

**ROSS VALLEY FIRE DEPARTMENT
STAFF REPORT**

For the meeting of January 11, 2023

To: Board of Directors
From: Jason Weber, Fire Chief
Subject: Fire Dispatch Services

RECOMMENDATION

Receive update on termination of dispatch services agreement with Marin County Sheriffs Office, review proposed alternative for new fire and EMS dispatch services and direct Executive Officer to execute letter of intent.

BACKGROUND/DISCUSSION

In November your Board was presented with the attached letter from Marin County Sheriffs Office notifying RVFD of the intent to not renew contract Fire and EMS dispatch services. Staff has worked on alternatives that included exploring options of creating a new Joint Powers Authority (JPA) for Fire and EMS dispatch services, as well as contracting with other agencies for like services. The Town of Fairfax which currently dispatches for Fairfax PD, Ross PD and College of Marin PD, does not have capacity to assume Fire and EMS dispatch Services. Partner fire agencies were not interested in exploring a JPA model. Marin County Fire Department which currently has a fire dispatch center has proposed an option for contract Fire and EMS dispatch services. This staff report provides background related to current and proposed fire and EMS dispatch services.

Novato, Southern Marin, Tiburon and Kentfield Fire Districts, the Cities of San Rafael and Mill Valley and JPAs of Central Marin and Ross Valley contract with the Marin County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) for fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) dispatch. In September 2022, MCSO notified these fire agencies of its intention to end the current agreement effective June 2023. Per the MOU, MCSO is only obligated to provide 180 days' notice. Detailed discussions with MCSO regarding the timeline and logistics involved in separating law from fire and EMS dispatch are ongoing. During the most recent meeting the Sheriff has indicated his willingness to extend the deadline of June 2023. The current target "go-live" date is January 2024.

Fire agencies were already investigating other dispatch models including a regional arrangement with REDCOM, Sonoma County's Fire and EMS dispatch JPA. MCFD and REDCOM jointly funded a feasibility study, performed by Federal Engineering, to assess the conditions under which Marin agencies could join the REDCOM JPA and take advantage of economies of scale such as shared administrative positions and technology.

One important aspect of a possible collaboration with REDCOM relates to its exclusive contract with American Medical Response (AMR) for ambulance services in Sonoma County, which includes the

subsidized provision of dispatch services. In June 2021, AMR informed the working group that should Marin agencies join REDCOM and given that AMR does not have exclusive ambulance service in Marin, dispatch costs charged to Marin would reflect increased costs for overhead and profit margin¹. Given these revised budget projections, and due to legislative and physical space challenges as well increased costs, the working group decides to set-aside the idea of a regional center until Marin agencies had established a sustainable dispatch model in Marin County.

Nevertheless, the Federal Engineering study provides useful information regarding the needs of a stand-alone Marin Fire & EMS dispatch, including a staffing and call volume analysis, which were used to derive the cost estimates below².

SB 438 (2019) would prevent the (sub)contracting of emergency call processing with a private-sector organization.

Enhanced Fire & EMS dispatch service levels:

A Fire and EMS dispatch center would provide the following service-level enhancements, above and beyond what is currently provided by MCSO:

1. *Closest resource concept*: An independent Fire & EMS dispatch would allow geo-tracking of vehicles so that the closest unit is sent to an incident, for faster response. Due to security and software configuration issues, fire and EMS calls are not currently dispatched using closest resource concept.
2. *Potential use of Emergency Fire Dispatch Protocol (EFD)*: Similar to nationally adopted pre-arrival emergency medical dispatch programs, this program provides consistent call taking and pre-arrival instructions for fire and rescue related incidents.
3. *Command and Control*: MCSO does not employ fire personnel, and instead calls staff as needed in the event of a fire or complex incident. With increased wildfire risk and accelerated rates of spread across the State, Command and Control would ensure faster and more appropriate response levels. Command and Control responsibilities would be added by Marin County Fire Department.
4. *Technology and analytics*: The current computer-aid dispatch (CAD) does not provide the following necessary features (this list is not exhaustive):
 - a. Integration with CALFIRE and Sonoma County's CADs, reducing reflex times for resources between Counties and the region, including air resources.
 - b. IROC (Interagency Resource Ordering Capability) – a federal system used nationwide for resource ordering during large-scale events such as wildfires, earthquakes, floods or other major disaster.
 - c. Roll-out of already purchased First Watch software for EMS and Fire incident reporting.
 - d. Support of Mobile Device Computing (MDC) and associated software integration such as Tablet Command.

¹ Under SB 438, Marin agencies are collectively or independently prohibited from contracting with a private ambulance provider. REDCOM predates SB 438 and is therefore exempt operating in Sonoma County.

² See Federal Engineering Feasibility study starting on p. 55

5. *Public Information:* A Fire & EMS dispatch center would allow for better integration of early alert functions in collaboration with OES, and the ability to utilize multiple platforms to ensure timely distribution of information to the public.

Governance:

Previous discussions included the option of creating a new Joint Powers Authority to independently manage the new Fire & EMS dispatch. Based on feedback from the Fire agencies, this option is no longer being considered in the short to mid-term. It remains a possibility over the longer-term.

MCFD will coordinate the provision of dispatch services under a service agreement currently being drafted. The main terms of this agreement include:

1. A financial advisory group will contribute to the annual budget preparation and year-end “true-up”. The group membership will include:
 - a. Marin County Fire
 - b. One city or town fire department
 - c. One fire district
 - d. One at-large member
2. Proposed cost allocation: Although the County’s share of dispatch events is 8-10% annually, the County proposes to cover 22% of the overall budget. Other fire districts, departments, or authorities: 78%.

Budget and Cost estimates: *The figures presented here are preliminary only*

The cost estimates below rely on several assumptions:

- All Marin Fire agencies currently dispatched by MCSO decide to join the new Fire and EMS dispatch. This assumption was confirmed at the November Fire Chiefs’ meeting.
- Costs amongst non-County agencies are spread using CAD activity (this is the methodology currently used by MCSO)
- The existing CAD license is reconfigured to allow for a split configuration between Fire and law.
- The Fire & EMS dispatch is co-located to the south of the existing dispatch room at 1600 Los Gamos.
- 8 dispatch stations (3 of which would serve as overflow / training)³
- Several staffing models were considered⁴. A conservative option for budgeting purposes is 12 dispatchers and 4 Supervisors, which would provide 24X7 coverage as illustrated in Table 1.

³ See Federal Engineering Feasibility Study p. 58

⁴ See Federal Engineering Feasibility study p. 59 & 60.

Table 1: Fire & EMS Staffing model:

	Supervisor	Dispatchers	Summer (8am – 8pm)	Command & Control Captains	Management (office hours)
Day 7am – 2pm	1 FTE	3 FTE	2 clerks	1 FTE	1 Director, 1 Technical Manager
Day 2pm – 7pm	1 FTE	Mon – Thu: 4 FTE Fri – Sun: 5 FTE	2 clerks	1 FTE	1 Director, 1 Technical Manager
Eve 7pm – 10pm	1 FTE	Mon – Thu: 3 FTE Fri – Sun: 4 FTE		1 FTE	
Night 10pm – 7am	1 FTE	2 FTE		1 FTE	

1. Estimated on-going annual cost:

The new dispatch service agreement will increase costs to all fire agencies above and beyond the current costs, by about 74% for County and 45% for the other cities and towns or fire agencies. This cost increase is due to the need for a fully independently managed dispatch center (including a Director and Technical Manager) and the need to build-in surge capacity. Currently in the County MCSO has 13 FTE assigned to Fire and EMS and MCFD has 3 FTE for a total 16 FTE. The proposed model includes 19 FTE.

Table 2: MCFD contract estimated on-going (annual) cost by agency (for FY 22-23)

Agencies:	CAD %	FY 22-23 MCSO costs	Fire & EMS dispatch	Differenc e	% change over current	Share of total on- going costs
Central Marin FD	10%	\$254,713	\$368,127	\$113,414	45%	8%
Kentfield FD	4%	\$96,248	\$139,476	\$43,228	45%	3%
SMFD / Mill Valley FD	17%	\$440,892	\$636,437	\$195,545	44%	13%
Novato FD	22%	\$576,572	\$824,141	\$247,569	43%	17%
Ross Valley FD	9%	\$225,338	\$319,114	\$93,776	42%	7%
San Rafael FD	34%	\$857,735	\$1,255,228	\$397,493	46%	26%
Tiburon FD	4%	\$115,160	\$163,226	\$48,066	42%	3%
Non-County subtotal:			\$3,705,750			78%
County subtotal:		\$615,045	\$1,071,250	\$456,205	74%	22%

Total			\$4,777,000			100%
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2. Estimated one-time operational costs:

One-time operational costs include 6-9 months of staff training time and implementation of new CAD configuration. The proposed cost allocation is: 50% County, 50% other non-county agencies.

Table 3: Estimated one-time operational cost by agency

Agencies:	24M CAD activity	One-time operational costs
Central Marin FD	10%	\$149,009
Kentfield FD	4%	\$56,457
Southern Marin /Mill Valley FD	17%	\$257,614
Novato FD	22%	\$333,593
Ross Valley FD	9%	\$129,170
San Rafael FD	34%	\$508,087
Tiburon FD	4%	\$66,070
Non-County subtotal:		\$1,500,000
County subtotal:		\$1,500,000
Total:		\$3,000,000

FISCAL IMPACT:

Annual ongoing costs for Fire and EMS dispatch services are projected to be 42% higher than current costs an increase of \$93,776 annually. One-time costs are estimated to be \$129,000. One-time funds are available in Department reserves to cover one-time startup costs. Costs for services would increase agency contributions as outlined in the chart below:

Cost By Agency – FIRE and EMS Dispatch Services		
Agency	Annual Cost increase	\$93,776
Ross	\$21,915.45	
San Anselmo	\$38,007.41	
Sleepy Hollow	\$12,003.33	
Fairfax	\$21,849.81	

Attachments:

1. Letter from Marin County Sheriff's Office
2. Federal Engineering Study on regional Dispatch Center (hyper link)
3. Letter of Intent