

PUBLIC SAFETY DISPATCH SERVICES STUDY COMMITTEE

January 9, 2012

The Dispatch Committee meeting was held in the Moose Hill Council Chambers, Town Hall, 268B Mammoth Road, Londonderry.

PRESENT: Committee Members: Steve Chasin, John Farrell, Linda German, John Velliquette, Ed Nolan, Steve Young, Lisa Whittemore, Lt. Tim Jones, Captain Doug Cardwell; Alternate Committee Member Brendan Burns; Town Manager David Caron.

CALL TO ORDER

J. Farrell opened the meeting at 7:00 PM

OLD BUSINESS

No old business to report.

NEW BUSINESS

The committee began new business by seeing a 10 minute video of the Derry Town Council meeting from May 3, 2011 in which the topic of combining dispatch services was discussed. Derry Fire Chief Klauber briefed the Council on the benefits of a regional dispatch service. The Derry Town Council unanimously voted to approve that the town manager be able to propose a contract for the Derry Fire Department to provide dispatch services for the Londonderry Fire Department for the years 2012 to 2016.

The only comment pertaining to the video was S. Young asking D.Caron if the information provided in the presentation was accurate, if which he responded that it was.

J.Farrell explained that at this point the committee has visited all dispatch centers and have obtained the needed information and if no one objects, E. Nolan was volunteered to write the final draft outlining the data that we have received and recommendations that the committee has for the Town Council. With no objections to E. Nolan writing the final draft, J. Farrell then asked if anyone would

like to collaborate with E. Nolan. J. Velliquette and L. German agreed to collaborate with E. Nolan on writing the final draft.

S. Young then made the committee aware of a data point that was not included in the previous meetings. He stated that three additional signatures were collected as part of the petition that was signed by 1200 town residents who expressed support for maintaining the dispatch services within the Town of Londonderry. He had copies of the three signatures and the originals were given to the Town Council. J. Farrell then made the point to the committee that the petition that residents had signed is a non binding petition, meaning that it was not checked by the Town Council and the signatures were not reviewed.

J. Farrell commented that at this point the committee has received and reviewed a lot of information and the committee members must have opinions about the data and he would like to have all committee members voice their opinions.

Capt. D. Cardwell was the first to state his opinions and explained that in his 25 plus year fire career this type of proposal has come up 3 to 5 times, each with the same results. He explained that the Londonderry dispatchers are more than just dispatchers, they are records clerks, receptionists etc and when it comes down to it, if dispatch services were moved to Derry we would lose all the other functions that Londonderry Fire Dispatchers do. J. Farrell added that in the Derry Town Council video it was mentioned that the Derry Fire Department would collectively charge Londonderry businesses \$57,000 to maintain business alarm boxes. Londonderry currently does not charge town businesses to monitor alarm boxes.

Lt. T. Jones spoke next and explained that what he learned from the last committee he was involved with in reference to combining dispatch services, (which involved investigating the possibility of combining dispatch services between the Londonderry Police and Londonderry Fire Departments, which was last year,) was that it can be done but there will be upfront costs associated with it and that it would take time before the town saw savings. He recommended that the committee not just look at cost savings but to also consider bringing in additional revenue by creating a consolidated dispatch center that can provide dispatch services to other towns for both fire and possibly police services as well.

B. Burns explained to the committee that the citizen petitions weigh heavy, in his opinion, and even though the Derry Fire Department does not have any operational deficiencies and are top notch, he feels that moving dispatch services to the Derry Fire Department does not make financial sense. Looking at the numbers he does not feel that it would be in Londonderry's best interest at this time to transfer dispatch services over to the Derry Fire Department. He is not comfortable with businesses in Londonderry being charged for alarm boxes by the Derry Fire Department when they currently do not charge Derry businesses. The services that the Londonderry Police and Fire Departments provide are fantastic, granted that the fire facility, as we saw, is need of physical improvements. As for the police side, he feels that there is room for physical dispatch center growth, by design, but that the design was for police growth, not fire growth. B. Burns feels that even though police and fire dispatchers have the same job title, their jobs are very different and that combining the police and fire

dispatch centers in Londonderry would not be efficient. He went on to state that the town does a good job planning for future growth and with future residential and retail growth expected, it is his opinion that emergency services need to grow as well, but not resulting with outsourcing our own services.

L. Whittemore said that like other committee members she was also swayed by the number of citizens who attended previous Town Council meetings and by the number of residents that signed the petition to assure that dispatch services remain in town. She cautioned that those who are considering taking dispatch services out Londonderry, that there will be costs associated with moving dispatch services to Derry as well as a cost to bring those services back. She explained that if service was contracted to Derry, we would have to give our equipment to Derry, and if we chose in the future to end a contract with Derry, we would then need additional funding to upgrade and purchase new equipment. Given those factors, she is in personal favor of keeping dispatch services in Londonderry. She does agree with previous speakers in that if we are going to do something, we need to do something that will serve this community for years to come. As growth continues it is not just adding a dispatch desk to the current center but planning for necessary space needed to maintain dispatch services in the town and service that will grow along with the town. She feels that as we move forward we need to be careful in planning for the future and the anticipated community growth, especially with Woodmont Commons bringing an additional 1000 families to Londonderry. She believes that we need to focus our energy on how can we provide the need for expanded services within Londonderry itself.

S. Young described how he can recall conversations in the past regarding the building of a new police station and how it was suggested that it would be safer to build the police station away from the schools in case a criminal escapes from the police department, for example. He along with many others supported keeping the police station on campus, within the municipal complex. He said that we can all agree that that was a good decision in that the police are close to the schools, as is the Central Fire Station. He feels that a dispatcher is more than just a dispatcher and when he needs a fire permit he still has to go to the front of the station and speaks with the dispatcher. He feels community comfort feeling in that the dispatcher knows him as well as the community and if it means that it will cost a little more to keep the dispatch services in Londonderry then he feels that it is worth it. If it costs a lot to continue to maintain dispatch services then that is a different story. He did like Lt. T. Jones' comment about looking at the future and potential revenue sources for Londonderry. The potential may be there to increase revenue by sharing services such as fire and possibly police with smaller communities such as Auburn and Litchfield, communities which may appreciate the services that we can offer. He believes that it would take a lot of vision, time, and study from the town as whether it would be feasible and can we do it. He says as we saw in our trips to the police and fire stations, the doorways at the fire station are too small and there is room for expansion at the police department but not the expansion that we are talking about. S. Young then went onto say that if the Derry Fire Department levied charges for alarm boxes against Londonderry businesses, he would be the first one down at town hall to discuss the issue with the Town Council. He continued by saying that a business such as Granite Ridge which pays \$6.4 million in taxes would not feel the impact of a few hundred dollar for alarm box monitoring, but a small business like the

Londonderry Times will certainly feel the impact of an additional \$300- \$400 dollars and based on the amount of taxes such a business already pays to the town he feels that an increase for alarm box monitoring is unreasonable. He feels that Londonderry businesses deserve a certain level of service and regardless of what type of business it is or how much the business pays in taxes they should be offered the alarm box monitoring at no cost.

L. German explained to the committee that she had thought about the issue a great deal and that she had visited the Londonderry facilities as well as the Derry facility and she personally finds the prospect of going to our own regionalized dispatch center to be the most appealing and the most desirable for the town. She feels that there are smaller towns that maybe delighted to become part of our police and separately our fire and EMS dispatch systems. L. German sees the need to look into the future and not just at the end of our noses. Londonderry is unique in its relationship and geographic proximity to Manchester/ Boston Regional Airport. It is a major airport that is heavily traveled and vulnerable as well as a 24 hour operation which Londonderry is tasked to protect. We also have the prospect of Woodmont Commons in the future as well as the industrialization and commercialization of the north end of town. These are all major projects that are current and ongoing that we must address as community involvement and public safety. Most desirable to her is to have a future expansion of our own two dispatch centers and to find creative ways to finance it rather than just having the tax payers bear the costs. She stated that because of the airport involvement maybe Homeland Security would opt to pay for some of the dispatch center expansions. She feels that we should explore such options and keep everything here in town as we continue to grow and we may have to absorb some of the costs but it will lead to future revenue.

J. Velliquette explained that we were charged with six things to look at with specific instructions. We were able to have background materials from studies that were done before. We are all aware how the townspeople feel about this and we are also aware that the results of previous studies seem to speak for themselves. He went onto say that the committee first went to the Londonderry Fire Station and that they run an efficient operation but are at their maximum physical space and that adding to the fire station dispatch would require an additional building. He also does not feel that there is currently room in the police station to handle a regionalized dispatch center but that can be addressed in the future if needed. He feels that the committee learned from the Derry visit and that Derry Dispatch operates similar to Londonderry Dispatch with the exception of the EMS element. He feels that there was fear among the Londonderry residents that if dispatch services were to be transferred to Derry, that strangers would be answering their calls for help. Through the knowledge we received, we became educated in that the two towns run similar computer systems and dispatch software and it comes down to having control over the equipment. The dispatchers knowing the town and the equipment and which piece of equipment can fit down which street is what makes our fire department unique. To go back, none of the Londonderry facilities are fit to handle dispatch expansion. He feels strongly about having to put too many people and equipment in one room and having to handle multiple emergencies at once. The crosstalk can cause a disastrous situation. His opinion is that we should maintain status quo on how we handle both dispatches in Londonderry. At this point we should not shift our dispatch services over to Derry but we should also plan for the future in the years to come as developments such as Woodmont Commons become developed.

S. Chasin spoke next and said that there were a lot of good points brought up by fellow committee members and we have studied all the options and that he is a big proponent of regionalized services at the police, fire and EMS levels. He explained that he currently works in a regionalized EMS dispatch system as well as a regionalized police dispatch system and has worked in areas where departments only dispatch themselves. He stated that currently in New Hampshire, there are only 6 fire departments that dispatch themselves, 114 fire departments that are part of a regionalized fire dispatch system and 293 fire departments that are dispatched through a regionalized police dispatch service. Out of 577 public safety agencies in NH, only 24 (police, fire and EMS) agencies dispatch themselves, which says a lot. It leads S. Chasin to believe that regionalized dispatch services are effective and he feels that it is best for public safety, personnel safety and financial security. S. Chasin then addressed the petition that was signed stating that although 1200 people signed the petition, that only represents approximately 4% of the town's population and the petition was non-binding and gave no details as far as costs, budget committee and Town Council opinions etc, it just asked residents if they wished to have the dispatch services remain in Londonderry or be contracted with Derry. He then questioned where all of the residents are that showed up at the initial Town Council meeting that discussed this issue. No residents were present at this meeting, or the previous meetings. He explained that our committee meetings are open to the public yet all of those that desired to have the services remain in Londonderry and voiced their concerns through the petition and/ or being present at the Town Council meeting never showed up to any committee meetings. As for the financial impact, S. Chasin feels that there would be significant savings to the Londonderry residents and that the fire department, as far as the town is concerned, would get some of the savings. He feels that the fire department could use that money to better itself such as buying new equipment, renovations to the current Central Station, or paying for fire personnel to take advanced training classes and increasing their levels of certifications. He feels that the fire department can become one of the best in the state and that will increase the candidate pool during recruitment for open firefighter positions. He then stated that he does not feel that if dispatch services were to be transferred to Derry, the Derry Fire Department would be overburdened, which was an initial concern. Londonderry would add an additional 3500 calls per year to the Derry Fire Dispatch which translates to about 10 calls a day or one call every 2.4 hours. If the Town Council does opt to transfer services over to Derry, S. Chasin believes that there should be an amendment included in the contract that current Londonderry Dispatchers have the first opportunity to be hired in Derry. He explained that the town already contracts out services such as school buses and garbage/recycling collection and those companies are responsible for providing the service and maintaining the services and its cost effective to Londonderry. His opinion is that dispatch services should be regionalized whether Derry provides that service or Londonderry creates their own regional dispatch center.

E. Nolan was the last to speak. He mentioned that there was a lot said and that he believes the sentiments of the other committee members 100% or to some degree. After touring the Londonderry Police Department as well as the Londonderry Fire Department it was apparent that the fire department dispatch center is inadequate, as far as physical space, and it's not conducive to a safe or efficient operation. The personnel make up for the inadequacies with their professionalism. He has

seen many other locations where employees rise above substandard conditions and make it a better operation. After touring the Londonderry Police Department, E. Nolan stated that the police dispatch area was 2 to 3 times larger than the fire dispatch area and yet the nature of the two functions is vastly different. While we were at the police department we heard at least 6 radio transmissions in which patrol officers requested the dispatchers perform some function. On the fire department side the vast majority of calls are EMS related and that the number of calls is going to grow as the community grows. If we are looking to combine the police and fire dispatch centers, we need to look at the vast differences between the two. As for the Derry, E. Nolan commented that the Derry dispatch area was not much larger than the current Londonderry Fire Dispatch area and they operate with one to two dispatchers throughout the day and dispatch for several communities. Derry is looking for Londonderry to come on board to help finance two dispatchers working on all shifts. In E. Nolan's professional opinion, in a small dispatch area, with several dispatchers, there is a chance that critical mistakes can be made due to crosstalk and a lot of activity happening in the room because a dispatcher can go into sensory overload. This can happen at any one of our facilities because of the way they are designed. He suggests that we maintain status quo for now based on the economy. When the economy improves he suggests that the Town Council hire a professional communications consultant that will focus on two areas. One area would be a combined dispatch center for Londonderry only, incorporating the police department, fire department and possibly the public works department into one facility. He feels that there would be some cost savings in this model once the initial startup costs are paid off. The other area to investigate, would be to have Londonderry as a central dispatch center for towns that are not currently involved with Derry, such as Litchfield. E. Nolan would prefer the model of Londonderry becoming a regional dispatch center as we move forward, yet either one would satisfy him as a town resident. His opinion and suggestion is that a professional communications consultant be hired to investigate the best option for the town, whether it be a facility that can house a dispatch center to service only Londonderry agencies or a facility that can become a regional dispatch center hosted by Londonderry.

D. Caron had no comment to make.

J. Farrell wanted the committee to understand that we are an advisory committee and that the Town Council may accept our suggestion(s) or the Town Council may go another way. As for what he has heard as the most powerful piece, as for the future needs of the community, is that the community is continuing to expand and that we need to plan now for our future needs and capitalize on future revenue.

D. Caron then outlined the next steps in that the committee now needs to write a report, agree on the report and present it to the Town Council and the Town Council would then decide whether to accept the committee recommendation or move in other direction.

J. Farrell then presented a timeline for the reports and presentation to the Town Council. January 23, 2012 is our next meeting in which we will review the report that E. Nolan will be writing with assistance from J. Villequette and L. German. The committee will finalize the report at a meeting on February 23, 2012 and the 3 committee members that drafted the report will present the committee's findings to the Town Council on March 5, 2011.

A motion to approve the minutes from November 14, 2011 by L. Whittemore with one amendment to the minutes. Motion seconded by S. Young. Amendment was to change wording on page two of November 14, 2011 in L. Whittemore's section to read "L. Whittemore said that she was present at our council meeting and was affected by the number of citizens who attended the meeting expressing their opposition to moving dispatch services to Derry, she is willing to go to Derry and learn more about their service. Change to verbiage was made by S. Chasin and the corrected version was sent to M. Lapietro for official record keeping. S. Young seconded the amendment and committee approved the amendment by a vote of 9-0-0. Committee approved the minutes as amended by a vote of 9-0-0.

Motion to adjourn made by L. German and seconded by L. Whittemore. Committee voted 9-0-0 in favor of adjournment. Meeting adjourned at 7:58 PM.