

PUBLIC SAFETY DISPATCH SERVICES STUDY COMMITTEE

January 23, 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. Velliquette opened the meeting at 7:00 PM, filling in temporarily for J. Farrell, who had to briefly attend another meeting.

OLD BUSINESS

No old business to report.

NEW BUSINESS

Each member of the committee was given a hardcopy of the final draft that was constructed by E. Nolan, J. Velliquette and L. German. After a few minutes to look over the report, J. Velliquette asked E. Nolan to describe the body of the report to the other committee members. He began by thanking J. Velliquette and L. German for assisting in the preparation of the final report. E. Nolan stated that the report format was typical of a study report, which first describes the background information regarding the formation of the committee. The committee was given eight mission items from the Town Council to consider and the focus was on the two that impacted the mission the most. The first was Duty #5 which was to study the cost, efficiencies, and public safety impacts of current dispatch structure with various models including:

- a. Combined dispatch services under the direction of the police department
- b. Combined dispatch services under the direction of the fire department
- c. Regional fire dispatch services under the direction of the fire department
- d. Regional police dispatch services under the direction of the police department

- e. Partnering with other public safety agencies to provide fire dispatch services
- f. Partnering with other public safety agencies to provide police dispatch services

The second was Duty #6 which focused on hiring a professional consulting company to assist, if necessary, and to obtain budget clearance from the Town Manager.

E. Nolan addressed that J. Velliquette and other committee members had established an action plan at the committee's first meeting which established the initial direction of the committee. The action plan was to review the analytical reports from the previous police/ fire committee (2010) pertaining to combining dispatch services and the reports from Town Manager D. Caron in reference to transferring dispatch services to the Derry Fire Department and to gain insight into the services provided by Londonderry Fire Department, Londonderry Police Department and Derry Fire Department. We gained insight into the various agencies through presentations and on sight visits. Captain D. Cardwell presented the committee with a 10 minute video on the operations of the fire department and that was followed by a visit to the fire dispatch center. Next we heard a presentation by Lt T. Jones on the operations of the police department and that was followed by a visit to the police department. Finally we visited the Derry Fire Department and heard a presentation from Fire Chief Klauber and John Goldman, Director of Communications, and we also saw the dispatch area. The committee then reviewed the information that was received by the three agencies.

Reviewing the analytical reports from the police and fire departments, it was determined by the police/fire committee in 2010 that the initial start up costs to transfer fire dispatch to the police department will be considerable. In 2010, the previous committee interviewed public safety officials from Merrimack, Goffstown and Amherst and a common thread was that public safety did run more efficiently by belonging to a regionalized dispatch model.

The next report that we looked at was from Town Manager D. Caron. The report indicated that Londonderry would save between \$333,000 and \$518,764 over the life of an initial 5 year contract with the Derry Fire Department which is \$103, 752 in savings annually. He explained that the major goal would be to redirect the savings to front line fire responders such as increasing staffing. E. Nolan did point out that the report also addressed Derry charging for business fire alarm boxes. Currently the Londonderry Fire Department does not charge Londonderry businesses for alarm box monitoring. Derry would charge each business \$300 annually, which is a form of taxation. If this fee was deducted from the annual town savings then the annual savings to Londonderry would be about \$50,000. The study did not address resident opinions which resulted in dozens of residents attending a Town Council meeting in which many wanted to see Londonderry retain its stand alone fire dispatch service.

In reviewing the visit to the Londonderry Fire Department it was apparent that the dispatch area was cramped, extremely small and barely able to have one dispatcher function effectively. The room was filled with necessary equipment and the limited space would create cross talk issues if two dispatchers are working in the dispatch area during potentially busy times or residents walk in to speak directly to the dispatcher, the cross talk could create a risk situation.

E. Nolan then discussed our committee's findings pertaining to our visit to the Londonderry Police Department. The committee found that the dispatch area was substantially larger and more modern than the fire dispatch area. The police department has a considerably higher call volume than the fire department and again we found that there would be a high potential for cross talk based on patrol unit radio traffic, incoming phone calls, and residents walking in requiring service. This noise pollution

would also increase the likelihood of an error. If the police department and fire department were to merge their communications departments, the committee felt that errors would increase since the nature of the department functions are different and there would be many distractions. As far as space, the committee noted that if the police and fire departments were to merge the communications departments, the police department communications area would need to be redesigned to accommodate a joint dispatch center.

E. Nolan then summarized the key points in our visit to the Derry Fire Department. The committee found that the dispatch area at the Derry Fire Department is not much larger than the Londonderry Fire dispatch area. Derry Fire currently also dispatches for the fire departments in Windham, Auburn, Hampstead, and Chester. Derry Fire Chief Klauber noted that Derry is currently in talks with the Town of Salem for fire dispatch services. Chief Klauber explained that in accordance with national standards, the current dispatcher staffing of two dispatchers per shift in Derry would be able to handle 12,000 calls for service annually which is typical of a population of 70,000. The Derry Fire Dispatch would serve a population of 70,000 if Londonderry were to have Derry provide dispatch services. Those numbers would change as the client towns grew or opted not to renew their contract with Derry. Chief Klauber was asked about the \$5000 fee for capital improvements that would be billed to Londonderry. He said that Derry has plans for software and equipment upgrades that would initially be absorbed by Derry but then would be passed on to the client towns upon contract renegotiations. The committee sensed that the Derry center would have to be expanded or designed to handle Derry's long term plan of additional clients. The Derry equipment is current and has multiple redundancies built in. A committee member did ask about miscommunication or missed clarification in dispatching for another town, and Chief Klauber said that that has never happened and that there are dedication phone lines for each client town.

E. Nolan then addressed a DVD that the committee viewed that was of a Derry Town Council meeting on May 3, 2011 in which they discussed moving forward with plans to attract Londonderry to the Derry Dispatch Center. Several Town Council members suggested that both towns would save money and that there would be an increase in efficiencies for both towns. Derry currently operates with two dispatchers 60% of the time but that would increase to 100% if Londonderry were to join Derry. Chief Klauber discussed seeking outside dollars instead of using Derry tax dollars to fund the needs of the dispatch center. This is accomplished by charging a 10% annual fee to existing client communities upon renegotiations of contracts as well as the \$5000 capital improvement fee. Londonderry would be charged a 5% annual fee initially.

The next portion of the report was a summary of individual committee members' comments and suggestions. J. Velliquette recommended that instead of going over this section as a group, each member would look at their summary and confirm that the content was correct. These suggestions were given by each member at the previous committee meeting.

E. Nolan then addressed the section of the report dealing potential growth and development considerations. It was mentioned by members in previous meetings that there are several significant development projects underway or planned for the future in Londonderry. Possible impacts are the new airport access road which increases traffic into the community and could lead to development of the Pettengill Road area, the current planning of the development of Woodmont Commons, and the Interstate 93 exit 4A project as well as interstate lane expansion. Each of these items will have a significant impact on development, traffic and services provided by public safety agencies.

The committee then reviewed the evaluation of the dispatch models that we studied. The general opinion of the committee in regards to models one and two, which were combining dispatch services in Londonderry under the direction of the Londonderry Police Department and combining dispatch services in Londonderry under the direction of the Londonderry Fire Department, the committee feels that a combined dispatch center maybe feasible in the future and it may also be able to handle dispatch services for the Public Works Department. In reference to models three and four, which are regional fire dispatch services under the direction of the fire department and regional police dispatch services under the direction of the police department, it was the members general opinion that a regional public safety dispatch center is possible and it would be a way of generating revenue for the Town of Londonderry, as it is for Derry. The committee, except for one member felt that models five and six, partnering with another agency to provide fire dispatch services and partnering with another agency to provide police dispatch services, are not feasible and this time and would not be in the best interest of the town of Londonderry and its residents. One committee member felt that regionalization works and it is the way of the future and that Londonderry Fire would benefit if it joined the Derry Dispatch Center.

The committee has recommendations for the Town Council. We recommend that, in general, until the economy improves, the fire and police dispatch centers should remain as is. When the economy does improve, the committee recommends that a consulting company be hired and focus on at least two areas. The first being a development of a combined community communications center, similar to the one used in Amherst in which police, fire and EMS are all dispatch from one town dispatch center. The second item would be to develop a model that would provide Londonderry with the means to create their own combined regional dispatch center. In either case a stand alone dispatch center should be considered and housed at the Londonderry Police or Fire Department. We would ask that the Town Council retain the current committee to oversee the above recommendations.

J. Farrell then addressed S. Chasin who was the one member who dissented and did not agree with the rest of the committee. J. Farrell wanted to clarify the member's opinion in regards to the models that were studied and his recommendation. S. Chasin explained to the committee that he feels it would be in the best interest of the town at this point to contract with the Derry Fire Department. He noted that if the Town Council decides to keep dispatch services in Londonderry, then Londonderry should set up their own regional dispatch center as a way of generating revenue. S. Chasin does not agree with keeping the Londonderry Fire Dispatch Center as it is, a single dispatch center.

S. Young then suggested adding an amendment to the suggestions that the committee has made that will be forwarded to the Town Council. This would be number four on the suggestions list for the Town Council. He wanted to add a separate suggestion stating "while the majority of the committee, in a 8-1 consensus, believes that fire dispatch should stay in Londonderry today, the Town Council should strive toward a future regional public safety dispatch center. The preference is that it would be in Londonderry, an alternative location is acceptable with Londonderry as a partner in the operation". S. Young then made a motion that the Londonderry Public Safety Dispatch Study Committee adopt the final report dated March 5, 2012 and recommend to the Town Council the items in the suggestion list along with the addition of item number four which is the above statement. J. Velliquette seconded the motion to add item number four to the committee's recommendation list. Committee voted 9-0 in favor of adding the amendment.

L. Whittemore made a motion to amend the wording on the part of the report that summarized her recommendations. Her recommendation is the same and the content is factual she just wanted it reworded. E. Nolan added to the motion that he will amend L. Whittemore's section as well as any

typographic and grammatical mistakes elsewhere in the report. The motion to make changes to the report by E. Nolan was seconded by J. Velliquette and the committee voted 9-0 in favor of making the above changes.

L.German made a motion to accept the final report of the Londonderry Public Safety Dispatch Study Committee dated January 23, 2012 as amended. Motion was seconded by L. Whittemore with a committee vote of 9-0 in favor of accepting the final report as amended.

The committee will convene next on March 5, 2012 when several committee members present the final report to the Town Council.

Motion was made by L. German and seconded by E. Nolan to approve the committee minutes from January 9, 2012. Committee voted 9-0 to approve the minutes.

ADJOURNMENT

E. Nolan motioned to adjourn the meeting at 8:05pm, seconded by L. Whittemore. Committee vote 9-0 to adjourn meeting.