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DAVID H. YAMASAKI
Chief Executive Officer/Clerk
Superior Court of CA County of Santa Clara
BY D. ALDYCKI

September 1, 2011

Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury
Superior Court
191 North First Street
San Jose, CA 95113

Re: Civil Grand Jury Report - "Can You Hear Me Now? Emergency Dispatch in Santa Clara County"

Presiding Judge,

Attached you will find, as required by California Penal Code Section 933.05(a,b), the City of Palo Alto's response to the Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury's Final Report, "Can You Hear Me Now? Emergency Dispatch in Santa Clara County."

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding the enclosed document, please feel free to call me at (650) 329-2103.

Sincerely,



Dennis Burns
Interim Public Safety Director

Grand Jury Recommendations:

Finding 1: *Dispatch Consolidation would result in more cost effective emergency response and should be implemented throughout Santa Clara County.*

The City agrees with Finding 1.

Recommendation 1: *Jurisdictions that maintain their own dispatching centers should consolidate dispatch with neighboring jurisdictions and, where appropriate, should issue RFPs to do so.*

The City agrees with Recommendation 1.

The City of Palo Alto is working with the cities of Mountain View and Los Altos on a project to create a tri-city computer-aided dispatch (CAD) system. The City believes a “virtual consolidation” is a more cost effective solution, at least initially, than a physical consolidation.

The proposed tri-city virtual consolidation model will provide most of the benefits of consolidation without the start-up costs of building and equipping a brick and mortar facility.

Palo Alto Communications provides a number of ancillary services in addition to public safety dispatching. These services include dispatching for Animal Services, Utilities Customer Service, Park Rangers, Stanford Alarm Techs, after hours Public Works, after hours Stanford Facilities, and after hours Water Gas Waste Water. In addition, the center is the primary contact for the public and on-duty employees after hours and on weekends and holidays. It is unlikely that all of these services would be provided in a physically consolidated environment. The cost of replicating the services that remained with the City would need to be factored into any brick and mortar consolidation.

The Palo Alto Police Department believes the “virtual consolidation” strategy is consistent with the Grand Jury’s recommendations and that the strategy will provide a more efficient use of resources and enhanced situational awareness. The planned technologies are scalable enabling other agencies to participate in the future. There are clear cost savings benefits to this approach and it is anticipated additional efficiencies will become evident as implementation occurs.

Finding 2: *Radio equipment has not been standardized and impedes effective countywide communication and emergency dispatch.*

The City agrees with Finding 2.

Recommendation 2: *Jurisdictions which maintain their own dispatching centers should continue to work with the Silicon Valley Regional Interoperability Authority to achieve countywide standardization of radio technology.*

The City agrees with Recommendation 2.

Police and Fire agencies in Santa Clara County operate on three disparate radio bands, VHF, UHF and 800 MHz. SVRIA is a countywide JPA that seeks to address the problem of voice and data interoperability. SVRIA plans to build a countywide 700 MHz radio system for all Santa Clara County public safety agencies. The Department agrees that this proposal is a sound model for Police Communications. There continues to be debate in the Fire Community about the reliability of digital 700 MHz radio communication during active fire incidents. SVRIA is scheduled to release an RFP in September for a regional radio system.

Funding has not been secured for the proposed system and cost estimates vary from 60 to 100 million dollars for the complete project. There may be additional costs to individual agencies for subscriber units (mobile and portable radios). The County Police and Fire Chiefs have committed future Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) funding to the proposed system but, even in a phased approach, a considerable funding shortfall exists. The proposed installation schedule has Palo Alto, Mountain View and Los Altos as a phase three or final phase installation. Given these obstacles, the installation of a tri-city radio channel provides critical radio communications over the North County Region until the longer-term strategy can be implemented. There are representatives from all three cities participating in SVRIA committees dedicated to Santa Clara County regional goals.

The radio communication issues identified by the Grand Jury continue to be a major issue for the region. The consolidated effort under SVRIA is making progress defining the scope and cost of countywide radio system. There are funding challenges to building such a system. The Department and its partners in Mountain View and Los Altos are actively engaged with SVRIA in this and other regional communications projects.



City of Palo Alto

City Council Staff Report

(ID # 2012)

Report Type: Consent Calendar

Meeting Date: 9/12/2011

Summary Title: Grand Jury Response - Emergency Dispatch

Title: Approval of Response to Santa Clara County Grand Jury Report "Can You Hear Me Now? Emergency Dispatch in Santa Clara County"

From: City Manager

Lead Department: Police

Recommendation

Staff recommends that Council approve the attached response to the Santa Clara County Grand Jury report on public safety dispatching and radio communications in Santa Clara County.

Executive Summary

The 2010-2011 Santa Clara County Grand Jury Report entitled "Can You Hear Me Now? Emergency Dispatch in Santa Clara County" outlines a series of concerns, findings and recommendations regarding public safety dispatching and radio communications in Santa Clara County. The primary concerns of the Grand Jury are:

- The duplication of resources by multiple agencies and jurisdictions.
- The duplication of resources may cause delayed or inadequate responses, particularly for EMS, or conversely the "over-allocation" of resources when multiple jurisdictions respond to the same incident.
- The transfer of medical calls to County EMS results in a delayed response to medical emergencies.
- The facts that Police, Fire and EMS agencies are on three different frequency bands and that radio coverage is limited to local areas inhibits the ability of agencies to communicate with each other and restricts inner-agency radio communication to a relatively small geographic area.

Background

The Palo Alto Police Department operates the Emergency Communications Center for City and has dispatch responsibilities for Police, Fire, Stanford DPS, Animal Control and Utilities Customer Service. In calendar 2010, the center received 145,267 incoming phone calls of which 32,401 calls were received over 9-1-1 trunk lines. The Communications center dispatched 53,992 Palo Alto Police incidents, 10,279 Stanford DPS incidents, 9,370 Fire incidents, 4,349 Animal Control incidents and 6,684 Utilities incidents for a total of 84,674 incidents. Because of the center's ancillary responsibilities, Palo Alto has the third highest incoming call volume in Santa Clara County (behind San Jose and County Communications). The center employs 20 Public Safety Dispatchers. Contracts with Stanford and Palo Alto Utilities result in the cost recovery of 25% of the Communications budget.

Discussion

The report mentions the "virtual consolidation" effort by the cities of Palo Alto, Mountain View, and Los Altos. The three Police departments spearheading this effort believe that this strategy addresses most of the Grand Jury concerns without burdening the cities with the start-up costs of a brick and mortar consolidation.

The Grand Jury Report cites the West Jordan, Utah Regional Center as a model for successful dispatch consolidation. The center is an excellent example of a unified operation. However, the initial cost for building and equipping the facility in the year 2000 was \$10 million dollars. In order to estimate the true cost savings of a physical consolidation, the anticipated savings would need to be clearly defined and amortized to understand how long it would take to recover the construction and equipment costs. A distinct advantage of virtual consolidation is the geographic redundancy of three locations. A single location has increased vulnerability in the event of a catastrophic event.

The virtual consolidation concept enables the three cities' 9-1-1 centers to operate on the same technology platform and networks for core public safety applications, the 9-1-1 phone system and a shared radio frequency. The first phase of this strategy is the joint acquisition of public safety applications that will operate on a single network. These applications include Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD), Records Management (RMS) and mobile and in-field reporting systems. A vendor has been selected for this project and project implementation is anticipated to begin in the fourth quarter of 2011.

The second phase of this concept is the installation of a common radio channel covering all three cities. A frequency has been identified and licensed by the FCC and an RFP for construction has been issued. Grant funding through the State Homeland Security Grant program has been secured for this project.

The third phase of virtual consolidation is the design and deployment of a common 9-1-1 phone system that will allow the three cities to load share and have redundant capabilities. Initial discussions with potential providers have been initiated and implementation is anticipated for 2012. The State 9-1-1 Emergency Communications Office provides the funding for this project.

Leveraging this shared technology will enable the cities to increase efficiency, share resources and reduce costs.

The Grand Jury report is accurate in describing the duplication of resources by multiple agencies across the County. Each dispatch center allocates staffing based on peak call volume and demand and must be prepared to handle major incidents such as a multi-alarm fire or a large scale police response 24/7.

On a shared system, duplication would be reduced in a number of areas. Staffing adjustments based on shared capabilities would reduce overtime for sick calls and, potentially, the number of FTE positions. The overall staffing for three physically separate centers based on the tri-city activity level is inherently complex but each city would no longer be required to staff for the worst possible scenario. For example, if Palo Alto was working a 3 alarm fire, incoming 9-1-1 calls could be routed to Mountain View or Los Altos. The other agencies could create calls-for-service in the shared computer aided dispatch (CAD) system and dispatch Palo Alto responders over the shared radio frequency, thus freeing Palo Alto personnel to focus exclusively on the critical Fire event.

In addition, the shared technology will facilitate the use of resources outside of the geographic boundaries of each individual city. The enhanced situational awareness the technology provides will allow the dispatch of the closest available Police or Fire resource regardless of jurisdiction. These capabilities will also provide the opportunity to pursue true boundary drops for Fire response districts, initially between Palo Alto and Mountain View and possibly with County Fire in Los Altos.

The Grand Jury's concerns about delayed EMS responses and the transfer of EMS calls to County Communications are not applicable to Palo Alto as Palo Alto Fire provides its own EMS services including ambulances. Palo Alto Communications dispatches EMS resources and does not transfer callers to County Communications. A county-wide CAD to CAD interoperability project has the potential to reduce EMS response times for the other participating cities.

The tri-city CAD system will allow the three agencies to create common response algorithms that insure the correct allocation of resources to joint response incidents and precludes the duplication of efforts.

The radio communication concerns expressed by the Grand Jury continue to be an issue not only for Santa Clara County but for the State and the County as a whole. The Department concurs with the recommendations that all three cities continue to participate in the Silicon Valley Regional Interoperability Authority (SVRIA) in an effort to provide a long term solution to radio issues in Santa Clara County. Palo Alto, Mountain View and Los Altos have representatives on various working committees of the JPA. The aforementioned regional radio channel under development solves Police communication issues in the short term between the three Cities.

The radio channel provides a critical communication link between the Police units and allows for better coordination of joint responses or major events in the region.

There are number of other issues identified in the Grand Jury Report. The report cites the maintenance of back-up power as an additional expense necessitated by the need for continuity of operations in the dispatch centers. While this true, most Cities have other critical technology infrastructure and services that require an Uninterrupted Power Supply (UPS) and generators. Elimination of the Communications Centers would not eliminate the need for these redundant power sources.

The report identifies County Communications as the "Alternate Answering Point" for most Santa Clara County 9-1-1 centers. This back-up design is vulnerable in the event of a major catastrophe such as an earthquake when multiple centers could cease operations. County Communications is not capable of providing dispatch services for other centers as it does not have access to their radio systems. It is highly unlikely the center could handle the influx of 9-1-1 calls from several additional cities after a major event. The advantage of virtual consolidation is that the Palo Alto, Mountain View and Los Altos will provide redundant capabilities for each other. The technology is duplicated at all three locations insuring continuity of operations as long as one center is functioning.

Policy Implications

This response is consistent with City policy.

Attachments:

- Can You Hear Me Now Cover Letter 090111 (PDF)
- Can You Hear Me Now - Emerg Dispatch June 2011 (PDF)

Prepared By: Dennis Burns, Police Chief

Department Head: Dennis Burns, Police Chief

City Manager Approval: James Keene, City Manager