board and the county sheriff mutually agree that the sheriff will operate the system.
In any county, after the board of county commissioners commences operation of a public safety communications system, if the board chooses to stop operating the system, the county sheriff may operate the system.¹

The board of county commissioners may construct, acquire, or contract for communications facilities for the public safety communications system. In addition, the board may acquire or contract for computers and other equipment in connection with the system, provide equipment to the users of the system, maintain the facilities and equipment, employ personnel or contract for personal services, and exercise other powers as necessary to operate the system. The board may adopt policies or rules for the administration, operation, and maintenance of the system. If the county sheriff is the operator of the system, he may employ personnel in connection with the operation of the system.

The board of county commissioners may enter into agreements with ... political subdivisions of this state ... concerning the use of the countywide public safety communications system. (Emphasis and footnote added.)

A board of county commissioners thus may establish and operate a communications system to provide immediate field exchange of police, fire, and emergency medical services information between the county and participating political subdivisions.

Although R.C. 307.63 does not expressly state that a county may use the countywide public communications system to dispatch emergency personnel, it is reasonable to conclude from the language of R.C. 307.63 that the General Assembly intended to authorize a board of county commissioners to establish and operate a countywide dispatching network, and to make that network available to any political subdivision that enters into an agreement concerning the use of that network. See, e.g., R.C. 307.63(A) (a public communication system qualifies as a countywide public safety communication system regardless of which "jurisdiction ... employs the persons responsible to dispatch emergency personnel using the system"); R.C. 307.63(G) (nothing in R.C. 307.63 "requires a county sheriff in a county with a population of less than seven hundred fifty thousand to use the public safety communications system to dispatch his employees"). Further, since it is axiomatic that townships and municipal corporations are political subdivisions, see New Orleans v. Clark, 95 U.S. 644, 654 (1877); Tuber v. Perkins, 6 Ohio St. 2d 155, 157, 216 N.E.2d 877, 879 (1966); 1972 Op. Att'y Gen. No. 72-035, a board of county commissioners is authorized, pursuant to R.C. 307.63(D), to enter into an agreement with the municipal corporations and townships of the county concerning the use of the countywide public safety communications system. Accordingly, R.C. 307.63 authorizes a board

¹ R.C. 307.63(F) states when a county sheriff is not authorized to operate a countywide public safety communications system. This division provides as follows:

The authority granted to a county sheriff under [R.C. 307.63(B)] to operate a countywide public safety communications system does not apply in any county where, on and before the effective date of this section, the board of county commissioners is providing public safety communications facilities to, or coordinating the public safety communications needs of, municipal corporations, townships, or other entities or officials by means of officials or with employees not under the direct supervision of the county sheriff. However, if such a board of county commissioners and the county sheriff mutually agree that the sheriff will operate a countywide public safety communications system, he may operate it.
of county commissioners to enter into an agreement with the townships and municipal corporations located within the county whereby the townships and municipal corporations use the countywide public safety communications system to dispatch their police officers, firemen, and emergency medical personnel.

With regard to the authority of a county to charge a municipal corporation or township concerning the use of the countywide public safety communications system, it is a general rule that, if a county provides a service, the county may not charge the political subdivision receiving the service unless there is express statutory authorization for such charge or authority necessarily inferred from an express power. See, e.g., 1982 Op. Att'y Gen. No. 82-011 (syllabus, paragraph one) ("[i]f a service is performed for a public office by an office of county government, whether on a mandatory or discretionary basis, a board of county commissioners may not charge the office receiving such service unless there is express statutory authorization for such charge or authority implied [by] an express power"); 1931 Op. Att'y Gen. No. 3406, vol. II, p. 938 (where a statute provides that an expense be paid out of the county treasury no charge back to the state or any political subdivision in the county may be made); cf. 1988 Op. Att'y Gen. No. 88-042 at 2-203 ("[i]t is a general rule that a charge may not be made against a state agency except pursuant to clear statutory authority"). There is no provision within the Revised Code requiring a municipal corporation or township to pay a county for the use of a countywide public safety communications system. Further, the provisions governing the establishment and operation of a countywide public safety communications system may not be read as implying the authority for a county to charge a municipal corporation or township concerning the use of the system.

Rather, pursuant to R.C. 5705.19(KK), a board of county commissioners may determine that it is necessary to levy a tax in excess of the ten-mill limitation for a countywide public safety communications system under R.C. 307.63. In light of R.C. 5705.19(KK), it is thus clear that a county may establish and operate a countywide public safety communications system with moneys from the general fund or revenue derived from a tax levied pursuant to R.C. 5705.19(KK) that is deposited into a special fund. See R.C. 5705.05 ("[t]he purpose and intent of the general levy for current expenses is to provide one general operating fund derived from taxation from which any expenditures for current expenses of any kind may be made, and the taxing authority of a political subdivision may include in such levy the amounts required for carrying into effect any of the general or special powers granted by law to such subdivision... The power to include in the general levy for current expenses additional amounts for purposes for which a special tax is authorized shall not affect the right or obligation to levy such special tax"). Therefore, it is unnecessary for the municipal corporations and townships that use the countywide public safety communications system to pay the county for the use of the system.

Accordingly, pursuant to R.C. 307.63, a board of county commissioners may enter into an agreement with the townships and municipal corporations located within the county whereby the townships and municipal corporations use the countywide public safety communications system to dispatch their police officers, firemen, and emergency medical personnel. A board of county commissioners that establishes a countywide public safety communications system may not require municipal corporations and townships that use that communications system to pay the board for the costs it incurs in connection with the operation, maintenance, and management of that system.
C. A Board of County Commissioners May Enter into a Contract 
Whereby the Board Provides Dispatching Services to Townships and 
Municipal Corporations

A board of county commissioners also may dispatch the police officers, firemen, and 
emergency personnel of townships and municipal corporations pursuant to a contract entered into 
under R.C. 307.15. This section, which authorizes a board of county commissioners to exercise 
powers of and perform functions on behalf of a township or municipal corporation, provides in 
relevant part:

The board of county commissioners may enter into an agreement with the 
legislative authority of any municipal corporation, township ... and such 
legislative authorities may enter into agreements with the board, whereby such 
board undertakes, and is authorized by the contracting subdivision, to exercise 
any power, perform any function, or render any service, in behalf of the 
contracting subdivision or its legislative authority, which such subdivision or 
legislative authority may exercise, perform, or render....

Upon the execution of such agreement and within the limitations 
prescribed by it, the board may exercise the same powers as the contracting 
subdivision possesses with respect to the performance of any function or the 
rendering of any service, which, by such agreement, it undertakes to perform or 
render, and all powers necessary or incidental thereto, as amply as such powers 
are possessed and exercised by the contracting subdivisions directly....

See generally R.C. 307.19 (sections of the Revised Code that authorize contracts or agreements 
among particular classes of subdivisions do not control or limit the making of agreements under 
R.C. 307.15, "it being intended that such [section] shall be applied as fully as though such other 
sections did not exist"). Thus, pursuant to an agreement made under the authority of R.C. 
307.15, a board of county commissioners may undertake to dispatch police officers, firemen, 
and emergency medical personnel on behalf of a township or municipal corporation provided the 
municipal corporation or township has the authority to dispatch emergency personnel on its own 
may enter into an agreement with a municipal corporation or township located within that 
county, under R.C. 307.15, to grant narcotics agents the same police powers exercised by the 
peace officers of the contracting municipal corporation or township").

Municipal corporations and townships are statutorily authorized to provide police 
protection, fire protection, and emergency medical services to their citizens. R.C. 505.37-.42 
(authorizing a township to provide fire protection and emergency medical service); R.C. 505.48-. 
55 (authorizing a township to provide police protection); R.C. 509.01 (a township may appoint 
constables to preserve the township peace); R.C. 715.05 ("[a]ll municipal corporations may 
organize and maintain police and fire departments"); R.C. 737.11 ("[t]he police force of a 
municipal corporation shall preserve the peace, protect persons and property, and obey and 
enforce all ordinances of the legislative authority of the municipal corporation, all criminal laws 
of the state and the United States, all court orders issued and consent agreements approved 
pursuant to sections 2919.26 and 3113.31 of the Revised Code, and all anti-stalking protection 
orders issued pursuant to section 2903.213 of the Revised Code. The fire department shall 
protect the lives and property of the people in case of fire. Both the police and fire departments 
shall perform any other duties that are provided by ordinance"); R.C. 5705.19(I) (a township 
or municipal corporation may levy a special tax for the purpose of providing a fire department
or to purchase ambulance equipment, or to provide ambulance, paramedic, or other emergency medical services operated by a fire department); 1967 Op. Att’y Gen. No. 67-078 (syllabus, paragraph two) (R.C. 715.372 authorizes a city to provide ambulance service as a related adjunct of hospital service). Insofar as the power to dispatch emergency personnel is necessarily implied by the authority to provide police protection, fire protection, and emergency medical service, municipal corporations and townships are authorized to establish a dispatching network in order to provide police and fire protection, and emergency medical care. Therefore, R.C. 307.15 authorizes a board of county commissioners to enter into an agreement with a municipal corporation or township located within that county whereby the county dispatches the police officers, firemen, and emergency medical services personnel of the municipal corporation or township. See 1963 Op. Att’y Gen. No. 16, p. 88 (pursuant to an agreement under R.C. 307.15 and R.C. 307.16, a board of county commissioners may operate a base radio station to receive and transmit official fire activity messages from and to the fire departments of political subdivisions in the county); 1939 Op. Att’y Gen. No. 827, vol. II, p. 1061 (syllabus, paragraph one) (“[a] county may, by contract, furnish to a municipality information over the county broadcasting system for a sum to be agreed upon between the proper county and municipal authorities”).

I turn now to the issue whether a municipal corporation or township must reimburse the county for any expenses incurred by the county in dispatching the emergency personnel of the municipal corporation or township under a contract entered into pursuant to R.C. 307.15. The method of payment to be used in agreements entered into under R.C. 307.15 is governed by R.C. 307.16, which states in pertinent part:

Every agreement entered into under sections 307.14 to 307.19, inclusive, of the Revised Code, shall provide, either in specific terms or by prescribing a method for determining the amounts, for any payments to be made by the contracting subdivision into the county treasury, or by the county to the municipal corporation, in consideration of the performance of the agreement.

Research discloses contrary opinions with regard to the interpretation and application of R.C. 307.16. In Ranz v. Youngstown, 140 Ohio St. 477, 45 N.E.2d 767 (1942), the Ohio Supreme Court concluded that G.C. 2450-3 (now R.C. 307.16) "does not prescribe a mandatory form requiring payments to be made by the contracting subdivision into the county treasury. It does prescribe a mandatory form to be followed in case the agreement provides for such payments." Id. (syllabus, paragraph nine). In contrast, one of my predecessors, in a situation similar to the one presented in your letter, examined the language of R.C. 307.16 and determined that a board of county commissioners may not establish and operate a base radio station for fire communications between the various fire departments of the county under the authority of R.C. 307.15 unless the participating political subdivisions finance the establishment and operation of the base radio station. 1963 Op. Att’y Gen. No. 270, p. 344. In so concluding, 1963 Op. No. 270 stated at pages 346-47 as follows:

2 Pursuant to R.C. 715.37, a municipal corporation may erect, maintain, and regulate hospitals.
It might be thought that [R.C. 307.16] requires payments to be made into the county treasury by a contracting subdivision where, by agreement, the county is to exercise some power on behalf of such subdivision. As to this exact language in the General Code, however the Supreme Court of Ohio has said:

"Section 2450.3, General Code, does not prescribe a mandatory form requiring payments to be made by the contracting subdivision into the county treasury. It does prescribe a mandatory form to be followed in case the agreement provides for such payments."  (State ex rel Ranz v. Youngstown et al., 140 Ohio St., 477 (1942) Syllabus #9) (Emphasis added)[.]

I might conclude, therefore, that payment by the contracting subdivision is not a necessary part of all agreements made under authority of Sections 307.15 and 307.16, supra.

In the Ranz Case, supra, the county had made expenditures for poor relief within a municipality pursuant to agreement and the court ruled that reimbursement therefor could not be compelled. As is apparent from the court's opinion, however, the county had ample authority to expend its funds for poor relief even in the absence of the agreement. I am of the opinion, therefore, that this case does not stand for the proposition that agreements pursuant to Sections 307.15 and 307.16, supra, convey general authority to expend county funds, but that if the board of county commissioners does have independent authority to make the expenditure, funds sufficient to finance the undertaking in question would have to be provided by the contracting subdivisions in the agreement.

Thus, 1963 Op. No. 270 and Ranz v. Youngstown are in conflict on the issue whether a municipal corporation or township is required to reimburse a county for services rendered under a contract entered into pursuant to R.C. 307.15.


"Courts are by the law made such final arbiters and when the law is interpreted by a court the interpretation given to it by the court becomes the law within the jurisdiction of the court, and such interpretation as the court gives to the law should be followed and acted upon, at least within the territory over which such court has jurisdiction."

In light of *Ranz v. Youngstown*, it appears that neither a municipal corporation nor township is required to reimburse the county for any expenses it incurs in dispatching the emergency personnel of the municipal corporation or township under a contract entered into pursuant to R.C. 307.15. Rather, the allocation of costs incurred by the county in dispatching the emergency personnel of a township or municipal corporation is properly a matter that should be negotiated by the county and township or municipal corporation as a part of the agreement for dispatching services that they enter into pursuant to R.C. 307.15. See 1990 Op. Att’y Gen. No. 90-025.

Therefore, R.C. 307.15 authorizes a board of county commissioners to enter into an agreement with a municipal corporation or township located within that county whereby the county dispatches the police officers, firemen, and emergency medical services personnel of the municipal corporation or township. The allocation of costs incurred by the county in providing dispatching services to the municipal corporation or township is a matter that may be negotiated by the county and the municipal corporation or township as a part of the agreement for dispatching services that they enter into pursuant to R.C. 307.15.

II. Authority of a Township and Municipal Corporation to Enter into a Contract with a County for Dispatching Services

Your third and fourth questions concern the authority of a township and municipal corporation to enter into a contract with the board of county commissioners whereby the township or municipal corporation pays the county to dispatch the police officers, firemen, and emergency medical services personnel of the township or municipal corporation. Except as provided in R.C. 307.63 and R.C. 307.15, no provision of the Revised Code authorizes a township or municipal corporation to enter into such a contract with a board of county commissioners.

R.C. 311.29(B), however, authorizes a township and municipal corporation to enter into a contract with the county sheriff whereby the sheriff undertakes and is authorized by the township or municipal corporation to perform any police function, exercise any police power, or render any police service in behalf of the township or municipal corporation, which such township or municipal corporation may perform, exercise, or render. Any contract entered into under R.C. 311.29(B) must "provide for the reimbursement of the county for the costs incurred by the sheriff for such policing including, but not limited to, ... the cost of equipment and supplies used in such policing, to the extent that such equipment and supplies are not directly furnished by the [township or municipal corporation]." R.C. 311.29(D).

As stated above, a township and municipal corporation are authorized to dispatch their police officers. Thus, pursuant to R.C. 311.29, a township or municipal corporation may enter into a contract with the county sheriff whereby the sheriff dispatches the police officers of the township or municipal corporation, and the township or municipal corporation pays the county for the costs it incurs under the contract.

In addition, a township may enter into a contract with the county sheriff upon such terms as are agreed to by them for use of the services or equipment of the county sheriff. R.C. 505.43; see also R.C. 505.50 (a board of township trustees may enter into a contract with "the county sheriff upon any terms that are mutually agreed upon for the provision of police protection services or additional police protection services either on a regular basis or for
additional protection in times of emergency"). Because a county sheriff is authorized to preserve the public peace in his county, R.C. 311.07(A), a sheriff is authorized to maintain and operate a dispatching network. See United States v. Laub Baking Co., 283 F. Supp. 217, 220 (N.D. Ohio 1968) (a county sheriff "possesses the authority to engage in activities which are reasonably necessary for the due and efficient exercise of the powers expressly granted to him"). Thus, pursuant to R.C. 505.43, the county sheriff and township may enter into a contract upon such terms as may be agreed to by them whereby the sheriff permits the township police to use his dispatching network. See Op. No. 90-025 (syllabus) ("pursuant to R.C. 505.43, a township and a village may enter into a contract upon such terms as may be agreed to by them whereby the village provides police protection to the township. The township may permit village police personnel the use of the township's electronic dispatching network in conjunction with such police protection").

The allocation of costs incurred by the county sheriff in providing the use of his dispatching network to the township is properly a matter that should be negotiated by the township and county sheriff as a part of the contract that they enter into pursuant to R.C. 505.43. See Op. No. 90-025 at 2-94 ("the allocation of costs incurred by the township in permitting village police personnel the use of the township's dispatching network is properly a matter that should be negotiated by the village and the township as a part of the contract for police protection that they enter into pursuant to R.C. 505.43"). Accordingly, pursuant to R.C. 505.43, a township may enter into a contract with the county sheriff whereby the sheriff dispatches the police officers of the township, and may negotiate as part of the contract the allocation of costs incurred by the sheriff under the contract.

III. Conclusion

Based on the foregoing, it is my opinion and you are hereby advised as follows:

1. Pursuant to R.C. 307.63, a board of county commissioners may enter into an agreement with the townships and municipal corporations located within the county whereby the townships and municipal corporations use

3 R.C. 311.29 and R.C. 505.43 are independent sources of authority for a county sheriff and a board of township trustees to enter into a contract whereby the sheriff agrees to provide dispatching services for the township’s safety forces. The provisions of those two sections differ in several respects, and thus afford a county sheriff and a board of township trustees important alternative choices with respect to the procedures and requirements that will apply to and govern such a contract. It also is apparent that a contract negotiated and executed by a county sheriff and a board of township trustees under R.C. 505.43 is not subject to the specific terms and requirements set forth in R.C. 311.29, absent a specific directive to that effect from the General Assembly. In the case of R.C. 505.43, for example, the General Assembly has included express references to R.C. Chapters 2744 and 4123, and has further stated that the provisions of those two chapters apply to a contractual relationship formed pursuant to R.C. 505.43. On the other hand, the General Assembly has included in R.C. 505.43 no similar reference or statement concerning R.C. 311.29. From this one may reasonably conclude that the provisions of R.C. 311.29 do not apply to contracts negotiated by a county sheriff and a board of township trustees under R.C. 505.43.
the countywide public safety communications system to dispatch their police officers, firemen, and emergency medical personnel. A board of county commissioners at establishes a countywide public safety communications system pursuant to R.C. 307.63 may not require municipal corporations and townships that use the system to pay the board for the costs it incurs in connection with the operation, maintenance, and management of that system.

2. R.C. 307.15 authorizes a board of county commissioners to enter into an agreement with a municipal corporation or township located within that county whereby the county dispatches the police officers, firemen, and emergency medical personnel of the municipal corporation or township. The allocation of costs incurred by the county in providing dispatching services to the municipal corporation or township is a matter that may be negotiated by the county and the municipal corporation or township as a part of the agreement for dispatching services that they enter into pursuant to R.C. 307.15.

3. Pursuant to R.C. 311.29, a township or municipal corporation may enter into a contract with the county sheriff whereby the sheriff dispatches the police officers of the township or municipal corporation, and the township or municipal corporation pays the county for the costs it incurs under the contract.

4. Pursuant to R.C. 505.43, a township may enter into a contract with the county sheriff whereby the sheriff dispatches the police officers of the township, and may negotiate as part of the contract the allocation of costs incurred by the sheriff under the contract.