

SALT LAKE VALLEY EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS CENTER

OPERATIONS BOARD

April 28, 2016 – Meeting Minutes
VECC Board Room - 5360 S Ridge Village Drive
West Valley City

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chief Bryan Roberts; Draper Police
Chief Doug Diamond; West Jordan Police
Chief Phillip Quinlin, West Valley City Police
Chief John Evans; West Valley City Fire
B/C Wayne Edginton; South Jordan Fire
Chief Marc McElreath, West Jordan Fire
Chief Craig Burnett; Murray Police
Chief Gil Rodriguez; Murray Fire
D/C Terry Addison;
Chief Warren James, UFA

OTHERS PRESENT: John I. Morgan, VECC Executive Director
Jeff Monson, H.R. Manager
Gigi Smith, Police Manager
Andrea Partridge, Admin. Services Manager

This is a Special Operations Board Meeting to discuss the Staffing Issue Summary, Summer Staffing and Options and Recommendations.

1.0 Issue Summary

This is a follow up from a joint meeting last Wednesday where we discussed that VECC has lost a significant number of people. SLC Dispatch has adopted a new program where they are doing lateral hires, which affects Police Services along with dispatch. One of the things discussed last time was compensation difference, which is \$3 - \$4 per hour. One of the individuals from VECC who went over to SLC has been actively recruiting some of our dispatchers. The fact that there is shift differential, one individual from here will most likely receive \$5 more per hour, which is a good trade off even if seniority is lost. Addressing staffing deficiencies was discussed at the joint meeting. Turnover is between 11 to 24% and VECC pretty much stays within this range, with the exception of this past year. More and more people are hired, but we are running into training issues. The biggest area of turnover is within the first few years. As John looks at the options, one of his obligations is to throw everything out on the table so that the Operations Board can determine where we are going and what our direction is. VECC has been hit the past few months from the outside with the reduction in 9-1-1 fees. John has met with several different auditors but they won't even have reports out until September 30, 2016. Matching salaries with SLC has a delayed affect. Even if compensation is increased, getting people in and trained will be a several month process. There are immediate steps that deal with service that need to be taken. John put out some of these options so that everyone has access to them on Dropbox. SLC has gone three budget periods and has asked for \$500,000 to increase their staff by 10 people.

Jeff Monson explained the turnover rates. He compared the last 3 years of turnover. In 2014, VECC lost 34 full time employees, 15 of those specifically mentioned they were leaving VECC due to better pay. The start pay was raised to \$14.92 in 2014 and in 2015 it was raised to \$15.19. This year, people have left due to other jobs, the stress of the job, relocation, and family concerns. In 2015, VECC only lost 5 people due to better pay. Total, we lost 21 full time employees. This year, partially due to SLC and their lateral move, we have lost 11 so far, with 5 recently leaving for SLC. Several other individuals are actively looking at SLC to move over as well. With 8 years of service, SLC will top an employee out. Going into summer and the high call volume with reduced staff will be very challenging. Chief Rodriguez commented that everyone is struggling with employees leaving due to higher wages. The tough part is that each department is different. It's hard for him to throw more wages at employees at VECC that they can't do at home. John mentioned that it's not just about money, there are options in the middle that we need to take a look at. We need to change the way we do things such as combine channels on a permanent basis so that those calls in call taking can be answered. Dispatcher will not be required to call take while they are on a channel which will assist them in focusing on their channel.

Beth Todd explained that the current bid on Police is 19% vacancy, down 8. On Fire, we are down 3, 20% vacancy. Call Taking down 37% and 11 positions down. Part of the challenge is the amount of time it takes to train someone to get them moved through the system and onto channels. Call Taking takes about 13 weeks.

Moving to Fire from Call Taking is another 4 week to Tender and another 4 weeks to Sender. Police is service for 4 weeks and then a regular channel is 6 weeks. It takes between 8 and 13 weeks, once they walk through the door before they are on their own. In the current bid, most the people that have left have been mid-range employees who are on a dispatch channel, which is where most of the openings are currently at. This is why we have had to combine channels. Typically it's been on graveyard shifts. The next bid coming up May 8, 2016, to reduce the number of dispatchers needed, they took the 8 hours of Call Taking out of their 40 hour shift. We were able to reduce the number of dispatchers necessary from 43 to 37. For the Call Takers, we ran the annual call volume and created a new schedule based on the number of Call Takers needed, based on call volume. They have also blocked some shifts to even out the coverage on all 3 shifts. Training has been suspended unless it's required. Vacation time allowance has been reduced to 1 person each day each shift, unless the employee finds coverage for their shift. They did 2 Call Taking bids. There are 5 people in training right now and they are due to solo the end of May. They didn't want to have to do a new bid which included these 5, so they did a bit for May and then another bid for the rest of the summer. With the call volume for the Call Takers, they shifted some of the openings from Dispatch channels to Call Taking. We also have another group starting next week and they will be ready to solo mid-July.

John mentioned that when he first started here, they were bidding every 2 months, which disrupted many of our Call Takers. In that 2 months, everyone would have to do nothing but Call Taking, they would rotate into Call Taking. One thing they did was lengthen the bid so that there was a set schedule for a quarter, which helped fit into people's schedule a bit more. At the same time, in order to keep up on Call Taking skills, John required to do 1 day out of 5 of Call Taking. This seemed to be more acceptable. Police and Fire Dispatchers would do 4 days dispatching and then do 1 day of Call Taking. Taking the Call Taking time out of the radio channels, it puts in the extra day on channels.

Beth mentioned that normally, they open up a 4th Fire channel in the summer due to increased call volume. This year, due to the level of Call Taking staffing, we couldn't afford the extra bodies, so they have employees here during the same hours the 4th channel normally operates but they will Call Take unless they have to open a 4th channel. It just won't be automatically running. They went from 43 to 37 Police positions, from 15 to 14 Fire positions. Fire dispatch does have 2 hours of Call Taking per day per person which is the 4th fire person between 0900 and 0100. There will be one open swing shift, which at some point they'll have to move someone over and start their training. For the 2nd bid, they have 26 Call Taking shifts spread out evenly and will have 3 open shifts that part timers will fill in for.

Beth recommended that one of the first things we do is outsource our QA program to National Q. They go through and do the QA on the calls. Right now, we have 3 supervisors that work consistently on the QA program where they pull all the calls and then do the QA. If we outsource this, we can free up these supervisor and have them spend time out on the dispatch floor. They'll still have some responsibility to go through and review the calls, coaching and mentoring, that National Q has scored. We anticipate we'll be able to cover one open shift with those 2 people. The cost to bring National Q in for 4 months is \$28,000 and John expects that he would cover this with some of the recovered compensation from those individuals who are leaving. All supervisors would have a responsibility on the floor to answer calls. We would rebid the Supervisor bid and because of those leaving, most of the openings will be on the Swing Shift, we will load the afternoon Supervisor schedule to help cover those openings. We had one part-time employee come to us and ask if it would help for her to go full-time over the summer. Because of this, we are proposing to the other part-timers to see if they would be interested in going full-time in the summer to help us out. We currently have 15 part-time employees. Not everyone can do this and it's a short-term solution. One of the other thing being put into place is talking to the supervisors and limiting what they do to their top 3 priorities; coaching and personnel interactions, evaluations and those things they need to do, plus working channels. There will be a supervisor here but they might not be immediately able to answer things because they may be tied to a channel. Investigations and some disciplines will be handled by the Admin. support staff rather than have the Supervisors do it, to free them up to assist on the floor. Another thing discussed, although we are reluctant to do this because it's been tried before and backfired on us, is go to a mandatory overtime. It's there and it probably won't be one of the first things we do, we will try and do some other things first to correct some of the issues, but we recognize we might have to do this. The employees have been advised that this might happen. We are also looking into a part-time program, training someone on a part-time schedule, like a Firefighter or an Officer, to dispatch. The stumbling block with something that this is we'd have to bring them in at a compensation rate that wouldn't be our entry rate, but probably give them credit for their public safety experience. John isn't sure we could compete head-on with some of the other responsibilities. If we did this, we would have to bring them in at a higher rate, in his opinion.

John asked if any of these steps taken so far are concerning to anyone. He doesn't see that any of this diminishes the ability to respond to the agencies or to keep them safe. This is one thing that John is extremely concerned about is diminishing services to the point that the agencies feel like VECC isn't caring for those out in the field. These things are more logistic, which is why John feels like we have the authority to move forward with it. Chief Roberts asked if the calls going into queue could be identified as 9-1-1 calls or non-emergency calls. John mentioned they were both. He would like to triage the calls more to be able to put non-emergency calls on hold to assist with the emergency calls. Beth mentioned some of the internal process changes she would like to implement immediately include outsourcing to National Q. There are 2 kinds of abandoned calls; one where the call drops into a Call Taker position and the other is like a pocket dial where they hit it and hang up and it doesn't register into the system. These are both called back by the Call Taker twice to see if they actually have an emergency. We are talking about only having them call back once, which will save some time, and also making the Dispatchers more responsible for the abandoned queue call backs. They are relatively quick calls that they can call on and get on and off of them simply. There is also a pre-screen queue, which is everyone's responsibility. If a call comes in on a 10-digit emergency or non-emergency, the call will be answered with "Is this an emergency or can you hold" and if they can hold, they'll be placed in this pre-screen queue. Dispatchers are much more comfortable in taking these calls because they don't take too long. They will be expanding the "I" function. Right now there are 6 types of calls that they can use this on. It's more of a free-text situation, they use the Priority Dispatch software, but they don't have to go through every question. We have been looking at identifying, and we'll need help from the Police agencies, different calls where they can use the "I" function on. This will assist on speeding up the processes as well. Urgent disconnect is a script available to us in the ProQA software. If there are 9-1-1's in queue, instead of staying on the phone with a person until paramedics arrive, they can disconnect with the caller and go to the next call. John wants to discuss this thoroughly as this isn't just an Administrative decision and he asked which cases would they want the call takers to stay on the line. Anything in progress would need to stay on the line as they are collecting ongoing information, but if it's a call where they aren't getting further information from the caller, they can disconnect.

Beth wanted to discuss using the pre-screen queue for calls that come in on 9-1-1. Historically, call takers just go ahead and take these calls since the caller has called 9-1-1. In the process of getting the address and other information and then finding out what exactly has happened, if it's something that is not a true emergency, Beth wanted to go ahead and transfer these calls to the pre-screen queue. The pre-screen queue callers will hold typically longer. The current software does not estimate the wait time. However, they could be informed by the dispatcher or call taker how many people are currently on hold ahead of them. Dispatchers will also assist Call Takers with on those active calls by just sitting on the line until the officer gets there. They will just check up on the caller to make sure everything is okay, but they can also focus on their radio traffic, which also frees up the call taker to take incoming calls.

Right now, VECC runs 2 Service Channels from 1500 – 2300 from Tuesday – Saturday. One of the options would be to close 1 of the channels down until someone else is trained to take it. Usually if there is no one to man the channel, they are just patched together. Another suggestion is to pre-identify different channels to combine if necessary. Chief Evans asked if West Valley pays for the other service channel and if it will create an issue by closing it. John said that if it is decided to close, his obligation would be to go to the City Managers and talk about it. There would be an adjustment made if need be. Some of these things are things John has been considering for some time and now there's an urgency to push it forward. Beth also mentioned another option related would be putting out the shift on sign-ups for overtime. On the pre-identifying channels to combine, Beth and Gigi sat down and went over different combinations using call volume. She would also like input from the agencies. Also with combining channels, more of the requirements and duties will be defined for the dispatcher so that their focus is on the channel. One thing that John has been looking into is the chats between dispatchers and officers, not only the content but the number of chats. Chief Roberts asked John if he was letting the specific agencies know when something like this happens. John just started looking into it this month, but he's already been in contact with a few Chiefs. Gigi will be involved with this as well. Gigi also asked the agencies how important it was to them to combine channels with a bordering agency. It was more important to them to go off of volume. Right now, those agencies combined are Cottonwood Heights/South Salt Lake and Draper/South Jordan. Draper and South Jordan operate on one talk group where Cottonwood Heights and South Salt Lake operate off 2 talk groups but they are patched together. If needed, those channels could be split and placed with someone else. In dealing with call volume, West Valley has 2 channels and they do about 115,000 calls per year. The next busiest channel is West Jordan with 66,000. Murray runs about 46,000 and it goes down from there. John said these are contingency plans and he doesn't expect this to be normal operating protocols.

Beth had some technology options with the first having to do with the Fire channel. They are meeting with Zetron on updating the system and finding out what the options might be. Mark has reached out to Zetron to bring a representative out to speak with the agencies. Silent dispatch on medicals is moving forward. There are 2 Fire agencies that still use Fatpot and they are unable to do silent dispatch. In the configuration meeting, the consensus was all or none. This is something that we would like to move forward with. Chief Evans asked if those 2 agencies could borrow a laptop with Spillman on it. John would like to pursue loaning out laptops and Lin could just add in usernames. Siri, the automatic voice dispatcher, might be an option as well. On-line reporting, which Salt Lake City uses, off-loads some of their call volume. They refer people to their website to do on-line reporting for non-emergency issues. Beth also wanted feedback from the agencies on disabling IM's. As John said, it's typically one dispatcher talking with 10 different officers. Very little of it is work related. Chief Diamond doesn't want to take the tool away as it is very beneficial, but it can be dealt with on a personnel level. John will be doing random audits and will share with the agencies. John mentioned that the County came out with a group of people looking at 3-1-1 to try and provide a different alternative for many of the administrative calls that come in. This has stalled at the county counsel. They allocated about \$650,000 to set up the 3-1-1 but they wanted to do something much broader than just public safety, to include roads and animal control. John told them he didn't want to be answering all these calls as well. There are some County officials that didn't think it would help 9-1-1. John feels it could divert some of the calls and he would really like to still pursue it.

Finally, Beth discussed changing some of the services. They talked with SLC 9-1-1 and how they do business is the Dispatchers don't take any calls at all; none from the field or incoming calls from citizens. Everything is done over the radio. What this would do if VECC did this is free up some of the time to the Dispatchers in the event that a channel had to be combined. They would be able to concentrate on the radio rather than being on the phone. For some channels, officers frequently call in to speak with the dispatchers. Many of the Fire calls received are on channels 2 and 3 and they are for case numbers. Typically channel 1 is more business-related because they are the ones responsible for deciding who will go on which call. John would like to limit these calls to supervisors, Battalion Chiefs and Sergeants. They can receive case numbers and things of this nature over the radio. Warren James mentioned that if this is implemented and this is happening, the dispatchers will have to let someone know and not protect the officers. John would like to see this implemented within the next 30 days and he would like to see it discussed in the User meetings to reinforce it. Currently, between VECC and SLC with the cell phone calls that overlap into the other dispatch centers area, there are probably 3,000 calls that VECC handles for SLC and Sandy. Of that, probably 20% will be Fire/Medical calls. The agreement between VECC and SLC right now is that whoever answers the Fire/Medical, unless it's Police related Medical, they will keep the call. Beth wants to know if the agencies want to keep it as is or transfer the Fire/Medical calls over to SLC. SLC handles about 700 of VECC's calls monthly. John likes this agreement because time is of the essence when it comes to a medical call. Sometimes the calls drop, and sometimes SLC doesn't answer their calls, but it goes into a queue on their side. John would hate to take a step back by transferring calls. Beth also mentioned limiting service requests, to include things coming over on the Service channel or those channels that handle service on their main channels. John doesn't know how often it happens, but he requested that agencies have their officers do a service request if they are in a position where they are not safe to look at their MDT's, but if they are able to run their own UCJIS or plates, please have them start doing it. Agencies are also requesting the Dispatchers to enter their NCIC's when their records departments are open. Beth would like to funnel these requests back to their records departments to enter. Chief Diamond requested that if this is happening to please let them know so that it can be addressed.

John wanted to talk a little bit about the financial side of things. Jeff Monson mentioned that in talking about matching ourselves with SLC to shorten the gap, he put together years of service and the wages with VECC and SLC. VECC's current starting wage is \$15.19 and SLC is at \$15.62. On the top out end, SLC is topped out at \$23.93, which is their Dispatcher II and VECC's Dispatcher III. One other thing SLC does is a shift differential for shifts worked other than days. As much as John would like to compensate employees at a high level, like the agencies would like, he doesn't feel like this is the answer. From a management and administrative stand point, we need to estimate what has happened and what will happen in the future. SLC had 10 open positions, and we lost 5 employees to SLC. Going forward, we still have to look at what the market is providing. Our biggest problem right now is on swing shift and John recommends that we look at maybe a differential for swing shifts. If the Board would like John to run some figures, he would be happy to. SLC has a step plan where they have entry level and an increase at 1 year, 4 years, 6 years and then they top out at 8 years. At 6 years, they are currently around \$20.66. There is about a 5% difference between SLC and VECC at this point. Swing shift is where the workload is. John will run a few scenarios and will bring it to the next meeting. Chief Diamond mentioned that part of what's hitting us hard as well is the 9-1-1 revenue decline. It would be much easier to absorb an increase if this wasn't happening at the same time. Other options for revenue sources besides the agencies include verifying where we are headed with the 9-1-1 revenue. The State Tax Commission only audits approximately 2% and their audit includes the number of phone lines and what their revenue is. There needs to

be some sort of reconciliation at the end of the year. There are 3 separate entities auditing the State Tax Commission and the Telecoms, but that report is not due until September 30, 2016. The other thing is with one of the audits is looking at the \$0.61 and if it's adequate. The September 30th date gives us time to write new legislation that is justified by the audit results and John feels the \$0.61 should be increased. This probably won't go into effect until next year. Another idea is creating a Public Safety District. It would be a property tax, which would be consistent for public safety communications. Bringing in all of the dispatch centers here, everyone would be on the same pay plan. These are things that John is working on, but his obligation is to throw as many options out on the table.

John will put together a few ideas which include which items will be implemented and what the cost would be for the cities. Chief Diamond feels that a lot of the non-financial stuff discussed can be implemented and he would like to see a final list and when it will be implemented. On the financial things, he feels that it needs to be fixed and asked John to look at some of the scenarios. John will put together a chart so everyone can see in sequence what is happening and progress can be tracked as well.

The meeting adjourned at 12:37 p.m.