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MEMO

Date: November 9, 2016

To: James M. Kreidler – Town Administrator
Board of Selectmen

From: Robert M. Eaton, Jr. – Chief of Police

Re: Recommendation to Merge Townsend's Communication Center with NVRDD

This memo is to provide Townsend's Board of Selectmen and the reader background on the operations, functions and management of the Town's Communication Center along with an explanation of why I am recommending merging it with Nashoba Valley Regional Dispatch District (NVRDD).

The Police, Fire and Communication Center are three separate and distinct departments. Prior to my arrival, each of the three departments had a Department Head. As Chief of Police, I am also the Director of the Townsend Communication Center. The Communication Center had a full-time Director's position and someone to oversee the technology needs and repairs of all three departments. Technology needs and repairs for all three departments are managed and budgeted through the Communication Center.

The Communication Center currently has two dispatch console seats and is staffed with one Telecommunicator. We currently have four full-time Telecommunicators. They are responsible for handling all of the general phone calls coming into both the Police and Fire stations. They are responsible for taking all 911 calls, emergency medical calls, dispatching both Police & Fire and they handle lobby foot traffic. Based on our calls for service and the recommendation from State 911, we should have two Telecommunicators working at all times (24/7). We currently don't have the staffing, supervision or the budget to meet the recommendation.

As the Police Chief and Director of the Communication Center it's my responsibility to assess our Police Department's and Communication Center's administrative functions, operations, responsibilities and services to ensure that we are providing our community with best public safety services while being effective, efficient and fiscally responsible.

Over the last six months, Fire Chief Mark Boynton and I have assessed the Communication Center's current staffing, software, computer equipment, servers, radio & antenna system and other infrastructure.

Public Safety is no different than any other facet of life or in private businesses today. Staffing and technology is the driving force and is continually changing. Unfortunately, public safety, like other segments of local and State government, always seems to be behind the curve when it comes to technology changes. For example, in the private sector a computer server is usually built as a redundant system and is usually replaced every 3 to 5 years. We have the Communication Center, Police Department & Fire Department all on one server with no redundancy and it is about 9 years old. There is no way to repair the server because the parts are not made any more.

The records management system (RMS) we currently use isn't the industry standard throughout Massachusetts and is not interoperable with other public safety agencies in the Commonwealth. The preferred records management system is IMC through Tri-Tech Software Systems.

The IMC records management system would provide the police officers the capability to take advantage of all available functions of the mobile data terminal (MDT) in each police cruiser. Improved functions of the MDTs would increase officer safety as well as provide the ability to better serve the community by being able to see calls for service in Lunenburg, chat with other agencies to exchange information and request *Cross Agency* checks on individuals they come in contact with on the street. Officers would also be able to complete reports on the road versus working in the station.

On the administrative side, we would be able to use the records management system to track our training records, personnel, payroll, budgeting, and better track and review police reports, make traffic accident reports available online, and provide an in-house emailing system.

The Department's current surveillance system is antiquated, with some cameras not working and video storage only good for about 30 days. There are a number of cameras that need to be put in place to obtain proper coverage of dead spots both inside and outside the station. We need to replace our recording device to provide an increase in storage capacity.

Additional key fobs need to be installed to increase the safety of the prisoner processing area and property/evidence room.

In the last two months, the phone system crashed requiring after hours emergency repairs. On two separate occasions we experienced problems with Verizon where Verizon customers were unable to call into the communication center.

Just two days ago we experienced a radio issue with two radio tower transmitter sites not syncing together. The result was poor radio reception in the east end of Town as well as radio interference.

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Due to the restructure of the Communication Center's budget, there is no full-time supervisor position to oversee the daily operations, functions, management and budget. A Sergeant has to been assigned to oversee these functions however, his primary supervisory responsibilities are of the patrol officers, working his shift and other administrative functions. We no longer have a full-time person assigned to technology needs of the three departments. We currently have a person who comes in once a week for 4 hours but our technology needs require a fulltime position and the proper budget.

So how do we address our staffing, infrastructure, technology and supervision issues to ensure we are providing the highest quality public safety services with no interruptions and/or mitigate the possibility of equipment failure and liability?

First, more money is needed to repair the immediate problems even though it would be a short term solution to ever changing technology advancements. It needs to be understood that there will be continual cost to keep the Communication Center's equipment and technology up to current standards. We would have to add additional money to fund two Telecommunicator positions per shift, as well as a Supervisor and IT position.

Second, we could become a regional Communication Center. All of the expenses to upgrade us to a standalone Communication Center would still be there along with the expense to bring on another department or two. Keep in mind, we boarder New Hampshire and this limits our outreach capabilities. The idea of being a regional center has already been unsuccessfully explored. Through our research it was determined that many small departments are having a difficult time merging with other small departments. State grant money is competitive with no guarantee of receiving an award. Once again, even if you are able to afford the repairs, there are still annual maintenance costs and revolving costs to replace and upgrade equipment, software and staffing.

Finally, there could be a merger with another agency or regional dispatch center. Currently there are many other towns exploring options that are available to them. Let me first say, to merge a communication center or to establish a regional center is no easy task! There are many moving parts, it's time consuming and it's very costly.

Through our research, we have found that the best option for us to continue to provide the highest quality public service, safety & security to our community and for our first responders is to merge with the Nashoba Valley Regional Dispatch District (NVRDD). Visiting other centers, speaking with State 911 and other Chiefs, we are confident NVRDD is capable of taking on our public safety needs with a seamless transition. They have already received over \$300,000 in funding to replace our phone system, surveillance system, replace and create a redundant server system and convert our RMS to IMC. NVRDD will post four full-time Dispatcher positions internally for Townsend Telecommunicators to apply. We will eliminate our RMS annual maintenance fees; receive 3 MDTs for Police and 3 MDTs for Fire every few years. NVRDD will provide some technology support and assume all costs associated with future upgrades to dispatch software and equipment.

If we merge with NVRDD we would be part of a communication center that meets all the applicable national & State standards in best practices. The annual cost for NVRDD services would be \$157,000 compared to the current cost of \$520,901 or the estimated increased cost of \$774,318. The increase would be required to increase our staffing to meet the standards and best practices.

Based on the information above, I recommend the following:

1. Townsend joins Nashoba Valley Regional Dispatch District for emergency communication services and discontinues providing our own communication services.
2. All savings, including benefit load from regionalization of this service, be reallocated for the next 3-5 years to rebuild and expand the emergency services radio communications infrastructure. Also, to rebuild, replace, service and maintain information technology equipment and systems.
3. The responsibility and associated budget of rebuilding and maintaining the emergency service radio communication infrastructure become the responsibility of the Fire-EMS Department.
4. The responsibility and associated budget of replacing, maintaining and servicing emergency services information technology equipment and systems remain the responsibility of the Police Department
5. The Police Department be budgeted for and granted approval by the Board of Selectmen to hire civilian receptionists to greet and assist people walking into the lobby of the Police station Monday through Saturday from 8:00am to 6:00pm

If the Board of Selectmen or the reader of this recommendation has any questions please feel free to contact me.



Robert M. Eaton, Jr.
Chief of Police