

Public Safety Dispatch Options

August 28, 2018

Board of Supervisors

Purpose

- Receive an update
- Review changed circumstances since last discussion with the Board
- Consider further options for Public Safety Dispatch
- Provide conceptual direction and direct staff to return with more information

Prior Options Considered

- In July 2017, the Board heard a report from Deltawrx consultants on options for changing Public Safety Dispatch. Two alternatives provided at that time:
- **Previous Option 1 : Continue combined law/fire/ems operation with enhancements**
 - Add 5 call takers, 1 dispatcher, 1 civilian executive director
 - Optimize existing facility and make improvements
 - Equal governance by law, fire and ems representatives
 - Pros: Lowest cost (estimated at \$1.1 M); no transfer of calls from law to fire
 - Cons: Does not fulfill Fire/EMS request for separate center; governance under the direction of the Sheriff's Office was to be further examined.
- **Previous Option 2: Separate fire/ems from law, creating two dispatch centers**
 - Rehab of Station 19 for new center at cost of \$8-9 M from Fire District
 - For new Fire/EMS dispatch: Add 7 dispatchers, 7 call takers for Fire/EMS, 1 executive director, 4 supervisors and .5 GIS tech
 - For Law dispatch: reduce net 6.5 FTE
 - Pros: Preferred by local fire agencies for closest resource dispatching; eventual joint center and JPA.
 - Cons: Higher cost (\$2.8 M to backfill loss in Law operations); investment in another center in the south county does not further need for redundant center.

Board Prior Direction

Board direction was to pursue viability of Option 2 and provide

- information on participation by other fire agencies and partners
- financial options and funding sources from other agencies and partners
- Impacts on employees
- Information Technology support issues.
- Continued operation and funding of current center, including maintenance and capital needs

Staff has been delayed in returning to the Board for this update due to time spent on the recent disasters and recovery efforts.

Updated information

- Other fire agencies:
 - Fire Chief Peterson has discussed this with other fire agencies.
 - At the staff level, many express interested in joining a regional Fire/EMS county center to allow for nearest resource dispatching
 - Too early for exact financial commitments to be made, but some agency staff have expressed willingness for financial commitment.
- Impacts on employees
 - Currently there are 32 dispatch positions of which 4 are vacant.
 - The Board authorized 5 call takers, which were created and funded in the most recent budget. Filling those positions are in process.
 - Given the greater need for dispatchers, It is not envisioned that under Option 2 any dispatcher would be displaced.
- IT issues/maintenance and capital needs
 - The Sheriff requested funding in its budget request for IT improvements. The allocation was not granted, pending a final decision on dispatch options.
 - There is no outstanding capital requests for the current center. On average, Maintenance costs for the building are \$20,100.

Recent changes

- Need for redundancy: Recent disasters highlighted need for redundant center in north county; the large investment (\$8.6 M) in a new South County dispatch facility close to the existing center was re-evaluated. Some of that funding could be better utilized to provide redundancy in north county.
- Santa Maria: Santa Maria City opened a state-of-the art dispatch center (joint Law/Fire) that could accommodate adding law and/or fire-EMS from the County for regionalization of services as part of its current operation, or just to house the operation.
- Public Safety ACEO: The CEOs office has recently hired a new Assistant CEO dedicated to public safety, who could provide oversight should a combined center be continued.
- Existing facility: The existing facility was re-evaluated for space. The site could be split into two dispatch centers and eventually expanded.

New options given changes

Three new options for consideration

All options

- Allow for **nearest resource dispatching** for fire/EMS agencies and regionalization of fire/EMS services
- Contemplate a **JPA formed with local fire/EMS agencies for regional fire/EMS service**; this may not be immediately but in the medium term.
- **Recommend civilian executive director(s)**
- Some level of **redundancy**

New Option 1: combined center, reports to CEO under civilian director

New Option 1: continue joint law/fire/EMS center under civilian director, reporting to the CEOs office at existing location

- Sheriff, Fire/EMS, CEO and other representatives would be part of governance structure. A Civilian director under the CEOs office would be hired.
- As this gets in place, work with other fire agencies and partners to join a JPA.
- Expansion of the existing center may be needed and will be evaluated.
- In the immediate term, invest in technology and agreements with other fire agencies for nearest resource dispatching to degree feasible.
- Develop small alternative site in north county or agreements with north county agencies for County dispatch redundancy in an emergency.

New Option 2: work with Santa Maria in for regionalized law

New Option 2: Regionalize law dispatch, working with Santa Maria, and Fire/EMS in existing location

- Request the Sheriff regionalize law dispatch by joining the Santa Maria dispatch center; work with the City on staffing, funding, space needs.
- Use the existing South County facility for a regionalized fire/EMS agency. Create a JPA and funding agreements. Hire a civilian manager over the operations, directed by the JPA.
- In the immediate term, invest in technology and agreements with other fire agencies for nearest resource dispatching to degree feasible.
- Use this North County regional law dispatch center as the redundant County dispatch center in emergencies.
- Not recommended is a variation whereby Fire agencies also go to the Santa Maria Dispatch Center. This does not provide redundancy, and south county agencies may not prefer this option.

New Option 3: separate operations at existing site

New Option 4: continue with previous direction

New Option 3: Separate law and fire/EMS at the existing facility, thereby creating two dispatch centers.

- Create a separate fire/EMS dispatch operations at the existing facility
- Physically separate the two operations at the site; may required expansion of site also, which will be evaluated.
- Continues the Sheriff's oversight of law dispatch.
- Creates new fire/EMS dispatch operations under a civilian director, hired by County Fire.
- As this gets in place, work with other fire agencies and partners to join a Fire/EMS JPA.
- In the immediate term, invest in technology and agreements with other fire agencies for nearest resource dispatching to degree feasible.
- Develop small alternative site in north county or agreements with north county agencies for redundancy.

New Option 4 (Previous Option #2): Continue with previous direction of separate Fire/EMS center at Station 19.

Other factors

Other factors evaluated

- Dispatcher/call taker recruitment – given high cost of living, may be better and sustainable recruitment environment in North County
- Cost – costs not fully evaluated. Will be once Board provides conceptual direction. Staff will return in 60 days with further information. This allows staff to work with the City of Santa Maria should that be an option.
- IT upgrades will be needed in any scenario. Staff will return with more information.

Recommended Actions

- It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors
 - A) receive and file update from staff on Public Safety Dispatch alternatives;
 - B) Consider options for Public Safety Dispatch;
 - C) Provide staff with conceptual direction on a recommended Public Safety Dispatch alternative and direct staff to return within 60 days with further financial and timing information to fund the selected option; or
 - D) Provide other direction as appropriate; and
 - E) Determine this exempt from CEQA pursuant to section 15378(b)(4) of CEQA Guidelines