

Agenda

Sedgwick County

Emergency Communications Advisory Board

August 20, 2015

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chief Ron Blackwell, Scott Hadley, David Miller, Chief Robert Lee, Chief Brad Smith, Chief Jeff Whitfield

ALSO PRESENT:

John Speer, Marv Duncan, Elora Forshee, Laura Meyers, Kevin Sexton, Linda Staats, Kristin Gill, Roge3r Taylor, Dan Wegnor, Larry Tangney

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chief Blackwell called the meeting to order at 2:00pm.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Minutes were approved and seconded

3. INTERIM DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Elora Forshee briefed the board on the following:

- a. Statewide call handling solution – Elora notified the board that the current 911 phone system is quickly coming end to life and will need to be replaced in the next couple of years. The state of Kansas is moving toward a statewide call handling solution and the most economical and efficient solution would be to buy into the statewide system. The statewide system is a hosted, off site data center that will feed into our communications center and allow us to connect to other Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs), or 911 centers. This connection allows us to share costs and also provides redundancy in that if our system went down we could roll our emergency calls to other PSAPs throughout the state. This also relieves the maintenance burden off of the individual PSAP. Along with the phone system there is a GIS statewide map available. The predicament we will find ourselves in is finding funds to pay for a migration to the new system. The current phone system operates off of legacy, analog lines and the new system will operate off of a combination of the analog lines and will start transitioning over to a digital, geospatial solution but both the analog and digital system have to be maintained during the transition, and by maintaining you have to also pay for both systems simultaneously for a period of time. The cost of the state call handling solution is \$18,000 per seat, per year (we have 24 seats so that is a cost of \$432,000 per year). The initial startup cost will be \$96,000 to establish our automatic call distributing function with an

additional \$29,000 per year for that function, for a total of \$460,800/year of known costs. There are some costs that are currently unknown associated with moving into the geospatial data retrieval that the state is still trying to ascertain and may, or may not, be covered by the \$18,000 per year. Then we may have additional costs unique to our 911 center, such as for the large number of administrative lines that we maintain, that we are exploring. We currently spend \$640,000 on phone service so the duality of costs would mean that for approximately one year we would be paying 1.1 million dollars for our 911 phone system which exceeds our current budget. We are still exploring solutions – both as a state and within our center – but we want to go ahead and get the word out to the Advisory Board to start thinking ahead at an upcoming financial strain. We are working closely with the 911 Coordinating Council to find a solution and to find more details on what we need to do to move forward so more information is definitely going to be coming.

- b. Operational Planning for 2016 – Our current situation in dispatch is that our workload is ever increasing and we see no relief in sight, personnel wise, to address the burgeoning strain on the system. Since 2010 our emergency call volume has increased approximately 30% - your call volume is increasing and subsequently so is ours. In 2011 we began staffing the suburban law channel, an addition that required 5 FTEs to staff and we were only granted budgetary authority to hire an additional 2 FTEs. That is the only addition in staffing we have seen in the past 5+ years.

We are noticing an ever growing and very concerning trend of emergency calls sitting in queue, waiting on an available call taker, daily at multiple times throughout the day. 911 tried to address the expanding workload through internal process changes. We quit taking calls from alarm companies wanting to verify jurisdictions when setting up new accounts, directing them instead to the GIS website. We stopped paying overtime to staff KDOT outside of our contract perimeters. We tried to address the most serious of time wasters, the cell phone hang ups, through a public service campaign which has proven to be unfruitful. We quit calling back cell phone hang ups and we are still not seeing relief in the call queue numbers. We also established minimum staffing levels for call takers and our overtime expenditures have gone up steadily. We increased our overtime expenditures \$30,000 in 2014 and we are on track this year to see an increase of an additional \$35,000. This is not a trend we will be able to maintain monetarily nor will our staff be able to personally maintain this workload.

Another great concern is that through this increased workload we have seen a decline in the service that you, our first responders in the field, are receiving from your dispatchers. This decline in service is not because they don't want to do a good job but they simply are unable to do everything they are being tasked with doing. They are so busy on the telephone that they are oftentimes not able to actively engage and participate in the dispatching process and are rather just going through the motions to get the job done.

For the 2016 budget we requested an additional 3 FTEs and were denied. It has been made clear that the priority of the current Commission is for departments to explore ways to work more efficiently in the current budget so that is what we have set forth to do. During 2016 we

would like to implement an internal non-emergency call prioritization process. Our current phone system has the ability to move calls back and forth between an emergency and non-emergency queue, a tool we utilize each 4th of July and New Year's Eve. What we will do is staff non-emergency call takers during peak times of the day. These hours won't initially be publicized nor will there be a separate number for the public to call. The 911 call taker will quickly prioritize the call and if deemed a non-emergency the call will be shunted to the non-emergency queue therefore allowing the 911 call taker to be available for emergency calls. This will quickly move calls out of the 911/emergency call queue and will also lessen the burden for the dispatchers who are answering calls out of the emergency queue. The non-emergency calls may queue within their own system but because they are non-emergent the impact is not as acute. Our initial proposal, and what we are seeking input on from our partner agencies, is to shunt all burn permits, scheduled EMS transfers, general alarms (excluding holdup, silent entry, and fire alarms) and priority 3 law enforcement calls to the non-emergency call takers. This would eliminate 20% of the call volume off of your dispatchers and out of that emergency queue. The system would be closely monitored and if proven successful after an appropriate period of time we would look to publish a non-emergency number to the public to completely remove the dispatcher out of that non-emergency call taking process, similar to the 311 systems utilized in other metropolitan areas.

Staffing this line would take a realignment of our current staffing practices. We have found through data pulled that there is a gross disparity in workload with the suburban law and investigations channel. We are currently working with the Sheriff's Office and our suburban law enforcement partners to address the workload disparity between the Sheriff channel and the Law channel and various options are going to be discussed at the September Police Chief's Meeting. We would also like to cease staffing the investigations channel – moving all of the Sheriff units to the Sheriff Patrol channel and directing WPD users to use the appropriate WPD channel depending on which bureau they are working in. The other predominant users on the investigations channel are Juvenile Field Services and Adult Probation and we will be sitting down with their administration to discuss other options for their needs. We have had times in the past where we have stopped monitoring the investigations channel due to staffing needs and have found it to be a very smooth transition.

Everything is up for discussion at this point with hopes of moving forward at the beginning of January 2016 with a new plan that both satisfies the business needs of 911 and the needs of all of the agencies we serve. We will discuss this further at our next advisory board meeting.

4. No off agenda items. Meeting was adjourned.