

WHAT-COMM STAFFING NEEDS

Since 1999, staffing at What-Comm has not kept pace with growth. One reason for this has been our organizational structure over the years. Until 2014 What-Comm operated under the leadership of a Bellingham Police Lieutenant who served as Deputy Director. This position rotated every 2-3 years. This lack of continuity in leadership made it difficult to effectively monitor and address long term staffing needs. It is difficult to gain a perspective of staffing needs over time when your term is only 2-3 years. In 2014 a civilian Deputy Director was appointed. In that role I have been able to gain a broader view of staffing needs over a longer period of time. It is clear to me that our staffing has not kept pace with population growth and the number officers and deputies on the street.

Number of What-Comm Dispatchers

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>Number of Dispatchers</u>	<u>% +/-</u>
2000	23	
2010	26	+13.0%
2020	29	+11.5%
Total % increase from 2000-2020		+26.1%

Total Population Served

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>% +/-</u>
2000	167,742	
2010	201,520	+20.1%
2020	225,300	+11.8%
Total % increase from 2000-2020		+34.3%

Number of Officers/Deputies Served

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>Number of Officers</u>	<u>% +/-</u>
2000	207	
2010	250	+20.8%
2020	304	+21.6%
Total % increase from 2000-2020		+46.9%

Technology has been another area of significant growth. While new technology provides our dispatchers with important tools to assist the public and our officers, it also increases our dispatchers' workload. Twenty years ago, we were just migrating from pen and paper to a very basic CAD system. We had two simple records management systems, the State system (WACIC, NCIC, and DOL), and a very basic 911 phone system. Today we have a CAD system that provides a great deal more information including officer safety information, an interactive map, and information about locations. Our records management systems are much more complex and provide a great deal more information. The State provides much more information. Our phone system is more than a phone as it contains numerous resources and now has the ability for callers to text 911. Our dispatchers now monitor security cameras throughout the city, and we

utilize internet resources. All these technological advances provide us with valuable tools that help ensure public and officer safety, but they keep our dispatchers very busy.

We are also seeing an increase in the complexity of the calls we receive as our population has grown and changed throughout the years. Our most critical incidents used to be rare, but many are now common.

Finally, we are seeing the impact of state and federal laws on our staffing. Recent changes in laws now afford our employees many more opportunities to take time off through FMLA and other important benefits. While these benefits are important to the health and wellbeing of our staff, it has resulted in more time off.

In summary, our staffing simply has not kept up with growth, technology and other changes that impact our workforce. We no longer have a buffer. This became very clear during the COVID pandemic. We took many precautions and were fortunate to see minimal absenteeism due to COVID, but had we lost several of our staff to COVID, we would have been very shorthanded. As it is, we find ourselves shorthanded and working a large amount of overtime anytime there is a prolonged absence in dispatch.

I am asking for 3 additional dispatch positions in our 2022 budget. I do not take that request lightly as I realize the financial cost that our user agencies will have to bear. Without additional staffing we see a different cost. Dispatchers who are getting worn out. I sat in their chair for over 20 years before becoming the Deputy Director. I know the toll of working shorthanded and working too much overtime. This Board and our user agencies have done a tremendous job of supporting our dispatchers throughout the years. Now we need to support them with additional staffing.

Sincerely,

Greg Erickson
WhatComm Deputy Director