

**WHAT-COMM COMMUNICATIONS CENTER
ADMINISTRATIVE BOARD
MINUTES
February 27, 2020**

Present were:

Administrative Board Members: Bill Elfo, Sheriff, Whatcom County Sheriff's office; Chief David Doll, Bellingham Police Department; Seth Fleetwood, Bellingham Mayor; Bellingham Fire Chief Bill Hewett(non-voting member) Bellingham Fire Department; Mel Blankers, Chief of Everson Fire Department; John Crawford, Whatcom County Fire Commissioners Representative; Dan Hammill, Bellingham City Council. Scott Korthuis, Lynden Mayor; Satpal Sidhu, Whatcom County Executive.

Also present were:

Rob Wilson and Dan McDermott, Bellingham Fire Department; Greg Erickson, What-Comm Deputy Director of Operations; Deputy Chief Scott Grunhurd, Bellingham Police Department; Julie Knight, Accounting Technician, What-Comm; Coni Turner, GIS Specialist, What-Comm; Sam Dunkailo, Systems Analyst, What-Comm; Mark Wright, Technical Support, What-Comm; Tyler Schroeder, Whatcom County Executive's office; Alysnn Everbeck, Linda Greene, What-Comm Supervisors; What-Comm dispatchers Sheri Ducker, Katherin Mitchell, Kaitlen Damstedt and Peter Tran. Prospect Dispatchers, Amanda DeBruin, Doug Chronister and Renee Brennan and Prospect Supervisor, Shelia Hanlon.
Jim Peeples, Whatcom County Fire Commissioners; Rob Neher WCFPD #8; and Duncan McLue, WCFD #11.

Opening comments & Introductions:

Sheriff Elfo called the meeting to order at 1:00pm and welcomed everyone.

Sheriff Elfo took a moment to recognize Rob Wilson and his 35 years of fire service in Bellingham.

Sheriff Elfo asked if there were any public comments, and if so, each person would be allowed 3 minutes to speak. There were no public comments.

Approval of the Minutes

Approval of meeting minutes from October.

Discussion: No discussion.

David Doll motioned that the minutes be accepted.

Mel Blankers seconded the motion.

Sheriff Elfo called for a vote. None opposed. Motion passes.

Motion to terminate Center Consolidation Working Group

Presented by David Doll

There was a motion at the previous board meeting to form a consolidation center committee. We believe right now is not the best time to continue to pursue co-location.

Discussion: No discussion.

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Dan Hammill motioned that we should not form the consolidation center committee.
Mel Blankers seconded the motion.
Sheriff Elfo called for a vote. None opposed. Motion passes.

Prospect update

Presented by Rob Wilson

Prospect has had a stable year, with no retirements or dispatchers leaving employment. This has allowed for smooth continuing training and education for existing dispatchers.

Rob introduced Dan McDermott as the next division chief and how he rose to the top as the perfect person to take over the position.

Immediate CPR has continued to be a great addition in saving community members in cardiac arrest. Lives saved in Whatcom county in remote areas has been incredible over the last 3 to 4 years.

Pulse Point has approximately 2 thousand members. These members are alerted to pulmonary emergencies in their immediate area. Public members can see alerts and respond to offer immediate aid.

Sheriff Elfo mentioned that a citizen is donating funds to equip WCSO patrol vehicles with defibrillator units. The units will be the same as what is currently being used in BPD patrol vehicles.

WHAT-COMM update

Presented by Greg Erickson

Greg welcomed the many new board members and talked about the challenge coins that are provided to each new board member.

Greg talked about the number of dispatchers and supervisors at What-Comm and introduced some of the staff. Greg gave a brief overview of operations. We have many dispatchers with 15 or more years of service which is highly unusual in the 911 industry.

We received 182,000 emergency calls in 2019. Approximately 27,000 of those calls were transferred to Prospect and 10,000 calls to other agencies. We also receive many non-emergent calls on administrative lines which brings us up to about 290,000 calls in total for 2019. About 33 calls per hour. There was about a 7% increase in police incidents in 2019 over 2018. Part of the increase is due to adding Blaine, Lynden and Sumas police departments to our dispatch agency. This has improved communication and interoperability between law enforcement agencies.

Greg presented a budget overview about how our budgets work and how we simplified the budget documents.

All the tax revenue is now applied to 911 costs, and none is put into reserve, per the 2019 board request and approval. We have seen the 911 tax revenue remain at a steady amount for the past number of years and expect little or no increase in the coming years.

Greg stated that the only other tax available to us is an emergency communications sales tax.

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Dan Hammill asked: is that a vote of the people for the added tax? Greg responded, that is correct. Scott Korthuis asked: why is the 911 tax steady? Greg responded: Statewide the tax has remained steady with no increases. Many people have discontinued their land line services. Also, as new communication technology becomes available to the public, not all of those services yet require a 911 tax.

David Doll asked: what funding do we get from the state contract from our CPD contract?

Greg responded: We get about \$45,000 a year. Funding is based on county size. Small counties receive a large portion of funding and medium to large counties receive smaller portions.

Greg next shared information about plans for Text to 911.

We will be implementing it this year in Whatcom County. We are approaching this in a methodic manner. We want to make sure the public is aware and educated before we roll out the service. We are not anticipating a large text volume. We are working on our systems to be able to transfer texts to Prospect and ensure everything goes smoothly.

Greg next introduced Sheri Ducker and Linda Greene and that they will be sharing some basic information about WHAT-COMM 911/dispatch services.

Sheri Ducker: All 911 calls come into What-Comm as the primary PSAP.

If the calls are fire/ems related, they are transferred to Prospect. What-Comm receives and triages all calls and makes sure they are transferred as needed to the correct agency for response. We dispatch for 9 agencies, 3 border towns/crossings; outlying areas that require responders to go through Skagit County, Point Roberts that requires responders to go through British Columbia, and Lummi Island that requires a ferry.

This requires a multitude of actions from a dispatcher; some of which is contacting border patrol to ensure there is a free lane for deputies to get through the border to point Roberts. Other agencies we work with during incidents are Coast guard, National Forest Service, and Homeland Security.

We currently have 29 full time positions made up of dispatchers, supervisors, and calls receivers.

Call receivers answer calls and determine what the need is.

Dispatchers triage the call, dispatch it and research and provide as much information as possible. If dispatching to a domestic violence incident, the dispatcher gathers as much information about the parties involved that they can, while at the same time dispatching law enforcement.

Dispatchers continuously monitor call screens and check on the status of officers helping to ensure their safety. Dispatchers also research and enter information into the national crime database.

Communication Training Officers (CTO's) – Train new staff to call receive and then dispatch.

There are dispatchers that also fill many other needs such as:

Tactical teams, collecting and providing 911 recordings, a public education coordinator who attends many public events and helps educate the community; a CAD committee that ensures our CAD system and it's features stay up to date and are fully utilized; and a social media committee for public Facebook announcements.

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Linda Greene:

We currently have 4 supervisors consisting of 3 shift supervisors and 1 training supervisor.

The training supervisor plays a key role in training new dispatchers; meets with all CTO officers on a regular basis, and monitors training.

Shift supervisors do all the same duties as other dispatchers as well as supervising, assigning and delegating projects.

The entire staff at What-Comm participate in many things to help our community, such as food drives, providing supplies for the homeless, school supply drives, and care packages to recognize and celebrate groups we work with, such as the current plan to celebrate public works.

Sheriff Elfo thanked the dispatchers for all they do.

Linda encouraged officers to come in and double-plug and visit with the dispatchers.

David Doll asked: What do you expect the impact of adding texting will be?

Linda responded: Responses will be much longer and involved.

David Doll asked: will texts be transferred to Prospect?

Greg responded: Yes. Since we share the same phone system, we can do this.

Greg shared that other centers who are already using text to 911 average 1–1.5 minutes to handle a phone call, and that the average time to handle a text takes up to 7 minutes.

Dan Hamell asked: Do you work with behavioral health officers?

Linda Greene introduced Supervisor Alysnn Everbeck who is our liaison with Behavioral health officers.

Alysnn responded: Yes, I liaison with our Behavioral Health officers. We communicate once per week regarding frequent callers, how they are doing, if they are escalating and what kind of impact that is having on 911.

Bill Hewett responded: Prospect has dispatchers tracking EMT's in the field and status checking. The EMT's manage behavioral health issues directly while in the field.

Prospect is currently working on accreditation and has a plan to implement a transfer direct to a nurse hotline where they can get the appropriate help and connection with services that they need.

Scott Grunhurd presented some of the upcoming items that will need to be addressed within the next 2 years.

He welcomed the new board members and stated that it is going to be a busy year.

We will need the board to approve/extend the interlocal agreement by the end of June.

Equipment and Staffing: We will be asking for additional staffing and equipment updates soon.

Sheriff Elfo shared about the radio frequencies and how the demand has affected the radio system.

We need to look at solutions to address the radio system demand.

Scott: Thanked Sheriff Elfo for his patience in the challenges that radio frequency is seeing.

David Doll asked: How many dispatch positions are we asking for? We want to plan for budgeting.

Greg Erickson responded: We need 4 – 5 positions, however we are asking for 2 dispatcher and 1 supervisor position.

Sheriff Elfo asked: how long does it take to train new positions?

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Greg Erickson responded: It takes a minimum of 2 months to get someone in the door and then a year to be fully trained.

Bill Hewett shared that Prospect is working toward accreditation, and they have determined they will need an additional dispatcher. He also shared that they need new console furniture and a new UPS. They are looking into finance options and expect to finance the cost over a period of years.

Other business:

Sheriff Elfo stated that radio infrastructure is failing. There are many instances where officers cannot communicate with dispatch. They are in the process of hiring a project manager to oversee changes to the infrastructure. There is about a \$6 million cost for the project. They have asked for 2 million this year and \$4.5 million in the following year. He asked for the support and help from law and fire representatives.

It was also noted that the general platform of the fire/ems radio system is over 38 years old.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2 pm.