

April 14, 2011

PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE REPORT

A Public Safety Committee meeting was held on Thursday, April 14,, 2011 at 5:30 p.m. at the Benton County Sheriff's Department and County Jail, 1300 Southwest 14th Street, Bentonville, Arkansas

Committee Members Present: Winscott, King, Curry, Carr, Sandlin

Others Present: Sheriff Keith Ferguson, Comptroller Richard McComas, Administrator of General Service Elizabeth Bowen, Administrator of Public Safety Marshal Watson, 9-1-1 Administration Director Mary Kay Sullivan

Media: None

JP Winscott called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

Public Comments

None

Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) Consolidation Study

Administrator of Public Safety Marshal Watson stated that in the early days of 9-1-1 an election was held in Benton County to provide for the taxation to support the 9-1-1 system. He stated that a 9-1-1 board was made up to oversee the funding of the 9-1-1 system, the 9-1-1 Director's office, and other 9-1-1 projects. He stated that in February 2011, the 9-1-1 Board was approached to discuss a Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) or dispatch consolidation study. He stated that currently there are six dispatch centers working in Benton County – four primary answering points,(Central Communications, Bentonville, Siloam Springs, and Rogers), and two secondary answering points (Lowell and Bella Vista). He stated that CenCom essentially answers all 9-1-1 calls that originate outside of the four municipalities, and dispatches for all county and municipal organizations outside of the four primary dispatch centers. He added that CenCom answers the 9-1-1 calls and then does a direct transfer to the two secondary dispatch centers for service.

He stated that the 9-1-1 board has approved up to \$30,000 to conduct a consolidation study to look at the potential to combine all or a portion of the primary answering points into a single dispatch center. He stated that the study would look at the operational efficiencies which could be achieved by consolidating, co-locating the centers, the financial considerations, and potential savings that would be made possible through the use of a shared system and resources.

JP Curry questioned what happens if a storm comes through and wipes out a consolidated system.

Marshal Watson stated that a purpose-driven facility would be built to a higher standard, with sufficient redundancies that are not in place at this time. He added that this study could identify one of the existing facilities as a cold site. He added that the study could recommend having two centers, and that those two smaller centers could co-exist and back each other up in case of a disaster.

JP Hawkins asked if the \$30,000 for the study is going to determine all the savings possible and whether it would be worthwhile. Marshal Watson stated that the study will review each agency's budget, staffing, and policies, and then provide the potential savings and potential organizational structures that could exist in this consolidation. He added that it would be a minimum of five to ten

years before this could be put into effect. He stated that once the report is complete, then funding options would have to be looked at, and everyone would have to pull together to support this.

JP Sandlin stated that the original intent was to have one CenCom and that the cities have chosen to separate themselves and have their own emergency systems.

Marshal Watson stated that typically across the United States, as municipalities have grown they have branched out to have their own dispatch centers. He added that as these municipalities' geographic boundaries have come up against each other, they have come back and re-consolidated. He added that the study may come back and indicate that this consolidation is simply not an option. He stated that the current environment may not support it, but it is something to look at and study, and is a good long-term goal for the county. He stated that what is in place now are multiple dispatch centers working together to dispatch one call, and if they were to consolidate, there could be some gain in operational efficiencies.

JP Winscott asked if there is a possibility of short-term gains that could be achieved early on that could be a cost savings. Marshal Watson stated that would depend on what exactly what the study says when it comes back, and that there may be federal funding available.

JP Winscott stated if the study is approved by the Quorum Court, he would like to see the study broken down into phases. Marshal Watson stated that the \$30,000 would strictly cover Phase I of the study which would be the investigative portion, where they look at the budgets, staffing levels, and equipment, and then come back with a snapshot of the efficiencies, or lack thereof, that consolidating or co-locating might provide. He added that a Phase II study would involve implementing the process to integrate technology and develop a specific facility layout, and that Phase III would be the production of such a facility.

JP Curry asked if something occurred that brought this to the forefront. Marshal Watson stated that this has been discussed for several years in a variety of circles in the county, and that a study was done about 10 years ago, but it is time to bring it back to the forefront, and take the opportunity to bring in a technical expert.

JP Sandlin asked if the 9-1-1 Board had asked for this study to be done, and what made this subject come up.

Marshal Watson stated that he had presented the request for the consolidated study to the 9-1-1 Board and that the Board had agreed that it was the right thing to do for the county.

JP Sandlin asked who is on the 9-1-1 Board. Marshal Watson stated that the board consists of three citizens at large (Jerry Sheridan, Jimmie Thompson, and Dale Chastain) and a Fire Chief position (Tom Jenkins, Fire Chief of Rogers) and a Law Enforcement position (Lance Johnson, Police Chief of Centerton).

Discussion was held on the current locations of the existing 9-1-1 systems and how the consolidation study would affect the surrounding cities and county.

Sheriff Ferguson stated that approximately 15,000 calls are taken in one year and that someday there is going to be a breakdown in communication while we are dealing with life-threatening situations.

JP Carr made motion to forward the 9-1-1 Department request for \$30,000 for a consolidation study for consideration to the May 3, 2011 Finance agenda, seconded by JP Curry.

Motion passed by unanimous show of hands.

Emergency Medical Services

Marshal Watson presented the committee an Emergency Medical Services Operational Study for Unincorporated Benton County, Arkansas which was requested by the Intergovernmental Cooperation Council. Marshal Watson stated that currently, EMS is provided for the unincorporated areas by the municipalities, and that Benton County does not provide a subsidy or other cost reimbursement to these municipalities for their service. He added that the rapid growth in Benton County, along with the municipalities, has created a strain on the emergency medical services system. He stated that 9-1-1 Administration Board Members have approved \$30,000 for a study to determine the feasibility of consolidating EMS services.

Marshal Watson presented a proposal prepared by The Ludwig Group, LLC of Hillsboro, Missouri to do an EMS assessment of Benton County for \$29,900. He stated that Gary Ludwig, Managing Director, of the Ludwig Group is a nationally recognized Fire and EMS expert, and currently is the Deputy Fire Chief for the Memphis Fire Department. He stated that the Ludwig Group is interested in assisting Benton County by conducting an operational evaluation of the current EMS system and a strategic plan if it is determined that another delivery model could serve the needs of the county better.

Lengthy discussion was held on EMS and EMSD and the cost of the services provided to the county.

JP Winscott stated that it would be a good idea to take this information, study it, and then hold another Public Safety meeting for further discussion.

JP Carr made motion to table the request for \$30,000 for a study of the EMS service until the next Public Safety meeting in order to be able to read and gain more knowledge and insight into the situation, seconded by JP Sandlin.

JP Winscott stated that this is important and that a Public Safety Committee meeting will be held in the middle of May.

Motion passed by unanimous show of hands.

BCALERT Mass Notification System

Marshal Watson stated that BC ALERT was paid the first year by a Homeland Security Grant and that the grant terminates in June of this year. He stated that BC ALERT was not budgeted for in the 2011 Budget, and that \$9,000 is needed to get through the remainder of this year. He added that there are over 99,000 devices set up to receive messages throughout the county, so the system is working as it was intended.

JP Sandlin made motion to forward a request for \$9,000 to fund the BC ALERT system through the end of 2011 to the May 3, 2011 Finance Committee agenda, seconded by JP Carr.

Motion passed by unanimous show of hands.

Other Business

JP Winscott stated that the budgetary figure in the 2011 Budget to purchase two fire trucks is short by \$35,000.

Marshal Watson stated that the county budgeted \$370,000 to purchase two fire trucks, with the exact specifications that had been used before, and the bid came back at \$202,000 each, which was more than a 5% increase, and approximately \$35,000 more than the amount budgeted.

JP Carr made motion to forward the \$35,000 request for the purchase of two fire trucks to the May 3, 2011 Finance Committee agenda, seconded by JP Curry.

Motion passed by unanimous show of hands.

Sheriff Ferguson invited the committee to stay after adjournment of the meeting for a brief question and answer session followed by a tour of the County Jail facility.

After motion and second the meeting adjourned at 6:48 p.m.