9-1-1 Report

To The

Lenawee County Commission

9-1-1 Review Committee

February 4, 2008

Introduction

In the fall of 2007 the Lenawee County Board of Commissioners brought together users and the provider of the county's E 9-1-1 to answer the following question:

"*Should the 9-1-1 Center continue being managed by the Sheriff's Office or could the Center become more representative to all the user agencies involved through the management by an independent county entity?"*

The representatives were:

- Sheriff Larry Richardson, Lenawee County Sheriff Department
    - Undersheriff Gail Dotson represented the department throughout the process
- Lt. William Kanouse, Michigan State Police
- Chief George Truchan, Adrian Charter Township Police Department
- Dispatcher Linda Seeberger, Lenawee County Sheriff Department
- Chief Tim Shaw, Addison Fire Department
- Assistant Chief Ryan Rank, Madison Charter Township Fire Department
- Chief Terrance Collins, Adrian Police Department
- Chief Paul Trinka, Adrian Fire Department

Through a series of meetings and two site visits to a dispatch center operated by a stand-alone county agency in St. Joseph County and a sheriff department run agency in Van Buren County members of the committee gathered information about the operation of centers who are presently using those different formats.

The following report is a compilation of information gathered in the visits, open and frank discussion by committee members and the general public at the committee's last meeting on January 7, 2008. The outcome of that meeting has been made public but comments leading up to the vote may leave Lenawee County Commissioners with some questions. Hopefully those questions can be answered.

The Profession

Dispatching over time has taken on new dimensions. There are many who can still remember before a telephone in each home a Gamewell box or fire alarm box on the corner in a neighborhood. Each box was numbered and each firefighter knew the number and corresponding location. Through bells back at the station a series of four bells, a pause and then two additional bells would summon fire department

personnel to the corner of Main and Maple Street. From there the person pulling the alarm would direct the incoming fire forces to the source of the alarm.

Similarly, when more and more homes were installing and using telephones a colored light would be installed outside of a police department near the major intersection in town. Now that law enforcement had vehicles and didn't walk a beat, when the officers at the station received a call for aid they would switch the light on. Patrol cars passing by major through fares would see the light on, stop by the station and then report to the scene.

Telephones, cell phones, satellite phones, radios, computers and pagers have all made these methods of dispatching obsolete. As the methods of dispatch have changed from a firefighter or patrolman hearing bells and looking for colored lights the role and responsibility of the person who accepts the calls now is required to have a number of skills.

1. The individual must be a communicator. Any person taking a 9-1-1 call must not only write down or key into a computer pertinent information about a situation they also must know what questions to ask at a time in a person's life when things are not going well. Are there instructions that a dispatcher can give to evacuate buildings in the case of a fire, lock doors in the case of a possible intruder or have an individual begin cooling a burn? That act of communication must happen quickly, efficiently, courteously and accurately every time. Since dispatchers are the first line of defense for a citizen in need it must be done correctly every time.

2. The individual must have knowledge of radio systems. Wireless communications in dispatch centers offer more radio frequencies than many dispatch centers have dispatchers. Knowing which one to use for any given situation is required of all dispatchers. Most of the agencies in Lenawee County operate on VHF radio frequencies but Michigan State Police and Lenawee Community Ambulance operate 800 MHz radios. Dispatch channels, operations channels and fire ground channels all require that dispatchers and listen to and respond on the right frequencies all of the time.

3. The individual must have knowledge of computers and dispatch software. Dispatch centers have integrated telephone systems with their record keeping or computer aided dispatch (CAD) software. The time calls are received, dispatched and completed are kept on these systems along with narratives about the call. In addition, dispatchers must learn Law Enforcement Information Network (LEIN), National Crime Information Center (NCIC) for their law enforcement agencies and many have learned CAMEO software for fire department response to hazardous materials scenes for chemical plume dispersions just to name a few.

4. The individual must have knowledge of computer aided mapping systems and local geography. Phone numbers, including cell phones with GPS enabled can relate a 9-1-1 call to a specific point on a map. From screening out false calls to assisting a caller who cannot speak, dispatchers have a ready means of locating where the call originated from. Enhancements to map systems could be information such as fire hydrant or water access locations, locations of hazardous

facilities in relationship to schools, hospitals or high life safety concerns and dispatchers all need to have the knowledge of their operation.

5. The individual must have knowledge of law enforcement, fire and EMS practices. Dispatch centers typically write manuals in conjunction with the local agencies they serve in what exactly it is they should do in any given circumstance. What type of law enforcement stops require backup, who is sent as a mutual aid department, what instructions could be given to a parent of a choking child before an ambulance arrives? These are only a few of the procedural issues that a dispatcher must deal with on a daily basis.

Site Visits

The review committee visited two centers November 13, 2007.

St. Joseph County E-911 Central Dispatch

The committee met with Andrew Goldberger in St. Joseph County during the morning. St. Joseph County has a population of approximately 62,400. The Central Dispatch is the primary answering point for all emergency calls in the county. The center is funded by a millage currently and revenue from the State giving the center a budget of $1.34 million. The county has 11 fire departments, two of which are full-time, 10 law enforcement agencies and two EMS providers. After hours dispatching is done for 28 agencies in the county.

Staffing is currently 12 fulltime dispatchers working 12 hour shifts, 3 working supervisors working 10 hour shifts and 4 part-time dispatchers, one assistant director and one director. The director and assistant director both operate as dispatchers from time to time.

One of the supervisors met with the committee as well. She had been a dispatcher with the Three Rivers City Police Department prior to the creation of the center. In discussion it was found that while her wages did transfer from Three Rivers her pension benefits did not which is one of the Lenawee County dispatchers concerns.

The center provides all records management software for law enforcement in the county on a New World/AS 400 computer platform. There is no charge to the agency for the software or maintenance.

St. Joseph County does not enter warrants for the court system.

Training is provided in-house with new personnel working all shifts. One person completed the training in 7 weeks but the minimum is typically 12 weeks or longer.

One of the driving forces of the creation of the center was Lt. Tilman Crutchfield (presently Sheriff of Monroe County). Mr. Goldberger was not director at the center's inception but started shortly afterward. Mr. Goldberger's understanding of the creation of the center was to provide better staffing, efficiency, cost effectiveness and to be impartial. Mr. Goldberger commented that he works for 2 boards, the 9 member 9-1-1 Board and the County Board of Commissioners. The County Board has the ability to hire and terminate the St. Joseph County 9-1-1 Director.

Van Buren County Sheriff Department

The second visit on the same day was with Jeri Taper, Dispatch Director of the Van Buren County Sheriff Department. Van Buren's population is 83,000 year round residents with a large influx of summer residents on the Lake Michigan shore. There is a secondary Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) in South Haven for the City of South Haven, lessening the call volume on the Sheriff Department. The center is funded by a 4% telephone surcharge collected by the State and from the county's general fund with a total budget of $924,192. There are 9 police agencies, 2 State Police Posts, 12 fire departments and 2 private ambulance companies. The Sheriff Department contracts with 6 units of government to provide dedicated coverage during agreed upon times.

Staffing is 12 fulltime dispatchers working 8 hour shifts on a seniority basis. The director is a working dispatcher as well filling in as needed and had worked a night/morning shift prior to our arrival. Despite a union/non-union situation there has been no conflict with the arrangement.

Software used by Van Buren County Dispatch is a custom software package that has grown over time. It has been very functional for them, cost effective and meets all of their needs.

The staff enters warrants and personal protection orders for the court system.

With the exception of fire department paging the radio system is on the State of Michigan 800 MHz radio network.

Dispatch policies for all agencies in Van Buren County are written by Ms. Taper and approved by the 12 member 9-1-1 Board and the users of the 9-1-1 system.

Observations from the Site Visits

Not too many years ago both centers were packed into spaces that were much too small, had old, outdated equipment and inadequate light and ventilation. Both centers operate from new or newly remodeled facilities. The centers are adjacent to the county's emergency operations center in both Van Buren and St. Joseph County.

The radio systems in both centers were current and had gone through series of upgrades to get there. Technologies such as automatic vehicle locators (AVL) were present in St. Joseph County and not in Van Buren. While this technology is not new it is still being implemented across the country. AVL allows dispatchers to send the closest car to an incident without polling or asking each patrol unit their location. This allows a quicker response to citizen's requests.

Both centers offer services to outside the realm of public safety such as after-hours request for public works departments, calls for child or adult protective services and similar functions. Neither center takes walk in reports of car/deer accidents or crashes on personal property unless there is personal injury. There is a policy or protocol to deal with them and the caller is advised what their next step is.

Both centers have directors who are civilians. Jeri Taper has 20 years as a dispatch director and has a background in fire and EMS. Jeri does not hold a rank within the Van Buren County Sheriff Department

but is considered a part of the command staff with privilege and pay equal to a Lieutenant. Andrew Goldberger has been working for over 30 years in communications starting his career in Ypsilanti. He is not deputized by the St. Joseph County Sheriff.

St. Joseph County has received the endorsement of the voters in millage renewals since their inception. Van Buren County is beginning discussion on moving away from county general fund money for operations.

General Concerns

In reviewing the material found on moving dispatch centers the arguments throughout the United States are no different than in Lenawee County. Throughout our committee meetings and during the meeting that was attended by the public the main argument was; *if it isn't broke, why fix it*?

There are 182 Public Safety Answering Points (PSAP) in the State of Michigan. 13 of these reside in a sheriff department operation, 169 centers are operated by other agencies.

One possible reason offered was that dispatching has evolved into a profession of its own, given the training, technology and scope of responsibility. A department created to be a dispatch center could focus on communications as their mission. Dispatchers in Lenawee County have no career path if they would like to advance within the department. While some are satisfied with that there may be others who would be rewarded by the responsibilities of supervision or administration.

The committee member from Lenawee County's dispatch center offered these concerns as an employee as well as members of the public attending the final committee meeting:

1. Loss of pay. Through any transition from their present location to a different department there is concern that they will be out of the deputy's union and pay will be cut.

2. Loss of pension benefits. There was discussion of dispatchers coming from Adrian Police Department to the Sheriffs Office and loss of pension benefits.

3. Loss of PA 312, binding arbitration. Dispatchers leaving the deputy's bargaining unit have concerns that they would not be covered by PA 312 during collective bargaining.

These concerns were beyond the expertise of the committee. The county's labor attorney along with the county board of commissioners and representatives of the bargaining unit would need to address these concerns.

In the past there was discussion at the Lenawee County ETDB level to change the present 8 hour shift to a 12 hour shift. In speaking with Under Sheriff Dotson while writing this report, the Sheriff would not approve the change because of current staffing levels. Sheriff Richardson estimated overtime issues would arise more often with a 12 hour shift if personnel called in sick. There seemed to be confusion among some of the committee members why the change was not approved.

The same is true for the proposed dispatch shift supervisor positions. Proposed by the Sheriff Department administration the positions were never created. A variety of legitimate reasons exist such as decreasing surcharge funds from land-line phones, rearranging the department to allow the on-duty sergeant the ability to offer more supervision and others. As was the case in the request for 12 hour shifts, the positions have not been created. In both the 12 hour shift and dispatch supervisor issue there was a communication breakdown between the ETDB, employees and administration.

There is a sense from committee some members that the dispatchers would like more and/or closer dispatcher supervision. While it is not uncommon for agencies to have law enforcement, EMS or fire available to dispatchers to respond to questions regarding calls, dispatchers would like to know on a daily basis from a dispatch supervisor what it is that needs to be done. St. Joseph County has the ability to supervise dispatchers with dispatch supervisors many shifts, Van Buren County handles it a little differently with the director coming in to fill shifts or possibly just "showing up."

The fire service has an interest in assisting dispatchers and in turn helping themselves with mutual aid requests. Box alarm systems, automatic aid agreements and mutual aid departments or equipment would be much easier to dispatch if a fire scene incident commander didn't have to remember who he had already called to the scene, who had been called to move up to a station or which department was on deck if things got worse. The New World Software used by Lenawee County Dispatch is outdated. A meeting is scheduled February 18 to meet with New World Software sales.

Emergency Medical Dispatching (EMD) is required by many counties as a standard of pre-hospital care. Ambulance calls for areas covered by Lenawee Community Ambulance are forwarded to a dispatch center in Ann Arbor. EMD procedures should be continually reinforced through training and used with all medical calls to assist bystanders in rendering aid to victims. Standard protocols are available such as Medical Priority Dispatch System (MPDS) or Powerphone.

Polling of units is a practice of calling patrol cars, finding out where they are and then sending them to a scene. Smaller law enforcement agencies in the county typically make dispatch aware when they are patrolling their jurisdiction. Chief Officers from those smaller departments would like to be called first in the event of an incident, rather than have Sheriff Department cars polled to see if they are in the area and then called.

The Emergency Telephone District Board (ETDB) in general is uncertain about their role, responsibility and authority in the oversight of Lenawee Central Dispatch. A work session between the representative from the commission and ETDB needs to be scheduled. The group needs to look at the resolution establishing the ETDB and the state statue providing for one and resolve the gray areas or rewrite the county resolution.

Conclusion

As reported in the local media there was no conclusion other than committee members agreeing that issues exist, need to be addressed and not be left unresolved. There is unanimous agreement that an entire staff of hardworking, dedicated dispatchers exist at the Lenawee County Sheriff Department. To

be the first one talking to someone on the phone when their spouse is not breathing, or to someone who wants to take their own life, their house is on fire or they have just been in a crash is not an easy task. A dispatcher does not have a truck to ride in during the Fair Parade, “cop” trading cards to give school children or walk-in blood pressure clinics to check up on senior citizens as the feel good things the rest of the emergency services get to do. It is the sincere hope of the committee that the Lenawee County Commission gives Lenawee County Dispatchers the resources they need to continue these duties as expertly and efficiently as possible.