

TOWN OF PALM BEACH

Office of The Town Clerk

REPORT OF THE PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON JULY 10, 2006

I. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Chairman William J. Brooks called the meeting of the Public Safety Committee Meeting to order at 1:00 p.m., on July 10, 2006, in the Town Council Chambers. On roll call, the following members of the Committee were found to be present: Chairman William J. Brooks and Committee Member Allen S. Wyett. Also present for all, or a portion of the meeting were: Mayor Jack McDonald, Council Member Kleid, Council Member Markin, Town Manager Peter B. Elwell, Assistant Town Manager Sarah E. Hannah, Town Attorney John C. Randolph, Fire-Rescue Chief Edward J. Moran, Assistant Fire-Rescue Chief, Andrew Cox, Police Chief Reiter, Support Services Major Sallenbach, Communications Manager Bonnie Maney and Deputy Town Clerk Diane Kassover.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chairman William J. Brooks led the Pledge of Allegiance.

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The Agenda was unanimously approved as printed.

IV. REVIEW OF PROPOSED CHANGE IN FIRE-RESCUE DISPATCHING AND PUBLIC SAFETY COMMUNICATIONS

REPORT OF THE PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON JULY 10, 2006
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Town Manager Peter Elwell explained that discussion today would address the proposed change in the Fire-Rescue Department's dispatching system and its implications for public safety communications in the Town of Palm Beach. He advised that for the past six months, a team including representatives of the Fire-Rescue Department, Police Department and Town Manager's Office had been investigating the pros and cons of this change. He referred to his detailed memorandum to the Public Safety Committee Members, William J. Brooks, Chair and Allen S. Wyett, Member, dated June 7, 2006, and included in the backup material to discuss this proposed change. The items the Committee needed to consider before making a recommendation to the Town Council fell into three categories.

- Operational
- Intangible
- Financial

Town Manager Elwell noted that the issue would come down to a binary choice of:

- Creating a more regional Fire-Rescue linkage, with the Town losing a significant measure of local control; or
- The Town maintaining their independence in order to ensure that they control essential public safety communications with the citizens but losing an opportunity to increase interoperability with the Town's Fire-Rescue mutual aid partners.

In response to Councilman Wyett, Fire-Rescue Chief Moran advised that, as to service, the proposed change would benefit the residents of the Town. He commented further:

- The Town would require the assistance of their mutual aid partners if a significant incident occurred.
 - ▶ The closest partners were Palm Beach County, West Palm Beach, and Lake Worth.
 - ▶ Palm Beach County and Lake Worth operate on the Palm Beach County Fire-Rescue (PBCFR) radio system.
- The PBCFR would enable the Town to manage incidents more effectively without going through cumbersome switches or patches.
 - ▶ Communications between the Town's Fire-Rescue and all other Fire-Rescue Departments in Palm Beach County would be more direct than they were today.
- The Town did not have a significant number of large scale incidents, which had its good points and bad points.

REPORT OF THE PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON JULY 10, 2006
--

- ▶ The volume of incidents would be decreased, lowering the need for mutual aid.
- ▶ When a system was not used regularly, a high possibility of error could occur.
- ▶ When it came time to create patches or necessary switches with other agencies during a significant incident, it would be more cumbersome and dangerous not only for the citizens, but the firefighters as well.
- ▶ The response to significant incidents would be better controlled when multiple agencies responded along with the Town.
- The solution would be to have all agencies on the same universal radio system providing all the services.
 - ▶ The Town of Palm Beach telecommunicators could stay on the line with local 911 callers while PBCFR telecommunicators serve those callers.
 - ▶ The Town of Palm Beach Police Department responds to every fire and EMS call. Since Police units usually respond from the field and Fire-Rescue units usually respond from their stations, the Police units arrive first at the scene.
 - ▶ The PBCFR radio system would eliminate the patches that would need to be created for transports to hospitals, outside of its immediate transport area, when the Town transfers to the Police Department's new radio system: the Maycom system.
 - ▶ The PBCFR radio system will be linked with a traffic light preemption system, which could reduce the Town's EMS units travel time when transporting patients to area hospitals.
 - ▶ The most important advantage of the proposed system would be the safety of the Town's firefighters, and ultimately, the citizens. The ability of the firefighters to speak to one another clearly, and to their mutual aid providers.

In response to Chairman Brooks, Chief Moran advised that the pending lawsuit filed by the Cities of Boca Raton and Delray Beach was an issue of double taxation. He noted that their position was that Palm Beach County collected taxes for the PBCFR radio system from their residents but provided no services to their cities. He explained that a significant premise of Palm Beach County's defense was that they were providing a real and substantial benefit if a large scale incident occurred and mutual aid was provided.

In response to Chairman Brooks, Chief Moran stated that he could not say that the Boca Raton and Delray Beach systems were better than the Town's, but the issues that Boca and Delray had were slightly different from the Town's. He advised that their staffing was a little

REPORT OF THE PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON JULY 10, 2006
--

bit heavier than what the Town had, and they had a dedicated fire dispatcher.

Chief Moran discussed the Town's current system, explaining that it was not uncommon, in the evening hours, for the same person taking 911 calls to also be the fire dispatcher. He noted that was troubling because providing dedicated, monitored, tactical channel in the evening hours would be very difficult, unless there was ample staffing available.

Discussion ensued regarding the operation of the Town's radio system and the PBCFR radio system as it related to 911 calls.

In response to Mr. Wyett, Chief Moran advised that he did not believe that Palm Beach County wanted to combine and control all fire departments located in Palm Beach County. He stated that the Palm Beach County Fire Chief reassured him that he had no intention of making any effort to take over the Town of Palm Beach Fire-Rescue services.

Chief Moran stated that the Town would have an Interlocal Agreement with Palm Beach County, which would clearly spell out the terms of what the Town would receive and what obligations the Town would and would not have. He advised that a centralized/regional communication system would assist in making everyone better prepared for natural or manmade disasters that required assistance from other communities. The Town would still retain their independence.

Mr. Wyett stated that it was his impression that the chief advantage to joining the PBCFR radio system would be in the event of catastrophic incidents or calls for major assistance and not for minor everyday incidents.

In response to Mr. Wyett, Chief Moran commented:

- ▶ An advantage to joining the PBCFR radio system was that a tactical channel was monitored continuously by a PBCFR officer who could radio for additional units or provide other assistance as needed. This would enhance firefighter safety and provide quicker relay requests for mutual aid or other external resources.
- ▶ The Town of Palm Beach Fire-Rescue Department would be the only Fire-Rescue Department on the Maycom system in the State of Florida; all other agencies on the system would be law enforcement agencies.
 - ▶ The Town would not have direct communication with other Fire-Rescue agencies or hospitals.

Mr. Elwell advised that either of the two alternatives could be made to function. He

REPORT OF THE PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON JULY 10, 2006

noted that what made this issue so complex was that there was not a clear preferable alternative from a technical point of view. It came down to more of the intangible issues and the values to the community. Staff needed policy direction from the Committee on how to proceed.

In response to Mr. Wyett, Chief Moran advised that the Town did not now have a traffic preemption system in place when they transported to JFK Hospital or Good Samaritan Hospital. He noted that under the proposed PBCFR radio system, the Town would have that capability.

Chief Moran advised that the City of West Palm Beach just signed onto the PBCFR system, separating from their police dispatching system. The City of Lake Worth joined the PBCFR radio system and Palm Beach Gardens, a community a little larger than the Town, had been transferring their calls to Palm Beach County for at least eight years. He explained that Palm Beach Gardens still had their own police dispatching system. The team studying this proposed change went on a site visit speaking with the Palm Beach Gardens' police communications manager who indicated that they did not have any issues with the system or with call transfers, and that there were no time delays.

Mr. Elwell reiterated that either system could work. He noted the following concerns he had when first considering the proposed change.

- Whether the alternative of moving to the County system would be adequate for the Town;
- Whether it would have operational down sides that would be unacceptable to the Town in terms of a delay;
- Other aspects of the system that the Town could not tolerate.

Mr. Elwell advised that both the Palm Beach County Fire-Rescue Dispatch Center and the Palm Beach Gardens Dispatch Center operations were found to be very professional during the Town's site visits. He noted that the PBCFR radio system did work for Palm Beach Gardens. He advised that he overcame his concerns and believed that either system could work.

Police Chief Reiter commented on the proposed change:

- Noted the approach of Fire-Rescue was very different from law enforcement.
- A major or significant incident would require other Fire-Rescue departments to be called in.
- The operation of the Town of Palm Beach Police Department was very different from other police departments. It was not reliant on neighboring police departments other than for a rare major incident.

REPORT OF THE PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON JULY 10, 2006
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- Communication centers in other cities operated very differently than the Town of Palm Beach.
- The Town's Police Department was the only police department that responded to all Fire-Rescue and EMS calls.
- Suggested the Committee look at this from the viewpoint of day to day operations as well as when a major emergency might occur. (In an emergency situation, there would be more of a need to have radio contact between the two agencies.)
- Advantageous for the Town to have local control. It was certainly advantageous to have a telecommunicator in the Town's dispatch center rather than one located outside of Town.
- The Town of Palm Beach communications center staff has knowledge of the Town of Palm Beach that cannot be matched by PBCFR telecommunicators serving a large geographical area.
- Residents of the Town may react unfavorably if they call 911 for a fire or EMS incident and have to be transferred from the Town's communications center to PBCFR.
- Suggested that the Committee act very cautiously as he had great concerns regarding this change.

In response to Mr. Wyett, Chief Moran advised that there were no time constraints other than those related to the implementation of the Maycom system.

Richard Kleid, 2660 South Ocean Boulevard, Town Council Member, commented that Town taxpayers currently pay \$800,000 in taxes to Palm Beach County for the operation of the PBCFR radio system and dispatch center, even though the Town did not receive services. He questioned whether there would be savings to the Town of Palm Beach taxpayers relative to the Town's budget; \$300,000 worth of equipment would be received from Palm Beach County.

Chief Moran advised that if the Town joined the PBCFR radio system, it provided the Town, at no charge, radios, pagers, and computer equipment worth approximately \$300,000. The savings to the Town would be that no money was to be spent on equipment, maintenance, ongoing replacement costs or technological changes that would have to be made with the Maycom system years down the road.

Mr. Kleid asked, if it made sense for the Town to wait until the legal action taken by the Cities of Boca Raton and Delray Beach was settled before taking any steps?

Mr. Elwell responded that the Town was entering into the transition of radio systems within the Police Department that would occur regardless of the outcome of the lawsuit. The

**REPORT OF THE PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD ON JULY 10, 2006**

question before them was whether Fire-Rescue migrated to the new Maycom system with the Police Department or whether they instead joined the PBCFR radio system. He noted that if the cities win and the County's taxation practice was ruled illegal, the Town's taxpayers would be spared the \$800,000 expense in future years. In the absence of a transition within the Police Department's Maycom system, the Town would certainly want to wait for the outcome of the litigation before deciding whether to join the PBCFR.

In response to Mr. Kleid, Mr. Elwell responded if the Town went with the PBCFR radio system, there would not be less of a need for telecommunicators. He noted that most of the calls handled by the communications center were Police calls. He advised that even if the communicators were no longer directly dispatching Fire-Rescue calls, they would still monitor and transfer those calls to Palm Beach County. He stated that there would not be an opportunity to reduce staff there.

Dan McDonnell, 2784 South Ocean Boulevard, commented on the Town's excellent response time to 911 calls.

In response to Mr. Wyett, Chief Reiter advised that the decision had been finalized for the Police Department to migrate to the Maycom system in about a year to eighteen months. The contract was recently signed, and the installation of the system would begin shortly.

Discussion ensued regarding when a decision would have to be made by the Fire-Rescue Department. Police Department Support Systems Major Sallenbach advised that the decision did not have to be made now. The current system would remain in effect for approximately three years from the time the Police Department transitioned over to the Maycom system, and Fire-Rescue could be phased in. He advised that they did not have a one year deadline.

Chairman Brooks stated that he believed that if there was a major incident, the Town would benefit from joining the PBCFR radio system, but apart from that somewhat unusual circumstance, the Town would be better off remaining with the existing system.

Mr. Wyett stated that he believed this needed to be studied further. The Town had the luxury of time since it could remain with the present system beyond the point of the legal decision. He noted that if the City of Boca Raton and the City of Delray Beach lost their case, an additional argument could be made for the Town to join the PBCFR radio system, above and beyond which service was better. It would also give the Town an opportunity to see how both the City of Lake Worth and the City of West Palm Beach did under the PBCFR radio system. He stated it was a matter of deferral, at this time.

REPORT OF THE PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON JULY 10, 2006

Chief Moran reiterated his concerns regarding the Maycom system. He commented on the following issues:

- The quality of the Police Department telecommunicators was not the issue as they did an excellent job. The issue was with staffing, and under the makeup of the current system, as it stood, it was understaffed for what the needs were.
- The Police Department would be able to respond to every Fire-Rescue call regardless of which system the Town chose, since all calls come into the Town's 911 center.

In response to Mr. Wyett, Chief Moran responded that one of the points he was making was that no other Fire-Rescue Department was on the Maycom system.

Mr. Brooks stated that it would be to the Town's advantage if a decision was not made today. The Town should monitor both the technological evolution, and the legal situation brought forth by the City of Boca Raton and the City of Delray Beach.

Ms. Susan Markin, 1450 North Lake Way, Town Council Member, commented that the Town, in joining the PBCFR radio system, would become part of a much larger system and would not have the control they now had. She advised that, at present, the Town had control over response time, which put them in a much stronger position.

After further discussion, it was the consensus of the Public Safety Committee that a report would be provided to the Town Council at the August 8, 2006 Regular Town Council Meeting with the following recommendations.

- **The Town continues to monitor this matter, and if at some point in the future, it was appropriate, it would be given additional consideration.**
- **The Town would monitor the evolution of the litigation that the City of Boca Raton and the City of Delray Beach filed against the County.**

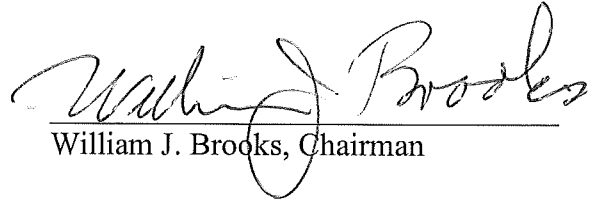
V. ANY OTHER MATTERS

There were none.

**REPORT OF THE PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD ON JULY 10, 2006**

VI. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to discuss, the July 10, 2006, Public Safety Committee Meeting adjourned at 1:50 p.m.


William J. Brooks, Chairman