



TOWN OF ADAMS SELECT BOARD WORKSHOP MINUTES

WEDNESDAY, December 9, 2015 – 7:00 PM
ADAMS VISITORS CENTER, 3 HOOSAC ST, ADAMS, MA 01220

On the above date the **Board of Selectmen** and held a meeting at the **Adams Visitors Center** at 7:00 p.m.

Chairman Richard Blanchard presided the meeting. Present were **Vice Chairman Jeffrey Snoonian**, **Members Joseph Nowak, Arthur Harrington, and John Duval**. Also present were **Town Administrator, Tony Mazzucco, Consultant Thomas Kennedy, Sheriff Thomas Bowler, Berkshire County Sheriff's Office Lieutenant Thomas Grady, and Police Chief Richard Tarsa**.

The Select Board Meeting was called to order at 7:03 p.m.

OFFICIAL BUSINESS

Dispatch Regionalization Presentations

Town Administrator Mazzucco introduced the speakers to the Board and the audience. Introduced were *Consultant Thomas Kennedy; Berkshire County Sheriff's Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Grady, Berkshire County Sheriff Thomas Bowler, and Adams Police Chief Richard Tarsa*.

Consultant Kennedy gave some background on the report that was submitted to the Town regarding the regionalization recommendation of the Dispatch Services. He explained the feasibility study and that there are nationwide and statewide efforts evolving around regionalizing 911 dispatch services. The latest focus is on video, text, and tweets received by the 911 centers, which will be implemented in a phased approach beginning in 2016. Through technology changes, GPS and mapping are now standard for wireless calls. Within the next five years wireless calls will be handled closer to those in the communities who are making the calls. Consultant Kennedy reviewed current staffing and the number of 911 calls received by Adams per day. In 2012 this study was initiated, and there were two issues then that have been resolved. The current recommendation is to regionalize. Consultant Kennedy explained this process would provide benefits to the Town of Adams by enhancing the emergency communications systems, progressing information technology and provide robust radio communications. There would be more dispatchers and a greater capability for handling large crises, at a reduced cost to the Town. The regionalization will provide information sharing through CAD, record system management and database sharing. He expressed it was his strong recommendation to regionalize at this time.

Berkshire County Sheriff's Office Lieutenant Colonel Grady explained he currently oversees the 911 Center that Adams is proposed to merge into. The 911 Dispatch Center is a state agency which formed at the request of the Berkshire County Police Chiefs. He invited the Board of Selectmen to visit the center, talk with staff, and to see the equipment. He explained he had attended several meetings regarding the consideration to regionalize the dispatch center and expressed full respect for Fire Chief Goyette, Police Chief Tarsa, and Adams Ambulance personnel. He stated he was there to answer any questions the public or the Board had regarding the center.

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TOWN OF ADAMS

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Chief Tarsa explained that it was his original intention to make Adams Police Dispatch the *Northern Berkshire Regional Dispatch Center*, but discovered it was not possible. North Adams is not positioned add another community or they may lose their current 911 funding. He explained he looked at this situation extensively and found the IMC software hub that was necessary was very expensive. It would require the current Dispatch Center to upgrade its software and communication systems at a significant cost to the Town. He explained the quality of service and technology would be assured in a regional center and the IMC database has full ability to locate cross streets and side streets for dispatch purposes.

Town Administrator Mazzucco gave a brief presentation that reviewed what each of the speakers had covered. He explained the grant application has been submitted, and if granted would not go through until at least July 1, 2016 or later. If the grant is not awarded, the Town will not move forward with regionalization of the services.

Public Q & A Period

Questions were fielded by the public on a number of topics.

Budget and Position Cuts

There are no budget decisions made yet, and the Town of Adams is not adding any officers to cover the station in the absence of the dispatchers. In the future, Adams Police Department may become a "dark station" where the regionalized dispatch center would monitor the lobby through video and receive calls from a callbox previously preplanned to be in the station. Non-emergency telephone line calls would be able to be answered by the regional dispatch center if the on-duty officer is not able to receive the calls. Currently there is no plan to roll over non-emergency calls to the regional center but it could be set up. Adams police officers expressed concern that vacation and personal time off would require a significant amount of minimum staffing and produce overtime hours. Staffing would be reallocated to manage the schedule and reserve officers would be put in place with funding that is already in the budget. The officers requested the Town keep the dispatch positions. Bylaws and collective bargaining agreements were discussed in regards to the manning of the police station and patrols after the dispatch center regionalizes.

Quality of Service

Citizens expressed concern about the potential for the regional dispatch center being too busy, forgetting to dispatch calls and leaving responders stranded. There will be no change in response time because responders will remain the same and the only change will be where the call is received and dispatched. One citizen requested a report on how often the regional 911 system failed. It was explained that technology occasionally fails, even in Adams, and there is a process to report and resolve failures when they happen. Human error is always present and errors occasionally happen by every dispatcher. Currently no statistics are kept to reflect a percentage of errors that occur. One citizen stated dispatchers taking the extra burden of calls would experience fatigue and PTSD, causing additional human error. Currently Adams Dispatch receives an average of five or six 911 calls per day and the increase in calls managed by the regional dispatch center would be minimal. If the trend showed a significant increase in calls, *State 911* would fund additional personnel at no additional cost to the community.



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Mass Casualty Incident, Natural Disaster and Mutual Aid plans would be implemented by the regional dispatch center and all protocols by the Town would be followed. There are currently twenty-one Berkshire County towns served by Berkshire County Sheriff's Communication Center. A citizen suggested staffing one shift in Adams with a dispatcher and having regionalization on the other two shifts as a compromise.

Radio Communications and Equipment

The current frequencies used by the Town of Adams would not change, and would not be worsened by the switch over. Citizens noted that they thought the police department seemed to be the only ones benefitting from the agreement. Additional equipment upgrades would be required without the regionalization and the grant would manage a significant amount of the cost if regionalization happens.

Cost of Services

A current Adams 911 Dispatcher said he felt the savings reported was inflated and that there would be no savings. The Town is not obligated to take the grant if awarded. Massachusetts is a "home rule" state so the state cannot force a regionalization.

A multitude of hypothetical scenarios were presented by the public to ask how they would be handled. The scenarios revolved around the topics of staffing, dispatcher knowledge, radio communications, budgetary costs, citizen and responder safety and response times. The speakers answered each scenario question for approximately an hour before the question and answer period concluded.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion made to adjourn by Member Duval

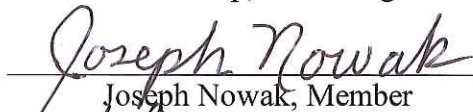
Second by Member Harrington

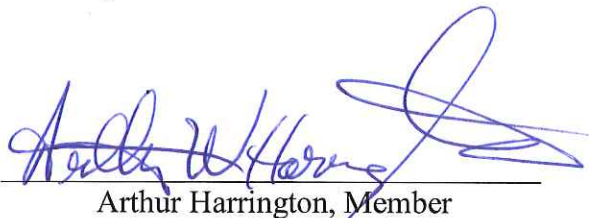
Unanimous Vote

Motion passed

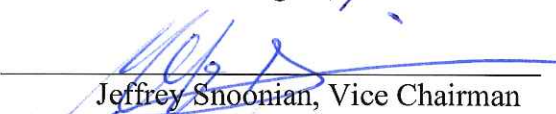
Select Board Workshop Meeting Adjourned at 9:59 p.m.

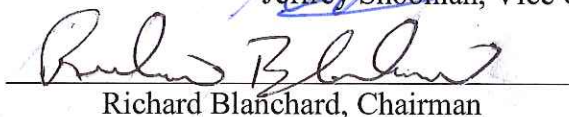
Respectfully Submitted,
Deborah J. Dunlap, Recording Secretary.


Joseph Nowak, Member


Arthur Harrington, Member


John Duval, Member


Jeffrey Snoonian, Vice Chairman


Richard Blanchard, Chairman