

**WHAT-COMM COMMUNICATIONS CENTER
ADMINISTRATIVE BOARD
MINUTES
Thursday January 26, 2023
Meeting held at 625 Halleck Street, Bellingham WA and Via ZOOM**

Present were:

Administrative Board Members: Bill Elfo, Sheriff, WCSO; Scott Korthuis, Lynden Mayor; Jeff Hindman, Fire Commissioners Association Representative; Chief Rebecca Mertzig, Bellingham Police Department and Dan Hammill, City of Bellingham Council Chair of the Public Safety Committee; Bill Hewett, Bellingham Fire Chief, and Satpal Sidhu, Whatcom County Executive

Absent: Fire Chief District 7, Larry Hoffman and Whatcom County Councilmember Kathy Kershner.

Other Panelists in attendance:

Bellingham Fire Department, Prospect Division Chief, Dan McDermott; Bellingham Police Department, Deputy Chief and Director of What-Comm, David Crass, Deputy Director of What-Comm Alys Everbeck.

Call to Order and Opening comments:

Sheriff Bill Elfo called the meeting to order at 1:00pm and asked for introductions from all of those in attendance.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

During this period of time, citizens may request to speak informally to the Board via ZOOM on subjects not scheduled on the agenda and will be unmuted by the moderator. EACH SPEAKER IS ALLOWED A MAXIMUM OF THREE MINUTES. If the speaker has written comments for the Board, an additional copy should be given to Julie Knight via email at jkknight@cob.org, preferably before the meeting, for our office files.

Sheriff Elfo asked the public if they had comments.

Comments were presented by WHAT-COMM Dispatch Guild president Katherin Mitchell. There were no other public comments.

Approval of the Minutes

Minutes from the September 29, 2022 regular meeting and the December 15, 2022 emergency meeting were distributed to the Administrative Board Members in advance of today's meeting.

Sheriff Elfo asked if everyone had a chance to review the minutes and if there is a motion to approve those minutes.

Bellingham Mayor Fleetwood motioned to approve the minutes and Fire Commissioner Jeff Hindman seconded.

Sheriff Elfo called for a vote: There were none opposed, the motion carried unanimously.

Whatcom County Executive Sidhu asked if there was any objection to rearranging the items on the agenda. He would like to discuss the What-Comm Facility topic before the presentations of the 2022 year reviews. There were no objections to the change in order.

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What-Comm Facilities Report

City of Bellingham Deputy Finance Director, Forrest Longman was introduced by Mayor Fleetwood and asked to present a memo regarding replacement of the What-Comm facility.

The city of Bellingham after reviewing past studies and committee notes regarding a new facility are presenting what they believe to be a practical and attainable funding option and would also facilitate getting the building done in the earliest timeframe possible. The City is willing to issue a city bond. The bond would be repaid by an increase in agency user fees and would be collected using the current cost allocation method for those fees.

The 2017 pre-construction design report from King Architecture included a \$7.6 million estimated cost for a 9,000 square foot 2-story building. Using the 2022 construction pricing index that \$7.6 million dollars equates to \$12 million to create a building that will meet the needs for a new center. Forrest reviewed the estimated increased agency costs, based on the \$12 million estimate.

Forrest indicated that he understands that the City and County will be asking the state legislative delegation for assistance with funding this project. He believes it is highly possible that the state will provide some funding which will lower the amounts needed from the individual agencies. Also, as the County and cities discuss another ballot measure for a Public Safety Sales Tax to finance a new jail, there is potential for cities to access a portion of this new revenue to offset the cost of a new What-Comm facility. The city proposes that to move the project forward, the City of Bellingham will take on the pre-financing expenses with the expectation that those expenses will either be rolled into the ultimate financing or offset the City's portion of the debt. We are asking the board to authorize this financing approach and to authorize the city to start this process. We also request that there be a follow-up for facility designs. We believe that if we get the financing piece going within the next 10-14 months that the building would be under construction in 2025.

Comment Period:

Executive Sidhu is concerned about being sure that we build a facility that will be sufficient for future growth and/or multi-use. He also has concerns that if we under develop already owned property that the remainder of the property would be lost for future development opportunities. He is greatly in favor of obtaining any funds we can from the State since those funds are a benefit to all of Whatcom County. There was some discussion about the amount of state funding that would be requested for this project. Bellingham city Deputy Administrator Brian Heinrich commented that the expectation is that the city would ask for 2-3 million from the state for this project, but they don't expect them to fund the entire cost. There was much additional discussion regarding the facility, the funding of the facility and next steps.

A motion was made by councilmember Dan Hammill to proceed with the proposal in the memorandum that was presented today. Chief Rebecca Mertzig seconded.

Fire Commissioner Jeff Hindman added that he would like to see Alys Everbeck and Dan McDermott be included in the decision-making process since they are most qualified to speak to what the actual needs are for the dispatch center. There was further discussion surrounding what the proposed motion would mean. Does this mean we are approving a facility today, or are we approving moving forward with the steps to fund the facility? Forrest Longman responded that this is a request to move forward.

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with an RFQ for the project. That involves real money and if the concept changes mid-stream, that will create additional expenses that are not included in today's proposal.

Mayor Scott Korthuis indicated that he believes there should be an opportunity to review the RFQ before it is submitted. After further discussion Mayor Scott Korthuis that Dan Hammill's motion be amended to include a subcommittee. Dan Hammill and Rebecca Mertzig accepted the amendment to the proposal. Sheriff Elfo called for a vote. There were none opposed, the motion carried unanimously.

Councilmember Dan Hammill asked Mayor Scott Korthuis to clarify what the purpose of the subcommittee would be. Scott Korthuis indicated it would be to discuss whether the What-Comm site is the best site for a new facility or if there are other locations that should be included in the review process? The subcommittee will consist of elected officials, Jeff Hindman, Dan Hammill and Scott Korthuis. They would like to include Alys Everbeck and Dan McDermott in those discussions as well as city and county facility engineers/management.

What-Comm Year in Review Presentation

Presented by Deputy Director Alys Everbeck

Alys presented some of the 2022 highlights. Call volume is up overall. There has been an increase in 10-digit non-emergency line use versus calls direct to 911. There has been a significant increase of calls coming in due to agencies referring people to 911. This is a good thing in that it allows us to streamline services and connect the caller with the appropriate services. It does cause some difficulty in that our staff is reduced at this time and the increased call volume can be very challenging to manage. Calls for border patrol have significantly decreased which was anticipated since we no longer transfer calls to border patrol for dispatching. Overall, even with the increase in call volume the dispatch staff is doing a tremendous job in continuing to meet or exceed national standards for call processing times. There were 3 new hires and training also continued for those who were hired in 2021. The training officers worked 2,600 hours of training time in 2022. The tactical dispatchers were deployed to 12 different incidents, sometimes up to 4 hours at a time. Staff worked a total of 10,000 hours of overtime in 2022 which averages out to 300-400 hours per person, with 3 of our staff working more than 500 hours of overtime. On average dispatchers processed 10,000 calls each. There were 2 retirements of long time staff (25 and 31 years) which is typically unheard of in this industry. The technology demands, shift work and overtime tend to make it difficult to retain staff for this many years.

Prospect Year in Review Presentation

Presented by Division Chief Dan McDermott

Dan presented 2022 highlights. There is a national standard for call processing time for fire/ems calls. In 2021 call processing time averaged 33 seconds per call and in 2022 it was an average of 30 seconds. The 2nd supervisor position was staffed, and the workload was distributed. They are now able to focus more time to advanced training of dispatch staff. The dispatch remodel was completed in July. The infrastructure created for the temporary dispatch space remains in place. This will allow for easy future expansion if necessary. They are confident the facility will serve them well beyond the next 2 decades. The last 2 weeks of the year was very eventful with snowstorms, freezing rains and phone outages.

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They did not receive any disruptions to services of their support agencies or citizens. Dan acknowledged the exceptional work done by staff at both Prospect and What-Comm.

Chief Bill Hewett shared information regarding House Bill 1055 which would move public safety telecommunicators in to the Public Safety Employees Retirement System allowing them to retire 5 years earlier than the current retirement system. He encourages everyone there to be involved in supporting this effort.

Adjourn

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 2:20 PM.

The next scheduled meeting will be held May 25th, 2023, at 1 PM.