

**Minutes of December 16, 2005 Meeting**  
**North-East King County Regional Public Safety Communications Initiative**  
**Steering Committee**

Attendance:

Jeff Blake, Kirkland Fire  
Tracy Burrows, Kirkland  
Diane Carlson, Bellevue CMO  
Jane Christenson, Redmond  
Stan Conrad, Issaquah Police  
Brenda Cooper, Kirkland  
Gene Markle, Kirkland Police  
Ken Carlson, Bellevue Fire  
Tim Fuller, Redmond Fire  
Rosemarie Ives, Redmond

Debbie Huntsinger, King Co Sheriff  
Alan Komenski, Bellevue Police  
Marcus Kragness, Shoreline Fire  
Joel Kuhnhenh, Woodinville Fire  
Walt Mauldin, Mercer Island Fire  
Lee Soptich, EFR  
Dave Ramsay, Kirkland  
Karen Reed, Consultant  
Rick Gaines, EFR  
Ron Zsigmondovics, Bothell Fire

The meeting was called to order at 8:30, with attendee introductions. The minutes of November 18 were approved without change.

Under staff communications, Walt Mauldin noted that Mercer Island was briefing its Council on the status of this project in February and that it would be nice to have a basic powerpoint presentation to present. The consultants agreed to develop a base powerpoint document that could be customized for use in briefing Councils.

Karen Reed reported that attorneys representing Mercer Island, Bellevue, Kirkland, and Eastside Fire and Rescue had reviewed the ILA and were comfortable with its contents with two caveats: (1) the issue of whether this agency is/should be a legally separate entity; and (2) whether the ILA could be amended by a supermajority (rather than a unanimous vote) of the governing board. The options for creating a legally separate entity are either to form as a non-profit or as a partnership. Forming as a legally separate entity would give participating agencies additional insulation from liability risks and would allow for the agency to hire employees and sign contracts. Cascade Water Alliance has been formed as a separate non-profit agency. It was noted that ValleyCom hires and signs contracts, even though it is technically not a legally separate entity. It was also noted that Bellevue Dispatch has not been sued in the last 20 years.

The other option is to operate under an interlocal agreement where one of the member organizations acts as the host organization for the purpose of hiring employees and/or holding title to property. This is the operational model for EPSCA.

David Ramsay pointed out that one downside to the creation of a legally separate entity was that current dispatch employees may have doubts about the security and stability of such a brand new agency. That security of knowing where your paycheck is coming from and what your benefits are is critical to keeping dispatch employees during the transition period. Mark Nelson suggested that there is strength and stability inherent in a new organization that has the backing of many participants. Lee Soptich pointed out that under the interlocal model, the employer of record is taking on a big responsibility—particularly if other participants have the sense that they can just walk away from the agency if problems crop up.

Karen Reed requested that each participating agency determine its position on the issue of whether or not to create a separate legal entity before the January 20<sup>th</sup> Steering Committee meeting. A summary of the pros and cons of creating a separate legal entity are summarized in the cover memo the ILA. The group will make a decision on this issue at the January Steering Committee meeting.

The attorneys also raised the issue as to whether or not a supermajority of the Governing Board should be able to amend the ILA. The current draft requires a unanimous agreement of the Governing Board to amend the ILA. Brenda Cooper cautioned against a unanimity requirement and brought up the experience of E-Gov where one smaller agency has been able to hold up progress on an issue because of a requirement for unanimity. As proposed in the ILA, any required supermajority vote would have to pass a two-pronged test: it must be a supermajority by weighted vote and a supermajority under a one agency, one vote criteria. The Steering Committee will decide this issue at the January meeting. In the meantime, each participating agency should develop a position on this issue.

The ILA also includes a general dispute resolution section that sets out the process for mediation of disputes and then requires binding arbitration if the mediation fails to reach resolution to the issue. Diane Carlson expressed some concern about the requirement for binding arbitration. Participating agencies should submit comments on the ILA, including the separate legal entity and supermajority vote issues, to Karen Reed by January 13<sup>th</sup>.

Mark Nelson reviewed a summary of a proposed Console Configuration based on call volumes and loading for the start-up period, phases 1-3, and the ultimate configuration of agencies. Mark stated that the immediate efficiency that can be achieved with the consolidation to a regional agency is in the call receiver position. Alan Komenski brought up the point that the proposed console configuration assumes that we currently have adequate staffing – which may not be the case. Jeff Blake suggested that the proposed staffing model should not build in cost savings that may deteriorate service from current levels, but also it may not be appropriate to try to fix all existing deficiencies through this process. Jim Montgomery cautioned that we should not underestimate the staffing costs of the regional center. There was a general feeling that the proposed console configuration was probably too lean on staffing. The Facilities Sub-Committee will review the proposal more carefully and give feedback on it.

Mayor Ives initiated a discussion of the level of service that will be offered by the regional agency. She urged the group to consider that by investing in the future, it may cost more but have a better outcome. Lee Soptich pointed out that it Eastside Fire and Rescue has done an independent study to determine the cost impacts of its consolidation. While the study did not show significant cost savings, it did demonstrate that there had been significant cost avoidance – costs that the participating agencies would have had to incur if they had not consolidated.

Mark Nelson stated that the issue of whether the dispatchers are cross-trained or not is critical to the development of cost scenarios for the agency. It was agreed that the police and fire sub-committees would meet separately in the first week of January to develop their recommendations on the cross-training and console configuration issues. Then, those subcommittees would meet jointly with the facilities and operations subcommittee to develop a recommendation for the steering committee. Mark Nelson pointed out that, as a rule of thumb, staffing costs would be approximately 30% higher if the dispatch staff were not cross-trained. Jeff Blake stated that it would be important for the subcommittees to determine what service is needed – then cost it out and determine whether it can work financially.

Mark Nelson introduced the draft Invitation to Submit Cost Information for the Northeast King County Regional Emergency Communications Center. It was agreed that the square footage requirements for the facility should be added to the document. Mark requested that additional comments be submitted by December 23<sup>rd</sup> so that the invitation could go out to the participating jurisdictions as soon as possible. Jane Christensen suggested that a search using nwproperties.net could generate a list of potential properties. The group established a January 17<sup>th</sup> deadline for submittal of cost information from interested parties.

Tracy Burrows gave a report from the first meeting of the Human Resources subcommittee. Mercer Island's recent experience with dispatch transition has pointed out a number of issues that we need to anticipate related to job security and benefits. The Committee is focused on developing a transition benefits package that addresses major concerns and includes incentives to stay on through the transition. The committee will seriously explore the option of offering a position to all current dispatchers. Even if that results in over-staffing initially, routine attrition will remedy that situation. This option may also include a probationary period for all transition employees. It was mentioned that the Medic One transition could provide a model for this agency. The turnover rate in dispatch centers was discussed. Mark Nelson offered to send out the recent APCO study entitled "Project Retain" that addressed this issue.

Marcus Kragness requested more feedback on why the tabletop exercise was cancelled. Jeff Blake explained that, as the planning group was developing the tabletop scenario, two issues arose that contributed to the decision: 1) there were many questions as to whether the current 800-megahertz radio system could support the operational changes related to incident-based dispatch that had been proposed, and; 2) there were concerns that trying to adopt a new model of dispatch at this time could slow the progress of the project down considerably. Mayor Ives raised concerns that the decision to cancel the tabletop exercise was made without consulting the larger group and that its results could have been very beneficial in improving interoperability and communications. There was agreement that these were important issues and that there should be continuing discussion on developing a common understanding of how Fire/EMS and Police each operate at an incident and whether there are improvements that can be made at the street level and in the dispatch operation to improve coordination and communications.

The meeting adjourned at 10:50.