

E911

In

MONTGOMERY COUNTY

for the Board of Commissioners of Montgomery County Indiana

By

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Of the many responsibilities of the County Board of Commissioners, none is as important as public safety, and no public safety function is more central than the Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) or the E 911 communications center.

As the current contract with AT&T, the E911 telephone service provider, approaches its expiration in July 2012, the Commissioners have a responsibility and an unprecedented opportunity to renew their leadership of the communications center function.

Findings

- The county commissioners delegated the PSAP and all elements of governance to the Crawfordsville Police Department (CPD) in the E911 Service Agreement, signed in 2002. As a consequence the PSAP is unidentifiable from the CPD and the commissioners do not have the control that goes with responsibility. The absence of effective governance and advisory structures has been a source of tension between the commissioners and the CPD from the beginning.
- Because the PSAP has no budget separate from the CPD, cost analysis and cost control by the commissioners is impossible.
- The advisory board is ineffectual. As a consequence, responder groups have little or no voice.
- Changes in technology, and in the communications industry, offer possibilities for PSAPs that were unthinkable 10, five, or even two years ago. These changes offer better, different, and less expensive options.

Recommendations

- The county commissioners create a governing board consisting primarily of elected officials from the city and county. The board consists of the president of the county commissioners, the president of the county council, the mayor of Crawfordsville, the president of the Crawfordsville City Council, and the director of Emergency Management Services. The board hires the PSAP director, approves an annual budget, establishes policies and procedures, and regularly reviews financial reports and activity. This recommendation presupposes the City of Crawfordsville wishes to merge the CPD and CFD dispatch centers into a county wide communication center. Otherwise, the county commissioners are the governing board.
- The governing board creates an advisory board consisting of representatives of the emergency responder groups and the citizenry as required by Indiana law and regulation. The advisory board provides regular and meaningful input to the governing board.
- The governing board assures that the communication center operates in the most cost effective manner possible without sacrificing quality of service. Potential strategies include, but are not limited to: multi-county purchasing, multi-county shift sharing, multi-county center, and

competitive bidding of major expenditures. In addition the governing board will assure that the PSAP utilizes appropriate technology and stays abreast of technological opportunities.

- The governing board assures that the communications center meets or surpasses all state, national and industry standards for facilities, equipment, software, education and training, staffing, quality control, policies and procedures and other matters as determined by the governing board.

Major Milestones

6/23/10	Accept the report.
6/28/10	Approve, amend or reject recommendations. Direct the attorney to begin work on the 2011 City/County Agreement.
7/1/10-12/31/10	Explore multi-county option.
7/12/10	Discuss next steps. Appoint the governing board. Hire consultants. Discuss City/County Agreement for 2011.
8/9/10	Governing board meets and appoints advisory board, writes governance policies and procedures, begins research/analysis on facility options. Commissioners sign 2011 City/County Agreement.
1/15/11	Decide on facility: who, what, where.
1/15/11-4/1/11	Develop plans and specifications for telephone service provider and director qualifications.
4/1/11	Send Request for Proposals to telephone service providers. Begin director search.
6/1/11	Select director. Award contract to telephone service provider. Develop budget.
7/1/11-10/31/11	Develop and complete operating policies and procedures. Purchase hardware and equipment. Interview, hire, and train staff
8/1/11	Sign 2012 City/County Agreement
1/1/12	Open for business.

History of E911 in Montgomery County: funding and governance

The county commissioners are responsible for providing a Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP). The PSAP receives all E911 calls, dispatches them to the appropriate responder, stays in communication with the responder until the incident is resolved, and maintains a data base of all activity. Many of these calls are life-threatening ones requiring the services of the city or township fire departments, the city, county or town law enforcement officers, or the county's emergency medical providers. However, some E911 calls are not emergencies, but instead, are requests for information such as how to report a stray dog, or to request a check of a Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) on a vehicle purchased out of state. (The "E" or Enhanced designation in E911 signifies that the system is capable of identifying the physical location of the phone line or call.)

In 2002 the commissioners signed a new contract with the telephone service provider, SBC, now AT&T. The new contract continued the long standing practice of dispatching service in Montgomery County by the Crawfordsville Police Department (CPD). Beth Sessions, the current director, has been with the center since 1988.

A PSAP's staff provides service 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. In Montgomery County, dispatchers work eight-hour shifts, usually with two dispatchers per shift. Staff includes nine dispatchers and the director. Ten police officers provide back-up dispatching service. Dispatchers are extensively trained according to standards developed by the professional communications association.

A telephone provider may provide lines only, or may also provide equipment, service and training. Montgomery County pre-paid a million dollar 10-year contract (expiring July 1, 2012) for complete service: lines, equipment, service and training. In January 2012, the commissioners will make the final payment on the bond that funded the pre-paid contract.

Typically, a PSAP is more than an answering point for E911 calls. Montgomery County's PSAP is also the communications center for law enforcement officers (city police, county sheriffs, and town marshals) and the fire and emergency medical personnel. For example, a law enforcement officer must call in to report a traffic stop. A stop may result in additional calls for wrecker service, license plate verification, or for a room at the jail. In addition, the communication center handles administrative calls for the CPD. In 2009, the Montgomery County communications center logged 98,427 calls of which 19,323 or 20% were E911 calls.

For the remainder of this report, we refer to the PSAP by its broader function—communications center.

City funds, county general funds, and user fees provide the funding for the communication center. State law controls the user fees. The county council must determine the land line fee, up to about \$2.50 per month. The Montgomery County council raised the fee from \$1.05 to \$1.60 in 2005. Land line telephone providers send the revenues from these fees to the county auditor. The state sets the rate for cell phone users. Until 2009, the fee was \$.50 per month; in 2010, the fee was lowered to

\$.25 per month. The state collects the fees and sends the revenue to the county auditor. In 2009, Montgomery County brought in \$446,685 in land line and cell phone user fees. The county auditor keeps the revenue in two accounts in a non-reverting E911 Fund. (Recent and anticipated changes by the state legislature will affect the income.)

In 2005, the county commissioners began to look more closely at their arrangement with the City of Crawfordsville and the CPD regarding funding and general oversight.

The 2002 informal agreement between the county commissioners and the city, divided the funding for the communication center into three parts: 1/3 county, 1/3 city, and 1/3 E911 fund. This informal agreement was flawed from the beginning because it presupposed that the City of Crawfordsville knew the cost of operating the PSAP and the other communication functions in order to allocate the 1/3, 1/3, 1/3 cost. Further complicating the problem is that the PSAP is operated as an internal function of the CPD and costs are integrated in the CPD budget.

In 2005, the county commissioners and the City of Crawfordsville signed the *Intergovernmental Cooperation Agreement for the Provision of Emergency 911 Dispatching Services by the City of Crawfordsville for Montgomery County*. The Agreement formalized the funding contribution from the E911 fund and from the county general fund, and created the E911 Advisory Board. The commissioners agreed to pay the city \$215,000 from the E911 fund and \$150,000 from the county general fund. Since then, the \$215,000 remains constant and the \$150,000 has increased by the same percentage as city employee raises, an amount that totaled \$192,423.00 in 2009. In addition, the county makes the bond payments, pays non-AT&T phone charges, and pays other technical and administrative costs. At the commissioners' request, the county council raised the land line fee from \$1.05 to \$1.60 to enable the CPD to hire an additional dispatcher.

Also in 2005, the county commissioners appointed Jim Capehart as E911 administrator to keep track of money in and out of the two E911 accounts, prepare the annual E911 report for the commissioner's approval and establish the additional payments to the city from the county general fund for county council approval. In addition he provides the county attorney with the proper amounts to be included in the annual intergovernmental agreement, makes quarterly reports, and takes care of other matters at the direction of the commissioners.

In spite of the provisions of the 2005 Agreement, and an agreement by the city to furnish financial information to the county, the communications center cost remains unknown.

During our interviews we asked, "What is the cost of the communications center?" We asked Terri Gadd, city clerk treasurer; David Peebles, city attorney; Charlie Coons, mayor; Nellie Thompson, city council president; Beth Sessions, communications center director; Mike Norman, assistant chief of police, and the county commissioners. No one knew the cost. We concluded that the communications center is so intertwined with the police department operations, with police officers being used as dispatchers, that the costs cannot be separated and reasonably determined.

However, we do know the amounts the county general fund and the E911 funds contributed to the communications center and PSAP operations in 2009. They are as follows:

County General Fund to Crawfordsville	192,423.00
E911 fees to Crawfordsville	215,000.00
E911 fees to bond payment	132,775.00
E911 fees to non-AT&T providers for trunk lines	14,059.00
E911 fees to Commissioners for administrative cost	12,625.00
E911 fees to Commissioners for technical costs: mapping, addressing	30,696.00
TOTAL	597,578.00

Furthermore, the 2009 city contribution of \$238,000 is listed on a budget document, likely prepared by the CPD for Commissioner Siamas, chair of the E911 Advisory Board. The resulting total operating cost of \$835,578.00 in 2009 does not include the cost of back-up police officer time.

The county commissioners believed that the Agreement, and the Board, would not only clarify funding contributions but also would provide more oversight. Although the Board was organized and met several times between 2005 and 2009, the language of the Agreement fails to deliver much oversight. In fact, the Agreement gave the CPD exclusive authority for all policies and procedures governing dispatch services.

The purpose of the board shall be to provide oversight administration of this agreement and to make recommendations to the City and County regarding issues which arise in the provision of emergency dispatch services and the administration of E911 addressing issues. The Board shall not have any authority to control, direct or administer the operations of the Crawfordsville Communications Center. It shall act in an advisory role only with regard to issues concerning dispatch services.

The Sheriff of Montgomery County will have the right to provide input regarding dispatching issues which relate to services rendered to his department, but the City shall adopt and implement all policies and procedures governing dispatch services.

The Agreement, signed for 2006, strengthened the role of the Sheriff concerning dispatching policies:

The dispatchers will follow dispatching policies and procedures approved by the Crawfordsville Police Chief and the Sheriff of Montgomery County.

While it is entirely appropriate for the Chief of Police to have administrative control over the communications center activities related to police business, the failure to provide for input regarding

dispatching issues by those agencies affected by the services of the communications center and by the commissioners is troubling.

The township fire chiefs raised concerns about their relationship with the communications center. They believe that they are of low priority and that their particular needs and preferences are sometimes ignored by the CPD dispatchers. We believe the monthly meeting of fire chiefs and emergency medical services personnel that began several years ago under the leadership of Crawfordsville Fire Chief Barton, and followed by Crawfordsville Fire Chief Small, is a good beginning for resolving these problems. Usually the communication center director or the assistant police chief attends these meetings. However, in spite of the informal meetings, concerns and tensions remain. It was not our role to judge or mediate these issues. However, it is our role to report them. We believe that a process for mediating differences and facilitating communication between the CPD and all parties involved in public safety is of the highest priority.

Since the first Intergovernmental Agreement and continuing through this study, the Crawfordsville Police Chief was not forthcoming with information and viewed any attempt by “outsiders” to have input in the operation of the communication center as interference with police business and an endangerment of public safety. The Intergovernmental Agreement supports his behavior.

Finally, our greatest concern is that while the commissioners delegated appropriate administrative authority to the City of Crawfordsville and the CPD, (internal policy, supervision of staff, reporting, etc.), it retained no governing authority (budget setting, supervision of the director, or standards development, etc.) Consequently, the county commissioners remained legally and financially responsible for E911 service but delegated all of its authority to carry out that responsibility to an agency of the City of Crawfordsville without any oversight governance whatsoever.

Technology

Like the computers in our homes, the technology available to call centers is better, faster, and less expensive each year. The world of equipment and software providers is ever changing as well. The E911 professionals refer to these changes as NGE911 (New Generation), and they include changes such as the decrease in the number of land line phones, the compatibility of all equipment, the sharing of equipment between PSAPs, the improvement of data bases including CAD (computer aided dispatch) and much more.

Telephone service to Indiana PSAPs, long dominated by a single provider, will likely see new companies vying for a market share and promising better products. Mapping technology is ever-improving offering the potential for dispatch from a distant site. The potential for cost savings by creating a service area of sufficient size to efficiently support a PSAP will become increasingly attractive to city and county leaders looking for ways to cut overall costs. Staying aware of the advances and being in a position to replace outdated and inefficient systems, providers and processes, where appropriate, is wise.

A PSAP does not stand alone. It is a central link in the web of emergency and public safety services in counties: fire suppression and prevention, preparedness for natural and made-made disasters, police patrol and crime response, incarceration, building standards and inspection, siren warning systems, emergency notification calls to schools and industries (reverse 911), health planning and promotion, and individual and community-wide medical response.

Greatly boosted by the efforts since the terrorist attack of 2001 to make communities safer, the federal and state governments developed standards, provided equipment, and promoted community planning and practice exercises to link these emergency and public safety providers for better and faster response.

While the technology used in PSAPs varies, technology is available to do the following:

- Locate the 911 phone call (cell and land line) on a map showing surroundings and detail.
- Display the address of the land line phone from which a call is made
- Display the name of the person to whom the land line phone is registered
- Display previous interactions with the system such as DUIs or ambulance requests.
- Display the name of the fire department, police department, emergency ambulance that serves the location and the back up or mutual aid providers
- Display an outline of the areas served by the provider(s)
- Display all active incidents and activity being currently handled
- Locate emergency vehicles (Vehicle Locator System --VLS)
- Display and record accurate time by satellite

In addition, Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) is capable of capturing data about the phone call, then reorganizing it in an endless variety of ways such as: all activity for a particular day; activity by type for an entire year, activity from a particular phone number/name; all calls routed to a particular responder on any day, time period (hours, years), all incidents of a particular kind for any time period such as all vehicle crashes caused by deer), dispatcher schedules, etc. This capability supports the reporting needed for governance and administration related to evaluation, quality control, budgeting, staffing, and general accountability.

Technology available to the responders also greatly increases the speed and effectiveness of the response. Laptop computers in the cars of law enforcement officers allow them to quickly access information such as license plates and outstanding warrants. Previously law enforcement officers had to retrieve this information from the communications center. The capability reduces the call traffic at the communications center, thus, freeing up people and equipment. In addition, firemen using laptop computers, in the same way, can retrieve information that increases the safety of personnel, yields a better assessment of the need for special or additional equipment, notes the location and types of buildings near the fire, as well as locations of fire hydrants, etc.

Supported by planning and grants from the Indiana SAFE-T program, responders will soon all have equipment that allows them to communicate with each other. In the past, for example, radios operated in different systems, preventing responders from communicating and coordinating.

Accurate section corners, aerial photography and geographically-based addresses (3391 East 150 North) instead of post-office-based addresses (Route 10 Box 7) provide the framework for the maps that are the foundation of the dispatcher's work. This interdependence requires communication and coordination between the PSAP management and those who provide other county services such as the surveyor and the mapping department.

After the cost of staff and benefits, the most expensive element of the PSAP is the 911 telephone service provider.

Four providers currently service Indiana PSAPs: AT&T (formerly SBC Ameritech), CenturyLink (formerly EMBARQ, formerly Sprint), and VERIZON (soon to become Frontier), and INdigital. Of the 160 E911 centers in Indiana, 90 are served by AT&T. INdigital also has the contract with the state to route cell phone calls. The field of telephone providers is in a state of flux. The state recently limited the number of PSAPS in each county, many PSAPS are changing from one provider to another, and telephone providers are merging or changing. One group of counties in eastern Indiana is developing a multi-county contract with one provider.

A communications center's arrangements with its service provider vary. Some communications centers contract for a complete package of services: equipment, maintenance and training. Others buy the various components from different providers. The cost of these services varies greatly depending on the type of arrangement. Montgomery County's contract with AT&T includes telephone service, equipment, and training. The contract was executed in 2002 for a ten-year term with yearly payments of about \$133,000.00.

State and federal recommendations and requirements

Planning for the future, requires knowledge of technology advances, law and regulatory change and proposals of federal and state public safety agencies, and the standards of national emergency communications organizations. Among the recommendations and requirements are:

- A county shall have only two PSAPS by 2014; counties that only had one in 2009, shall have only one. (One exception is that a county may have additional PSAPs operated by the State Police or universities.) Montgomery County is in compliance.
- Prepaid phones are assessed a fee at the time of purchase. Before 2010, the purchasers of these phones were not consistently paying for E911 service.
- Radios purchased with state/federal grant money in the future must be 800 MHZ compatible. (Executive Order 05-09)
- IC 36-8-16 and 16.5: The code regulates the fees imposed on land line and cell phone users, describes what the fee funds may be used for. For example, these fees must be separately accounted for and may not be used for some costs of the PSAP such as facility costs.

- The state likely will soon collect all land line user fees and redistribute them to PSAPs rather than the telephone companies distributing the revenues.
- The Indiana Commission on Local Government Reform, December 2007 recommends a countywide body to oversee the provision of all public safety services, and recommends multi-county PSAPs.
- In 2010, concerned about underfunded PSAPs, Indiana Representative Kathy Richardson, R-Noblesville) authored HR 96, urging the Legislative Council to establish an interim study committee to examine enhanced wireless emergency telephone service.

Neighboring PSAPs

We enjoyed and benefited from visits to neighboring PSAPs and wish we could have visited many more. However, the six PSAPs we visited graciously welcomed us and provided important contextual information. Of the PSAPs in six neighboring counties (Clinton, Fountain/Warren, Parke, Putnam, Montgomery, Tippecanoe),

- Fountain and Warren Counties operate the only multi-county PSAP in Indiana with a combined population of 26,373. (Fountain-17,954; Warren-8,419)
- Population of the service area of the six PSAPs varies from 70,000 in Lafayette/Tippecanoe to 17,241 in Parke County. Montgomery County's population is 37,629. (2000 Census figures)
- Service providers include AT&T, Verizon, and Indigital.
- Comparing the cost of the centers is difficult because facility arrangements vary. In Montgomery County the cost cannot be determined because the PSAP does not have a separate budget. Between \$500,000 and \$600,000 per year is about the minimum cost due to the 24-7-365 staffing requirement.
- To cover the 24-7-365 staffing requires a minimum of eight to 10 dispatchers.
- Dispatcher salary ranges from about \$12.00 to \$16.00 per hour. (Except for part-time staff, dispatchers are usually paid as salaried employees.)
- Two PSAPs, including Montgomery County, have an eight hour shift schedule; one has a mix of eight, 10 and 12 hour schedules; three use 12 hour schedules.
- Most PSAPs use part time dispatchers in addition to full time dispatchers. Two use law enforcement officers as back up dispatchers. Putnam County uses eight full-time and three part-time dispatchers.
- Four PSAPs are located in sheriff's departments; one is in a free-standing facility; Montgomery County's PSAP is in the police department.
- Change is a common theme. Putnam County has a new free-standing facility; Clinton County is building a new facility within the sheriff's department; Fountain/Warren Counties need a new facility; per recent state law, Lafayette and Clinton Counties each consolidated two PSAPs into one; Lafayette is changing telephone service providers.
- All six PSAPs serve as communications centers for law enforcement, fire, and emergency service providers within their service areas.