

[ajc.com](https://www.ajc.com)

Henry County spends \$88,000 on consultants for cyber security

4-5 minutes

Henry County Commissioners on Tuesday approved allocating more than \$88,000 for outside consultant to make sure its computer network is safe, as the county slowly brings its system back in operation after a cyberattack last month.

An expert in cyber security told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution that the investment could be just the beginning of expenses that could reach millions of dollars.

[Email has been restored to about 65 percent of county workers](#), and connections to the internet across all departments are close to being restored, officials said.

For the first time since last month's attack, the county was able to livestream its commission meeting online via its Facebook page.

The independent tech company will assess security measures the county has taken, determine if there are any gaps in its safeguards and assist in developing and implementing plans to defend against future attacks, according to a resolution allocating the funds.

"We will recover," Brad Johnson, the county's deputy manager, told commissioners. "We're doing well. We'll be back soon."

Henry took down its computer network in mid-July after its

technology teams discovered suspicious activity in the county's networks. It was later revealed that the county had been attacked by malware, but it has not yet specified what type. Leaders said they have not been asked for a ransom, which is typical in a ransomware attack.

Cities across Georgia and the nation have been [increasingly attacked by cyber criminals](#), with some municipalities asked to pay hefty ransoms. [Atlanta was attacked in March 2018](#), with the perpetrators demanding the equivalent of \$51,000 in bitcoin. The city refused to pay, but reportedly [spent as much as \\$17 million restoring its system](#), The Atlanta Journal-Constitution has previously reported.

The Georgia Administrative Office of the Courts, the Lawrenceville Police Department and mostly recently, the The Georgia Department of Public Safety, have all been attacked in the last couple of months.

One of the changes Henry is implementing will move from server-based email to a cloud-based configuration, Johnson said.

It also has taken off the network all computers that don't need to be connected, such as the laptop used at commission meetings to display documents and presentations to the public. In some cases, the county is using portable flashdrives to avoid making information vulnerable to attack.

The county also is moving ahead with a switch to software from Tyler Technologies, a company that specializes in municipal operating systems which has already sold some software to the county. Johnson said the Tyler Technologies software was the least affected during the attack.

Andy Green, a lecturer of information security and assurance in the Coles College of Business at Kennesaw State University, said part of the reason Atlanta spent millions is because it re-engineered its computer infrastructure from the ground up.

By going to a cloud-based email system, Henry County may be following that lead, he said.

“If they follow Atlanta’s approach and re-architect basically their entire IT infrastructure from the ground floor up, the \$88,000 will be just a drop in the bucket,” Green said.

Support real journalism. Support local journalism. Subscribe to The Atlanta Journal-Constitution today. [See offers.](#)

Your subscription to the Atlanta Journal-Constitution funds in-depth reporting and investigations that keep you informed. Thank you for supporting real journalism.