

**WHAT-COMM COMMUNICATIONS CENTER  
ADMINISTRATIVE BOARD  
MINUTES  
January 27, 2022  
Meeting held Via ZOOM**

Present were:

**Administrative Board Members:** Bill Elfo, Sheriff, WCSO; Seth Fleetwood, Bellingham Mayor; Tyler Byrd, Whatcom County Council Chair of the Finance Committee; Mel Blankers, Chief of Everson Fire Department; Scott Korthuis, Lynden Mayor; Satpal Sidhu, Whatcom County Executive; Jim Peeples, Fire Commissioners Association Representative; Chief Florence Simon, Bellingham Police Department; Bellingham Fire Chief, Bill Hewett and, Dan Hammill, City of Bellingham Council Chair of the Public Safety Committee.

Absent: None absent.

Other Panelists in attendance:

Bellingham Fire Department, Prospect Division Chief, Dan McDermott; Bellingham Deputy Chief, David Crass, Director of WHAT-COMM; Alysnn Everbeck, Deputy Director of WHAT-COMM and Forrest Longman, Bellingham Deputy Director of Finance.

**Opening comments:**

Sheriff Bill Elfo called the meeting to order at 1:00pm.

Sheriff Elfo asked the public if they had comments. There were no public comments made.

**Approval of the Minutes**

Approval of meeting minutes from the September 30, 2021, regular meeting.

Discussion: No discussion.

Sheriff Elfo called for a motion to approve the minutes.

Scott Korthuis motioned that the minutes be approved, and Tyler Byrd seconded the motion.

Sheriff Elfo called for a vote to approve the minutes. None opposed. Minutes approved.

**WHAT-COMM/PROSPECT Long-Range planning and year in review**

Presented by Alysnn Everbeck and Dan McDermott

**WHAT-COMM year in review**

Deputy Director, Alysnn Everbeck shared some statistics on call volume for 2021 and that there was a 7% increase in calls, over 2020. Extreme weather events such as heat, flooding and snow and ice, as well as societal upheaval and a pandemic had a direct impact on the increase in calls. The WHAT-COMM staff continued to admirably serve the community despite these challenges.

Building and Security and Equipment updates: The roof was replaced, and the building was painted. The alarm panel and security system were updated. Our IT staff and the radio shop worked many hours together with the vendor to install our new radio and logging recorder systems.

Other accomplishments: Staff was trained on receiving text to 911 and we rolled out text to 911 services in June of 2021. Our Public Education Coordinator organized and developed a public education committee to help better meet the needs of our community. The CAD committee is working hard to make sure that our next major CAD update is successful. The Tactical Dispatch team selected new leadership and updated call out procedures to increase efficiency and

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consistency. WHAT-COMM and PROSPECT worked collaboratively to successfully update our joint operations manual. All WHAT-COMM Dispatchers received a minimum of 24 hours of continuing education.

Staffing: Greg Erickson retired and Alysnn Everbeck was promoted to fill his position. Justin Rasmussen was selected to fill the position of Training Supervisor/Coordinator. 2 dispatchers were promoted to fill vacant supervisor positions. Coni Turner retired and Mark Wright trained with Coni and was successfully promoted to fill her position as our GIS analyst. 4 dispatchers began job shares, and 1 dispatcher was hired as a recruit by the Bellingham Police Department. With all the changes in staffing this meant that WHAT-COMM covered the 7% increase in call volume, with 4 less dispatchers for most of 2021. 3 of the 4 vacant positions were filled late in 2021 and 1 position was filled early in 2022. We look forward to filling the 3 new positions that were approved last September.

Sheriff Elfo commended Alysnn and the staff on their admirable performance especially during the flooding. Chief Simon commended Alysnn on the excellent job she has done since assuming the role of Deputy Director.

**PROSPECT year in review**

Assistant Fire Chief, Dan McDermott shared that they handled 56,664 calls that resulted in 37,075 CAD incidents, that resulted in 26,341 emergency medical service calls and 6,581 fire calls. They processed a 23% call volume increase from May to the end of the year, when the normal increase is 2-3% per year. This was done with no additional increase in staffing, and they did a tremendous job. Equipment Updates: The new logging recorder is paid for, installed and fully operational, the new radio system is fully paid for, installed, and will be fully implemented soon. The console furniture is fully paid for and is being shipped. The budget for the needed electrical upgrades and Uninterruptible Power Supply was set and approved in 2020. We are seeing an industry wide increase in costs since then and are waiting on updated quotes. We are hoping that they are still in alignment with what was estimated and approved in 2020.

Other achievements: We maintained the NFP1221 Standard of a 33 second average dispatch time for critical incidents. This is a critical service to ensure 911 callers are receiving help as quickly as possible. We also like to improve the out of hospital cardiac arrest survival rate. We learned in 2021 that we are 20% higher than compared counties at 56.33%, meaning citizens of Whatcom County that collapse from cardiac arrest have a better than 50% chance of surviving.

Sheriff Elfo asked how the cardiac arrest survival rate is measured.

Dan stated that there is an independent entity that does this statewide. They collect and analyze the data and present it in an unbiased way.

Executive Sidhu asked that if we had 6,581 fire calls in 2021 does this mean we have roughly 20 fires each day?

Dan stated that this is a combination of anywhere from a smell of smoke in the air, to an actual structure fire. I can provide a breakdown of specially how many of those calls were fires after the meeting if you would like that information.

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Dan Hammill asked to what extent they can measure the effects of prevention programs such as the community paramedic, Grace, and Lead programs, but more specifically the paramedic program. Are you able to track a reduction in 911 calls due to that program?

Dan stated that he does not have those statistics in front of him, but they have been studying that information. I might be able to answer some of that when I share our 5- and 10-year plan information.

**WHAT-COMM Long-Range Planning**

Alysn talked about crucial systems and what it will take to maintain those over the next several years. She asked that we implement an equipment replacement and repair fund and shared details of why that is necessary. Alysn went over a list of our major critical equipment, their life span and when we need to replace those systems and current estimated costs. She also reiterated that we are out of space here. We need more room to bring on the staff and equipment that will be required to meet future needs of our growing county-wide population. The current facility is aging and costing more each year in repair. She estimates at least \$15 million in today's dollars to build a facility to house just WHAT-COMM. 3 new dispatch positions were added for 2022 to meet the needs of our growing community and the increase in agencies that we now dispatch for. She suggested that we need to add at least 3 more positions to be able to pull the dispatch supervisors off the floor part-time to fill their necessary administrative duties and to spend time supervising rather than working as call taker/dispatchers, while attempting to supervise.

The cost of the equipment renewals and added staffing is anticipated to be a minimum of \$300,000 each year, over the next 10 years and if we build a facility, that cost would be roughly 2 million per year. Alysn provided 3 options for consideration. The pay as you go annual cost option, which would be collected as agency dispatch fees. We could ask the voters to implement a 2/10 of one percent increase in sales tax which would generate approximately 10 million annually. Or we could explore 5 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value property tax levy which would cover the increase in costs over time but would not cover our entire budget.

Sheriff Elfo Thank Alysn for forecasting the needs and presenting the information so clearly. He agrees that we need separate funds for equipment since there is a tendency to use reserves to buy down the rates and then when it comes time to replace equipment, we do not have the necessary funding. He feels that a discussion of the building, equipment and staffing needs need to be handled separately from each other.

Tyler Byrd asked if we should be expecting the same needs for Prospect as what you outlined for WHAT-COMM?

Alysn stated that there are two ways to answer that question. First, WHAT-COMM'S building is significantly older than Prospects. Second, some of our systems share their server hardware such as CAD and the Call Processing Equipment as well as the logging recorder. The annual costs that I shared would include the necessary servers for those shared systems as well as the cost to replace or refresh those systems.

Dan McDermott stated that PROSPECT has some similar needs such as a UPS and console furniture. Those needs are just happening at different times. We share a radio system which was replaced this past year and each center is paying their respective share of the cost of that system. Alysn's presentation covers the timing of not having to replace all our critical systems at once

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Tyler Byrd asked if Prospect has the same funding gap for items that are needed separately at Prospect?

Dan McDermott stated that the budget approved for 2021/22 included the cost of the current equipment replacements (UPS, radio system, console furniture and logging recorder). About \$.8 million. Those items were funded through the collection of dispatch fees charged to Medic One and the fire agencies. This is currently the only funding method we use for covering budgetary costs.

Tyler Byrd asked for clarification regarding what the EMS levy funds contribute to.

Bill Hewett stated that the EMS levy pays for the EMS dispatch fees only. Whatcom County pays for all the county fire district dispatch fees (except Lynden and Bellingham) from their general fund. Lynden and Bellingham each pay for their own city fire dispatch fees.

Scott Korthuis asked questions about future building plans. Where will it be built, who will own it, how will it be funded. All these things need to be figured out in planning accurately for the future.

Seth Fleetwood commented that there are some high-level discussions occurring about building a facility in Bellingham and there is discussion occurring about whether that would be a co-owned/cost shared building between Bellingham and the County, but that discussion is still ongoing.

Forrest Longman commented that there was a preliminary cost analysis done and the pricing that came back was significantly more than the funding source that had been identified. There is currently no set date for "shovels in the ground" on a building project. As far as the cost to WHAT-COMM, there would be a portion of the cost that would likely be collected from user agencies in the form of dispatch fees. If WHAT-COMM was located in a building with other services, or if they have a stand-alone building, the costs would likely be close to the same amount, either way.

Satpal Sidhu commented that he really wants to see a co-location of WHAT-COMM and PROSPECT in a single building and that we need to replace WHAT-COMM's deteriorating building. He would not want to see those additional costs funded through a new tax levy but would prefer to use EMS funds or borrow money through a bond process.

Bill Hewett commented that they are currently completing a minor remodeling at PROSPECT. He believes this will allow them to expand in their existing footprint for the next 20 years, and that they are currently the back-up center for WHAT-COMM.

Sheriff Elfo suggested that we need to break down the funding discussion into 3 separate areas. Equipment repair and replacement, staffing needs, and a building. He suggested that we create a committee to review just the equipment repair and replacement needs and come back with a funding recommendation at the September Administrative Board meeting.

Tyler Byrd made a motion that we create a committee to come back with a recommendation as outlined by Sheriff Elfo and it was seconded by Dan Hammill.

Discussion: Mayor Fleetwood suggested that there might be a benefit to having City and County mutual facilities staff meet to discuss building needs, in advance of a committee meeting together. Tyler Byrd asked why the committee couldn't combine the equipment and the building funding needs and come back with a funding recommendation for both. Satpal also recommend that the motion would include both the equipment and the building needs. Tyler Byrd accepted Satpal's recommendation as an amendment to his previous motion and Dan Hammill agreed to second the motion as amended.

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Discussion occurred about who should comprise the committee. Tyler Byrd and Scott Korthuis both volunteered to be on the committee. Seth Fleetwood indicated that the city needs to discuss outside of this meeting who will be on the committee, but that a Bellingham City employee will be selected.

Sheriff Elfo re-summarized the motion that was made by Tyler Byrd: Establish a committee to discuss equipment repair and replacement needs as well as the need for a facility. The committee will be comprised of 3 people. Scott Korthuis, Tyler Byrd and an elected Bellingham official. Sheriff Elfo called for a vote on the motion: None opposed. Motion carries.

Sheriff Elfo commented that he wants to make sure we address additional staffing needs. Executive Sidhu recommends that we review staffing needs once the current 3 new WHAT-COMM positions are closer to being fully trained. He suggested that Alys identify the next staffing increase need and perhaps include that and the cost in the September budget discussion meeting.

**Supplemental Services Discussion**

Presented by Alys Everbeck

An amendment has been proposed to the Interlocal Agreement, to allow for the addition of supplemental technologies and services. Alys explained that this is a way to add technology and services that only 1, or some of the agencies might find to be helpful, but other agencies may not be ready for or cannot afford to implement. The amendment would allow the interested parties to move forward with the proposed service and pay for it. The non-interested agencies would not contribute financially to the new technology or services.

Tyler Byrd motioned that we accept the amendment as presented, and it was seconded by John Korthuis.

Sheriff Elfo called for a vote on the motion: Non opposed. Motion carries.

Tyler Byrd asked if Mayor Fleetwood would email the group when they have selected who the Bellingham representative will be for the committee, and please include contact information for Forrest. Mayor Fleetwood agreed to do so.

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 2:13pm.

Next scheduled meeting is Thursday May 26, 2022, at 1 pm.