

Township seeks PSAP proposals for area 911 calls

By Chris Cotelesse | Posted: Monday, June 3, 2013 11:18 pm

THE WOODLANDS – The Woodlands Township board has requested proposals from consulting firms to evaluate the benefits for designating the township as a primary Public Safety Answering Point for emergency calls.

The Woodlands Fire Department dispatch is a secondary PSAP, meaning that a resident's 911 call is relayed to the dispatch by primary points in the sheriffs' offices of Montgomery and Harris counties.

Fire Chief Alan Benson said emergency calls to the department have been increasing by an average of 8 percent a year since 2010. The rate of growth could unduly strain the sheriffs' offices.

“Those two primary PSAPs are very busy,” he said. “We really believe by having our own PSAP, we can actually take that initial 911 call and take it from cradle to grave.”

The study would analyze costs, staff levels and efficiency associated with a Woodlands PSAP.

There is \$50,000 in the 2013 Woodlands budget that will cover the cost of the study, but Benson said he is hopeful it will cost less than \$30,000.

If the new primary PSAP were approved, the Montgomery County Emergency Communications District may provide operational funds. The district pays the two other PSAPs to answer and dispatch 911 calls, and Executive Director Chip Vansteenbergh said the board could decide to do the same for The Woodlands.

“But as for the formula and considerations, we're not even close to discussing that yet,” he said.

Before a PSAP can be established, the township would have to demonstrate that it could handle law enforcement emergency calls.

Vansteenbergh said 80 percent of emergencies involve the police.

He said a Woodlands PSAP would be a “unique circumstance” because the township contracts for about 90 deputies from the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office, and there may need to be “some negotiations between the primary PSAPs” to determine how to handle law enforcement emergency calls.