

**ROSS VALLEY FIRE DEPARTMENT
STAFF REPORT**

For the meeting November 8, 2023

To: Board of Directors

From: Dan Mahoney, Interim Fire Chief

Subject: Authorize the Board President to Enter into a Contract with Marin County Fire Department for 911 Emergency Communications and Dispatch Services Starting July 1, 2024 and Choose One of the Options for Funding the One Time Startup Costs.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Board President enter into a Contract with Marin County Fire Department for 911 Emergency Communications and Dispatch Services Starting July 1, 2024 and choose one of the options for funding the one time Startup costs.

BACKGROUND

Novato, Southern Marin, Tiburon and Kentfield Fire Districts, the City of San Rafael and Joint Powers Authorities (JPA) of Central Marin and Ross Valley (collectively “Fire Agencies”) contract with the Marin County Sheriff’s Office (MCSO) for Fire and Emergency Medical Dispatch Services (collectively “Dispatch Services”). In September 2022, MCSO notified these fire agencies of its intention to end the current agreement, effective June 2023. Collectively, the Fire Agencies asked for an extension to develop an acceptable alternative.

At the October 2022 Board meeting Staff presented a letter notifying the Department of MCSO’s intent to end the current dispatch agreement and not renew the contract for Fire and EMS dispatch services. Staff presented two dispatch options to provide the needed service. These options were a Joint Powers Authority (JPA), to independently manage “Dispatch Services”, and/or Marin County Fire Department (MCFD) to provide “Dispatch Services”.

At the January 2023 meeting Staff provided an update on the current status of dispatch options. Staff explained that partner fire agencies were not interested in exploring a JPA model and that Marin County Fire Department, which currently has a fire dispatch center, has proposed an option for contract dispatch services. The Board voted to move forward and signed a “Letter of Intent” relating to Marin County Fire Department providing “Dispatch Services”.

At the October 2023 Board meeting, staff provided a verbal update and reported that the Department had been working with our legal council to finalize the dispatch contract. Legal council has approved the contents of the contract.

DISCUSSION

The Department's current dispatch agreement with the MCSO is due to expire on June 30, 2024. The current “go-live” date for the new Dispatch Emergency Command Center is July 1st, 2024. The following will provide information on facilities, Enhanced Fire & EMS Service Levels, Governance, Staffing, Annual Costs and One Time Costs.

Facilities:

The current dispatch agreement with MCSO Communications Center resides in one room that provides both Fire, EMS and Law dispatch. Previous estimates assumed that the new Emergency Command Center (ECC) designed to provide fire and emergency medical dispatch services could be co-located within MCSO’s Communications Center, with minimal construction costs. However, upon investigation of space and technology needs, compliance with building codes and Department of Justice regulations (separation between civilian and law personnel), a co-location was unfeasible.

The new ECC will be built adjacent to the existing MCSO Communications Center, in an existing County building already built to essential standards that include an existing back-up generator, existing IT infrastructure, and existing HVAC. Ultimately, this significantly reduces the cost of tenant improvements. At the same time, this location allows the ECC and MCSO to maintain a shared Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD). A new CAD would cost approximately 1.2M. This option also reduced costs associated with the mitigation of construction noise and dust to ensure continuity of operations during construction.

Enhanced Fire & EMS Dispatch Service Levels:

A Fire and EMS dispatch center will 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 the closest resource concept.
2. *Implementation 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 from the field or home 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 (Dispatch Captain).

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 disasters.
 - c. Roll-out of already purchased First Watch software for EMS and Fire incident reporting which will improve access to quality real-time data.
 - d. Support of Mobile Device Computing (MDC) and associated software integration such as Tablet Command.

5. Alert and Warning - Public Information: A Fire & EMS dispatch center would allow for better integration of early alert functions in collaboration with the Office of Emergency Management (OEM). During extreme weather events an alert and warning specialist from OEM will be assigned to the ECC, ensuring rapid notifications. Additionally at the request of Fire Agencies, the ECC will provide early Public Information Services ensuring timely distribution of information to the public over multiple platforms.

Governance:

MCFD will coordinate the provision of dispatch services under the attached service agreement. The main terms of this agreement include:

1. An Executive Committee 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. The Existing Fire Dispatch Standards Committee will be utilized to review operational aspects of the Emergency Command Center and make recommendations to the Executive Committee.

3. Annual Cost of Service allocation: Although the County's share of incidents and population is 8.09 % and 8.59% respectively, the County proposes to cover 24% of the overall annual operating costs. Other fire districts, departments, or authorities will cover the remaining 76%. RVFD's share of the cost is 7.22% of the 76% as identified in Attachment A of the agreement.

The Annual Cost of Service formula is based on a blend of “incidents” and “population” data. Incidents are attributed to each agency based on the location of the caller, and only incidents requiring a response are included. This data will be refreshed every year. By blending incidents with population, the contribution formula reduces variation in year-to-year costs, compared to an allocation based on incidents only. Based on the contribution formula the annual cost will vary slightly from year to year.

Staffing:

Based on a 2020 feasibility study by Federal Engineering, utilizing industry standards to meet call processing times, the Emergency Command Center is proposed to be staffed with 20 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) employees. Current Fire and EMS dispatch operations in the County (MCSO and MCFD combined) utilize 17 FTE’s, without accounting for all technology services, facilities and Chief Officers’ oversight.

Annual Cost of Service:

The new dispatch service agreement will increase costs to all fire agencies above and beyond the current costs. This cost increase is due to the need for a fully independently managed ECC (including a Director and Technical Manager) and the need to build-in surge capacity.

The Department's current estimated dispatch cost for FY 23/24 is \$214,933. The previous four years of dispatch costs are listed in Chart A.

Chart A - Represents the Department's previous four years of dispatch costs.

MARIN COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT DISPATCH COSTS			
FY 20/21	FY 21/22	FY 22/23	FY 23/24
\$185.8K	\$232.8K	\$225.3K	\$214.9K

The Department's annual cost contribution is a combination of “Annual Cost Of Service” in addition to a 3.5% administration fee. The new FY 24/25 annual cost for the department is \$375,442. This is a \$160,509 or 74.6% increase from the current FY 23/24 costs.

Chart B - Provides each member agency’s cost increase for FY 24/25.

MEMBER AGENCY INCREASED ANNUAL COST (FY 24/25)			
Ross	San Anselmo	Sleepy Hollow	Fairfax
\$37,510	\$65,054	\$20,545	\$37,398
Total Increase for FY 24/25			\$160,509

**total is \$2.00 different due to rounding*

Startup Costs:

In addition to an Annual Cost, there is a one time Startup Cost for fire agencies. These are considered one time costs. The County shall pay 50% of the first \$3,000,000 of all Startup Costs, and 24% of all Startup Costs above and beyond the initial \$3,000,000. Public Entities shall collectively pay 50% of the first \$3,000,000 of all Startup Costs, and 76% of all Startup Costs above and beyond the initial \$3,000,000.

Startup Costs are defined as all expenditures necessary for the ECC to start operating, as determined by the County, including:

- Cost of MCFD-hired personnel working or training to open and operate the ECC up until the official opening of the ECC, including fees, salaries and benefits, cost of obtaining licensing and certifications, cost of performing testing and backgrounds etc.
- Purchase of technology systems and software, furniture, materials, equipment or services, including consulting, subscription, and maintenance services as operationally or administratively necessary for operating the ECC, up until the close-out of the ECC facility’s construction project, as determined by the County
- Cost of “Tenants Improvements” and all other costs related to construction of the ECC facility, up until the close-out of the ECC facility’s construction project, as determined by MCFD.

One year after the issuance of the certificate of occupation for the ECC facility, Startup Cost expenditures will be reconciled with previously invoiced costs. Within 60 days, the County will issue either a credit or an invoice based on final reconciliation.

Chart C - Represents RVFD’s One Time Startup Costs.

DEPARTMENT STARTUP COSTS	
Start Up Costs	\$481,594

Payment Options:

Public Entities have two options to pay Startup Costs. Either by “Annually Over 15 Years” or by “Lump Sum”.

Option 1: (Annually over 15 years) - County shall allow the Public Entity to spread its portion of the Startup Costs annually over 15 years. An amortized fee of 2% on the unpaid balance shall be charged for Public Entity wishing to pay Startup Costs annually over 15 years. Public Entities shall elect whether to pay in one lump sum or over 15 years by March 30, 2024. *(See Chart D for Department costs and Chart E for members' increased costs if Option 1 is chosen).*

Chart D

RVFD TOTAL COST FY 24/25 (If Start Up Costs Are Amortized over 15 Years)				
Annual Cost Of Services	Admin Fee 3.5%	Subtotal Annual Operating Costs	Start Up Costs	Total FY 24/25
\$362,746	\$12,696	\$375,442	\$37,194	\$412,636

If Option 1 is chosen, Chart E provides each member agency’s cost increase for FY 24/25. The amount includes Annual Cost and Start Up costs.

Chart E

MEMBER AGENCY ANNUAL COST (If Start Up Costs Are Amortized over 15 Years)			
Ross	San Anselmo	Sleepy Hollow	Fairfax
\$46,203	\$80,129	\$25,306	\$46,065
Total Increase for FY 24/25			\$197,703

Option 2: (Lump Sum) - The Department may choose to use undesignated reserves to pay these costs as a lump sum. The lump sum option shall be paid by May 2024.

SUMMARY

The following items shall be discussed and decided by the Board.

1. The attached 911 Emergency Communications and Dispatch Services agreement with Marin County Fire will need to be executed by November 9, 2023, for construction contracts to be awarded and ensure a go-live date of July 1, 2024. The Board shall consider executing the agreement.
2. A decision shall be made on whether to fund the one time costs (Startup Costs) at an amortized 2% over 15 years or to pay in a lump sum. The following options are available:
 - a. **Option 1** - Finance one time costs Startup costs at an amortized 2% over 15 years. If this option is chosen the Department will:
 - i. Pay \$78,000 more in the course of 15 years due to the amortized rate
 - ii. Members agencies yearly contributions will be more than just paying for the annual costs. See differences in Chart B vs Chart E.

- b. **Option 2** - Utilize undesignated reserves to fund the Start Up costs of \$481,594. If these funds are utilized the balance on the undesignated reserves will be \$1.4M over the 10% policy recommendation.

FISCAL IMPACT

Annual Cost of Service (ongoing costs) for 911 Emergency Communications and Dispatch Services are projected to be 74.6% higher than current costs, an increase of \$160,509 annually. See Chart B for members' contribution increases.

Startup Costs are estimated to be \$481,594. The following outlines fiscal impacts based on the Board's decision to fund the startup costs with either Option 1 and Option 2.

If Option 1 (Annually over 15 years) **is chosen**: An annual increase \$197,703 will be seen for FY 23/24.

If Option 2 (Lump Sum) **is chosen**: \$481,594 will be used from undesignated reserves, leaving the reserve balance at \$1.4M over the 10% policy recommendation.

Encl.: Agreement for 911 Emergency Communications & Dispatch Services with the County of Marin – **Attachment #1**
Marin County Sheriff's Office Notice of Termination of Fire Dispatch Services – **Attachment #2**
RVFD/MCSO 2021 Dispatch Contract – **Attachment #3**