



City of Bellingham
Immigration Advisory Board Meeting
December 15, 2020, 6:30 PM

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:32 PM

Board Members

Present:

Liz Darrow
Ada Rumford
Danielle Siedlecki
Katie Winkelman
Jahn Zuniga Escobar

Absent:

Monika Cassidy
Maria Isabel Cortes-Zamora
Ramon Barba Torres
Bridget Reeves

Liaison to the City Council: Councilmember Hannah Stone

Spanish Interpretation: Martha Sabalsa

Guest presenters: Scott Grunhurd, Gregory Erickson

City staff: Mark Gardner, City Council Legislative Analyst

There is an audio/ video recording of this meeting. Times in brackets [] indicate the start time on the recording for each section. See <https://cob.org/gov/public/bc/immigration-advisory-board-materials> to listen to the recording.

Welcome, and Board Business [00:00]

- Councilmember Hannah Stone welcomed the group
- Hannah Stone facilitated this meeting
- Minutes for the November 17 meeting were approved as written.
- Revised ordinance. A revision of the ordinance that created this board will be brought to the board for review before being sent to Council early in 2021.
- 2021 meeting schedule. Meetings will continue to be the 3rd Tuesday of every month starting at 6:30 p.m.

Reports from affected community members [10:28].

There are concerns that the same thing that happened two years ago to community members will happen again. Perhaps there is a law or ordinance that can stop this from happening.

It was noted that if community members cannot attend to provide an account of their experiences a video could be shared.

Overview of WHAT-COMM practices and procedures [16:25]

- **Facts about dispatch.** Dispatch is a difficult job and staff respond to things such as break-ins, domestic violence, and suicide. There is a rigorous hiring process and 10 months of training. The system started in 1983 and included dispatch for police, fire, and medical. In 1999 fire and medical dispatch were separated from police dispatch.
- **Organizational Structure.** There is an interlocal agreement that governs the system that lays out funding and oversight. The interlocal indicates that the Bellingham Police Department oversees the WHAT-COMM system but a Bellingham Fire Department division chief oversees fire dispatch. The interlocal includes the County and all of the cities. There is an oversight board composed of officials from the jurisdictions. The system is paid for by a combination of taxes, and fees charged to participating jurisdictions.
- **Flow of communications.** Communications flow from the public to WHAT-COMM, and then to dispatch staff. The dispatch is separated into police and fire ("Prospect"). 911 call takers answer incoming calls and triage them. Fire and emergency medical calls are transferred to Prospect and the rest are sent to law enforcement dispatch, with each jurisdiction having assigned dispatch staff.
- **Civilian director.** From 2017 forward the WHAT-COMM operations director has been a civilian from the emergency response system.
- **Call volume.** About 140,000 calls came into 911 in 2019. Another 75,000 calls came in on a line set up for non-emergency calls. About 75,000 calls went out from the system. Altogether in 2019 about 290,000 calls were processed by the system. A computer aided dispatch (CAD) computer system helps staff manage calls.
- **Law enforcement operations.** WHAT-COMM dispatch staff monitor officer status in the field and take requests from officers. Dispatchers may also send additional officers for backup or other assistance. Dispatch staff may handle 10 to 12 incidents at a time and may be working with 25 officers.
- **Participation in WHAT-COMM.** All local agencies except WWU dispatch through WHAT-COMM. Blaine, Sumas, and Lynden used to dispatch through Border Patrol, and there were concerns that some people wouldn't use the system if they knew they would be transferred to Border Patrol. Local law enforcement agencies have

their own policies for how they interact with Border Patrol or other federal agencies. WHAT-COMM facilitates sharing of resources across agencies and handles requests, such as for running a search on warrants or for reported stolen vehicles.

- **Border cities.** Small border cities such as Blaine, Lynden, or Sumas may request assistance from CBP as they may only have one officer on duty and may need backup for an incident. Also, Border Patrol has helicopters which may be used to search for a missing child or an Alzheimer's patient. Sometimes CBP calls WHAT-COMM if its officers see an incident occurring that is better handled by a local agency i.e. a traffic accident.
- **Federal operations.** There is an Operation Stonegarden focused on border community security that involves federal law enforcement, FEMA, and Home Security, but BPD does not participate in this, nor does WHAT-COMM. However, some small cities do.
- **Questions and Discussion.**
 - What state funding goes into 911? This comes from the 911 state office which collects taxes earmarked for local 911 systems. Each county has a contract from the state to collect and distribute these taxes.
 - Who relies on CPB for backup? Small cities, but the first choice would be other local law enforcement and the Whatcom County Sheriff. Each City has its own policy.
 - WHAT-COMM only calls CBP at the request of an officer. A mutual aid request may come for an officer, e.g. a suicidal subject was near Hannegan Rd. and CBP had a Spanish interpreter. Question: Is this legal under SB 5497?
 - There are proposals to consolidate WHAT-COMM and Fire dispatch. The board would have control over any changes. The board takes public comment into account.
 - Contact data. Dispatchers puts in notes. In the federal contact data it is not always clear that contacts are initiated by other agencies. Is data on contacts complete? The goal is to get all contacts not just those that go through WHAT-COMM.

Old/New Business [1:55:16]

- It was noted that the presentations during the Nov. 17 board meeting were informative and that it would be good to follow up on some of the ideas in future meetings.
- Bellingham Police Chief David Doll announced his retirement. Flo Simon will be interim chief.

Public Comment [1:57:55]

Members of the public provided comment and posed questions to the board. Questions and comments were:

1. There is concern that WHAT-COMM is facilitating interaction with federal agencies. There are also reports of racial profiling.
2. Do the restrictions in SB 5497 cover WHAT-COMM since it includes local law enforcement?
3. How can the local GRACE and LEAD programs support access to all people including immigrants? A harm reduction approach should be used so that everyone can feel comfortable asking for services. This would also apply to the Crisis Triage center.
4. There is potential for harm when WHAT-COMM facilitates calls to the CBP for border towns.
5. We need to know the results of various interactions documented in the WHAT-COMM system. Can detail be added? It is not always clear who is requesting contact with CBP.
6. There is a need for interpreters who are not with CBP.
7. Can we get the text of operational agreements of different law enforcement agencies to see how they interact with CBP? Are there written agreements with CBP? When WHAT-COMM takes calls from CBP, we lose control.

Discussion occurred noting that interlocal agreements and agency agreements are public documents. WHAT-COMM and City staff will work to get these agreements.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:57 p.m.

Recordings of this meeting with additional details of discussion is posted at:

<https://cob.org/gov/public/bc/immigration-advisory-board-materials>