

**MINUTES OF THE
MONTGOMERY COUNTY EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION DISTRICT
BOARD OF MANAGERS**

REGULAR MEETING

May 10, 2017

LOCATION: 9-1-1 Board Room
150 Hilbig Road, Conroe, Texas

BOARD ATTENDING

PRESENT: Paul Virgadamo, President
Vicky Rudy, Vice President
Robert Hudson, Treasurer
Ryan Gable, Secretary

ABSENT: James Simon, Member
John Young, Ex-Officio Member

IN ATTENDANCE: Larry Foerster, Legal Counsel
Chip VanSteenberg, Executive Director
Jeanne Frey, Operations Manager
Roberto Gutierrez, Systems Manager
Robert Brewer, Systems Tech
Andrea Wilson, Public Education Coordinator
Sadina Erwin, GIS Analyst
Terri Gill, Executive Assistant
Denise Jimenez, Montgomery County Sheriff's Office
Sarah Cottar, Montgomery County Hospital District
Shawn Trainor, Montgomery County Hospital District
TJ Darst, Montgomery County Hospital District
Rick Erickson, The Woodlands Fire Department
Lt. Joe Smart, Conroe Police Department

Mr. Paul Virgadamo, President, called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m., noting Mr. James Simon was unable to attend.

Public Comments

No one requested to address the Board.

City of Conroe Police Department's request under the PSAP Improvement Program for equipment to outfit four call-taking consoles and purchase a radio console

Mr. Virgadamo noted item one of the agenda, consider and take action approving the City of Conroe Police Department's request under the PSAP Improvement Program for equipment to outfit four call-taking consoles and purchase a radio console.

Mr. Chip VanSteenberg, Executive Director, stated he would speak on this matter as Lt. Joe Smart with the Conroe Police Department had not yet arrived.

Mr. Larry Foerster, Legal Counsel, requested Mr. Virgadamo recuse himself for this matter. Mr. Virgadamo did so.

Mr. VanSteenberg stated the Conroe Police Department is working on a bigger project and has requested a little over half of the annual reimbursement for this project and requested the unused funds be rolled forward into the next fiscal year for use towards the larger project.

The Conroe Police Department has requested approximately \$50,000 to outfit existing consoles in the dispatch center and purchase a radio console to be used for disaster recovery and as a back-up site for the Montgomery County Hospital District. The cost to outfit the workstations is estimated at \$12,000 and the cost of the radio console is \$42,790 for a combined project total of \$54,790. After deducting the 10% match requirement, MCECD's estimated share is \$49,311.

Mr. Virgadamo requested a motion, noting that he has recused from the vote. Ms. Vicky Rudy made the motion to approve the PSAP Improvement Program request by the City of Conroe Police Department and to roll the unused fund into the next fiscal year. Constable Ryan Gable seconded the motion. The motion carried with all in favor.

Selecting a Text Control Center provider and authorizing the executive director to enter into a contract

Mr. Virgadamo noted item two of the agenda, consider and take action selecting a text control center provider and authorizing the executive director to enter into a contract.

Mr. Virgadamo clarified that this will move the district closer to the technical ability to text to 9-1-1. Mr. VanSteenberg agreed, the district is moving towards implementing the technology, as several neighboring jurisdictions have already implemented the service, and are waiting for the vendors to catch up with the FCC mandated service.

One part of the process of deploying text to 9-1-1 is selecting a text control center (TCC). The TCC aggregates the emergency texts, routes them to the appropriate PSAP, and delivers location information. There are two companies that provide TCC services, Comtech and West.

Comtech offers two options based on the type of connectivity. Their recommended method uses T1 circuits connecting both host sites to two different Comtech facilities. They use two different carriers for redundancy. This option is priced as \$20,000 for initial set-up and equipment, plus \$21,250 per year for circuits, maintenance, and monitoring. A three-year contract is required.

Comtech's alternate method relies on a VPN connection (virtual private network) for a \$10,000 set-up fee and \$10,000 per year for maintenance and monitoring. A three-year contract is required with this one as well. This option carries a disclaimer, "traffic moving through a VPN is still transiting the internet, we do not recommend the VPN option but make it available without committing to any level of service reliability." Further, the disclaimer states, "in no event can or will we be liable to you for any disruption, lack of redundancy or reliability, or any other issue that occurs with the service as a result of this connectivity choice."

West Safety Services also proposes to connect via VPN. Their set-up fee is only \$3,750 but the annual fee is \$25,800. They require a five-year contract.

There is one key difference in the two companies. Comtech does not yet have the capability to transfer a text session to a neighboring jurisdiction. We would be able to transfer to all four PSAPs within the county, but not to a PSAP outside the county. West does allow transfers to neighboring PSAPs.

Despite the disclaimer and difference in service, the staff recommends selecting Comtech's VPN proposal for the following reasons:

1. A three-year contract is preferable to a five-year agreement given the rapid rate of change for this service as the technology matures.
2. Text to 9-1-1 occurs rarely so the larger investment is not justified at this time.
3. Based on experience, there is no appreciable increase in reliability between VPN connectivity and T1 connectivity.
4. Comtech is working with the Texas 9-1-1 Alliance on a project that would leverage existing connections to transit 9-1-1 texts. If that project comes to fruition during the term of this contract, MCECD will be able to

migrate without a penalty.

5. The need to transfer a text session to another jurisdiction outside the county is not expected to occur often; policy work-arounds can be developed. As Text to 9-1-1 grows and evolves, we believe Comtech will be able to match West's capabilities.

Ms. Rudy made the motion to approve the Comtech VPN proposal and authorize the executive director to enter into a contract. Constable Gable seconded the motion. The motion carried with all in favor.

Designating the MCECD IT Maintenance vehicle as an authorized emergency vehicle

Mr. Virgadamo noted item three of the agenda, consider and take action designating the MCECD IT maintenance vehicle as an authorized emergency vehicle.

Mr. VanSteenberg stated the MCECD IT technicians are responsible for maintaining 9-1-1 equipment at five different locations. They need the ability to move around the county quickly to respond to service outages. In normal circumstances, clear weather, regular traffic, this is not a problem. The current maintenance truck was specked out to improve response time and carry more tools and equipment. It sits higher off the ground to navigate during flash floods and has 4-wheel drive. The staff would like to add emergency lights to further improve response times.

While emergency lights are rarely needed, experience from recent events indicate their presence would be an asset. For example, Host A of the 9-1-1 system went down during a severe rain event in May 2016. Host B was supposed to take over but it did not. MCHD, where Host B resides, was receiving calls but remote sites were not. A tech went to CPD to diagnose and realized he needed to reboot Host B to reestablish the connection to the remote sites. The Conroe area was experiencing flash flooding; several streets were impassable and traffic was backed up on the clear ones. The travel time to Conroe PD and then to MCHD was much longer than usual. The staff believes emergency lights could have reduced the down time.

Section 541.201 of the Texas Transportation Code allows a public service corporation, like MCECD, to designate a vehicle as an "authorized emergency vehicle." Such authorization is needed to order and install the recommended lighting package. Mr. Foerster has reviewed the relevant statutes and recommends the board discuss and answer the following question:

Does the use of a vehicle as an emergency vehicle constitute "9-1-1 service" as defined by Section 772.001 of the Texas Health and Safety Code?

The definition of 9-1-1 service is "*a communication service that connects users to a public safety answering point through a 9-1-1 system.*"

Mr. Foerster stated he had two concerns, first the board would have to make a determination as to whether this is part of a 9-1-1 service. Second, the person who is driving the vehicle would need the proper training.

Mr. Ryan asked if a motion could be made subject to policy and training? Mr. Foerster replied affirmatively.

Ms. Rudy stated she would prefer that the policy be reviewed and approved prior to the designation. Mr. Foerster suggested the he and the staff could work on a resolution, a policy, and driver training.

Ms. Rudy made the motion to table action on designating the MCECD IT vehicle as an emergency vehicle pending written policy. Constable Gable seconded the motion. The motion carried with all in favor.

Discussion on critical address points which do not comply with basic addressing standards

Mr. Virgadamo noted item four of the agenda, discussion on critical address points which do not comply with basic addressing standards.

Mr. VanSteenberg stated there are over 230,000 address points in the 9-1-1 system that plot on the map and show the location. Of these, 7,160 are critical, meaning they do not comply with normal addressing standards. They could be in

the wrong block, or are on wrong side of the street. Emergency responders will have trouble finding an address that does not line up with what we expect.

Artesian Way, a subdivision in Roman Forest, was developed back in the 1970's, and is an example of the issue. The original development of twenty-two homes was addressed by the lot number. New development is in progress with a new builder, and new addresses are needed. The staff met with the City of Roman Forest, with the endorsement of the police and fire chiefs, and explained we cannot continue to address in that way, and would like to re-address the existing homes. The city council voted not to allow the re-addressing of the older housing.

This is our policy, we do not take a heavy-handed approach to re-addressing. If the city does not want to re-address, we will not do it, we will allow the critical address points to stay in place. We are in the process of updating our addressing agreements with the cities. Most of the engineers and developers are used to working with us.

Chief Robert Hudson noted the similarity to the Rayford Road and Rayford Business Park issue. Mr. VanSteenberg noted this is a business area with a long driveway off Rayford Road, and that has a Rayford Road address, subsequent buildings have access easement off the long driveway, with Rayford Road addresses. Chief Hudson stated an additional eight or nine buildings are currently being added. Mr. VanSteenberg stated this is one area where the staff are being a little more heavy-handed as addressing requests come in. We have had discussions with the city and the county about situations like this. Ms. Jeanne Frey stated the driveway could be named Rayford Road Extension. Chief Hudson explained the streets run perpendicular, and the driveway has been extended and curves around, and building is occurring on Holden Street Spur also. Ms. Frey stated the staff would look into the issue with Rayford Road.

No action was needed.

Executive Director's Report

Mr. Virgadamo noted item five of the agenda, executive director's report on items of community interest for which no action will be taken.

Mr. VanSteenberg reported the budget is in progress, a special meeting will be scheduled in June after meeting with the Financial Committee.

Mr. VanSteenberg introduced Mrs. Sadina Erwin to the Board. Mrs. Erwin is our new GIS Analyst. She came onboard in February, and has an undergraduate degree from Tarleton State and two Master's degrees one is from Tarleton University in Environmental Science and the second is from Sam Houston State University in GIS.

Mr. VanSteenberg reported call answer times have been a concern. The county has been working hard to bring them down, new staff are in training, and additional resources are planned in next year's budget. We have implemented auto-call distribution, which has sped up call answering. The Sheriff's office has had an increase in calls without an increase in staff, taking twice as many non-emergency calls as 9-1-1 calls. They also dispatch for 32 agencies with the respective admin lines.

In addition to looking at short-term issues, there is a need to look at long-term goals. We have based our current 9-1-1 structure on a study that was done in 2004, and a lot has changed since then. We are working on organizing a 9-1-1 Summit for Executives of the PSAP, to talk about our goals for the future, and make recommendations to the Board.

On the legislative side, we have been tracking several bills. One we supported and actively sought sponsorship for would allow districts like us to perform our own background checks. This was not our request, we use the sheriff's office, and that relationship works well for us. There are some other 9-1-1 related bills that may or may not pass. The most significant will allow privacy for 9-1-1 calls, by not allowing them to be released to the public.

Consent Agenda

Mr. Virgadamo noted items six through ten of the consent agenda, noting the items may be taken separately or as a whole.

Constable Gable made the motion to approve the consent agenda in its entirety. Ms. Rudy seconded the motion. The

motion carried with all in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 1:02 p.m.

These minutes were approved at regularly scheduled board meeting on July 19, 2017.

If needed, an official, signed copy may be obtained at the MCECD office.