

**Walworth County Fire/EMS Study Committee  
January 18, 2018 Meeting Minutes  
Rock County 911 Communications Center  
3636 N County Road F, Janesville, Wisconsin**

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The meeting was called to order by Chair Dale Wilson at 1:00 p.m.

Roll call was conducted, and a quorum of members was present: Chair Dale Wilson, Vice Chair John Peters, Denise Pieroni and Bruce Vander Veen.

Others present: Dr. Steven Andrews, Aurora Health Care; Walworth County Administrator David Bretl; Rebecca LeMire, Village of Darien Administrator; Richard Brandl, Town of Sharon Chair; Justin Schuenke, Darien Fire/EMS Chief; Mark Ruosch, Village of Sharon President; Nicholas Maise, Sharon Fire/EMS Deputy Chief

Rock County Attendees: Rock County Communications Center Director Kathren Sukus and Operations Manager Brian Becker; Dr. Christopher Wistrom, Co-Medical Director of Mercy Health Prehospital and Emergency Medical Services Center/Mercy Health MD-1; Evan Link, Mercy Health Medical Student

**Denise Pieroni made a motion, seconded by Bruce Vander Veen, to approve the agenda as presented. Motion carried 4-0.**

Denise Pieroni distributed suggested changes to page 4 of the November 16, 2017 meeting minutes for clarification. **She made a motion to approve the November 16, 2017 meeting minutes with the incorporation of the changes as recommended. Chair Dale Wilson seconded by motion and it carried 4-0.**

**Public comment period** – Chair Wilson thanked the Communications Center staff for hosting the tour and welcomed members of the public to the meeting. He encouraged input and stated there would be another opportunity for public comment at the end of the meeting.

#### **Unfinished Business**

- Follow up on survey instruments

Chair Wilson recommended postponing this item to the next meeting when there will be more time for discussion.

Walworth County Administrator David Bretl asked if item 8 b. could be considered first under New Business and the rest of the items could be considered after the discussion and tour.

#### **New Business**

- Discussion with Rock County Staff on Communications Center and 911 Commission

Rock County Communications Center Communications Director Kathy Sukus said the centralized Communications Center opened in 1993. Today, the center is the 9-1-1 Public Safety Answering Point for 13 law enforcement agencies and 11 fire and EMS entities in Rock County. The Center has been remodeled to accommodate 42 staff and six shift supervisors, 3.75 administrative staff and IT personnel. Telecommunicators receive emergency and non-emergency calls via computerized Next Generation 9-1-1 equipment and dispatch appropriate services using a Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) and GIS mapping systems. They also maintain activity status records on resource units, provide emergency medical pre-arrival instructions, serve as an information resource to response units and the public, operate radio transmitters in accordance with FCC rules and regulations, communicate by computer with mobile data computers and maintain electronic data files. Rock County's population is 156,000; of the approximately 350,000 incoming and outgoing calls, 65,000 9-1-1 calls per year are received. The Center has enhanced 9-1-1 wireless, and 80% of calls received are from mobile devices. The Center has an annual budget of \$4.5 million, \$3.6 million of which is allocated to personnel

expenses. Sucus said funding originally came from a per activity/per agency percentage fee until 1996 when the operation of the Center was switched to the tax levy. There is a nine member 9-1-1 Commission that functions as a governing board. Five members, the Beloit and Janesville police and fire chiefs and the Rock County Sheriff, are permanent members. Other memberships rotate on a two-year basis and consist of representatives from town law enforcement and fire/EMS departments. The Commission advises on operational policy and procedures, but has no input in hiring personnel. As Director, Sucus implements her own work rules and procedures. Fire and EMS work groups have been established. Most of the policy recommendations come from these work groups and are brought to the Commission for consideration. If the Commission makes a recommendation that involves funding, Sucus forwards the request to the County Administrator and recommends including it in the Center budget.

Chair Wilson opened up with questions for Sucus and Operations Manager Brian Becker. Wilson asked if the Commission ever recommended a policy change that wouldn't benefit operations. Sucus replied a police chief wanted to change procedure and it was adverse to the Center's operations policy. In that case, a compromise was reached. In her 30-year tenure she has experienced few conflicts with the Fire and EMS departments. Denise Pieroni asked if the protocols regarding the Center are the same in each community. Sucus said all of them have to sign an automatic mutual aid agreement. There is no private EMS service in Rock County. A commander does not have to request mutual aid; there is an 8 minute timing rule and if the department doesn't respond within the timeframe, mutual aid is automatically dispatched. Bretl asked about radio service. All radios are VHF digital conventional. Seven people per shift take calls and there is one supervisor on each shift. Bruce Vander Veen asked about training for the Telecommunicators and call takers. Brian Becker said there is a two-week classroom orientation with a supervisor and a Telecommunication 1 instructor. Following that, new employees are assigned into dispatch and begin call-take training, which lasts approximately 8 – 12 weeks. They then are assigned a shift. Telecommunicators complete training with other agencies and are cross-trained in all duties in the dispatch room. Completion of training and required certification takes approximately one year, and includes medical training. In 2003, call-take positions were added to assist in relieving Telecommunicators of the non-emergency call load. Sucus said 9-1-1 backup is provided by Town of Beloit Fire Department, who can do basic dispatching until experienced staff arrives in case of an incident. During the day, relief usually arrives within 15 minutes.

Pieroni asked if Sucus would change anything in the process of building the Center. She replied more supervisory staff would have been beneficial, and staff benefits were inequitable compared to Rock County employees in the early stage of consolidation. Technical skilled customer service personnel are paid \$18 - \$21 per hour, and supervisors \$25 - \$30. There is a broader pay range for Telecommunicators to allow for career advancement. Sucus was asked about community input. When the initial consolidation occurred, there was concern about overall response times. The Center sends customer service surveys to various locations within the County on a regular basis, and public response has been positive, particularly because of the technology advances that have enhanced coverage and service. Becker said each employee receives a performance rating monthly, based on Center goals. Telecommunicators' calls are monitored frequently for quality assurance. In 2017, 95% of 9-1-1 calls were responded to in 10 seconds or less. The standard is 90%, and the Center has been above the average for several years. Dispatch averages for fire/EMS services within 90 seconds is 93%, and 98% of calls are dispatched within 120 seconds or less. Dr. Chris Wistrom, Mercy Health MD-1, said the pre-arrival information provided to EMTs at the time of the call and while en route is invaluable. Rock County has the third best survival rate in the country. Dr. Wistrom said the stand-alone Center with its advanced technology is the best way to operate, and eliminates the potential of favoritism in prioritizing calls between police and fire/EMS departments. The work groups hosted by the Center are objective and decisions are made jointly. Vander Veen asked what qualifications are essential for an effective Communications Director. Sucus said experience with operations is the number one priority, along with knowledge of business operations and

human resource aspects of supervision. She said position descriptions are available on the Communications Center website. Sukus recommended a separate site for a Center, apart from law enforcement and/or fire/EMS operations. Bretl asked if Rock County has the same issues with attracting volunteers. Dr. Wistrom said mutual aid availability helps in coverage, and the medical directors ensure the same affiliations and medical standards are employed when filling voids in personnel. Sukus added in addition to the efficiencies created by a consolidated communications center, opportunities for procuring program grants are greater. Chair Wilson thanked Sukus and Becker for sharing their expertise and taking time to answer questions.

A tour of the dispatch center was conducted from 2:30 to 2:55 p.m.

### **New Business**

- Letter updating departments on the progress of the study  
John Peters and Chair Wilson are finalizing the draft letter to all who replied to the survey, and he will send it to the Committee for review. He encouraged members to email him with input and changes.

- Discussion regarding next steps  
Chair Wilson recommended meeting at the Sheriff's Office for the next meeting. He will also ask Health and Human Services staff attend to discuss ways to mitigate ongoing non-emergency calls being placed to 9-1-1. A follow-up on the surveys will be discussed at the meeting, and also the results from the Waukesha County study, if available.

### **Public comment period**

John Peters commented the County has capability through ProPhoenix to implement Next Generation 9-1-1, but the educational component after implementation would take considerable time. Bruce Vander Veen said a consolidated dispatch center could be a good first step to demonstrate the benefits of shared services.

**Confirmation of next meeting date and time:** February 15<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 p.m. The Committee will assemble in the Sheriff's Office Media Room inside the Administration office area.

### **Adjournment**

**On motion by Denise Pieroni, seconded by Bruce Vander Veen, Chair Wilson adjourned the meeting at 3:07 p.m.**