

TUMWATER CITY COUNCIL WORKSESSION
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CONVENE: 5:35 p.m.

PRESENT: Mayor Pete Kmet and Councilmembers Joan Cathey, Michael Althaus, Leatta Dahlhoff, Eileen Swarthout, Debbie Sullivan, Tom Oliva, and Neil McClanahan.

Staff: City Administrator John Doan, City Attorney Karen Kirkpatrick, Assistant City Administrator Behrends Cerniwey, Police Chief Jon Weiks, Finance Director Ursula Euler, Fire Chief Scott LaVielle, and Recording Secretary Valerie Gow.

**TCOMM 9-1-1
COMMUNICATIONS
UPDATE:**

Fire Chief LaVielle introduced Keith Flewelling, TCOMM 911 Executive Director. Mr. Flewelling updated the Council on the status of TCOMM 911 and the proposal under consideration to upgrade the radio system from analog to digital.

Mr. Flewelling reported that today, the 911 system handles 150,000 911 calls annually. Calls to the non-emergency line continue to increase each year. Outbound calls are decreasing because of electronic messaging. He described the dispatch process when calls are received. Fire calls are the lowest number of calls. Calls for law enforcement response continue to increase. The Tumwater Police Department accounts for 13% of all law enforcement calls. The Tumwater Fire Department accounts for 11% of the call volume for fire & emergency medical services (EMS).

TCOMM 911 dispatches all public safety with the exception of Washington State Patrol (WSP). Law enforcement incidents occurring on the interstate or state highways are transferred to WSP. Fire incidents in conjunction with law incidents are dispatched by TCOMM 911.

Mr. Flewelling reviewed the history of the public safety radio system and current efforts to replace the system. The TCOMM 911 Administration Board established a steering committee comprised of all chiefs of agencies/departments using the system. The steering committee completed a thorough analysis of the radio system, developed a recommendation to replace the system, and recommended hiring a consultant to review all information and identify missing information.

The agency contracted with the consultant firm of Hatfield & Dawson to document existing information, analyze missing information, review all alternatives within the context of the region's needs, and complete a cost-benefit analysis for each alternative. The consultant also considered changes in governance that might be required with each alternative and recommendations on how the

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agency should procure the system.

Goals identified for the new replacement system included:

- ❖ System longevity/sustainability
- ❖ Increased capacity and flexibility to meet user needs
- ❖ County-wide coverage for all channels
- ❖ System scalability to meet future growth and needs
- ❖ Multiple talk channels for dispatch and tactical operations
- ❖ Advanced features: Unit ID, Emergency Alert Button, Text Alert to Radio, GPS Tracking
- ❖ Migration from Analog to Digital Operation
- ❖ Compatibility/standardization for all agencies
- ❖ Ability to support other agencies such as Public Works and Parks
- ❖ Continued support of VHF operation
- ❖ Secure & isolated channels (encryption for some LE channels)

The steering committee prioritized five important system attributes:

- System Quality
- Capacity/bandwidth
- Coverage
- Cost
- Risk

Mr. Flewelling responded to a series of questions on the need for expanded channels, lower priority assigned to interoperability, and gaps in the system. Thurston County police and fire agencies responded to the recent trail derailment. The availability of a tactical channel rather than utilizing two primary frequencies used by the region would have prevented congestion on the system. Interoperability is important to law enforcement, particularly for WSP and Pierce County, because both agencies have moved to digital system whereas Thurston County is still using an analog system. Incident scenes crossing into Pierce County require a complex set of communication methods rather than direct contact. Today, there are areas in the City and within the county where emergency responders are unable to communicate with dispatch or other responders because of dead areas. No system exists today to cover the entire region; however, the goal is to improve the current level of radio coverage.

Mr. Flewelling reviewed the consultant's recommendation to meet with Pierce County and WSP to discuss the potential to partner on a new system to reduce costs. Of the three alternatives presented by the consultant, the steering committee recommended pursuing the stand-alone system with mutual use agreements for other tower sites

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outside the region at a capital cost of \$19,900,000. Additionally, the steering committee recommended replacing all user equipment (hand held radio and mobile radios) because of the change in frequency. Other systems similar to TCOMM upgrading to a new system typically have purchased all capital equipment including subscriber equipment at the same time, which would increase the total package cost to approximately \$30 million (\$10 million for subscriber equipment). The operating cost would be funded over a 15-year period. Internal analysis reveals TCOMM spends approximately \$1 million annually on operating and maintenance costs. Based on the change in systems, TCOMM anticipates a reduction of approximately \$500,000 for repairs and maintenance equating to an additional \$500,000 to TCOMM's annual operating budget. TCOMM's revenue is driven by sales use tax with 60% of the revenue from sales tax and 40% from excise tax on all telephones. When the economy is not trending well, TCOMM revenues decrease affecting the ability to cover expenses. The Board directed exploration of either increasing existing revenue sources or identifying new sources of revenue for operating expenses. At this time, TCOMM believes it could absorb the additional \$500,000 because the agency was paying debt service of \$500,000 on loans from 2008, which have been retired. Debt service for \$30 million from the state treasury is only for a period of seven years totaling \$5 million annually. Private financing affords a payback of 15 years (life expectancy of a new system) of approximately \$2.5 million each year. Under the consultant's recommendation, the subscriber cost of \$10 million would be a one-time expense as jurisdictions would be responsible for subsequent purchases.

City Administrator Doan pointed out that the decision to front-end the subscriber cost would be a policy decision because TCOMM could decide to bear the cost to upgrade the towers and radio system with cities and other subscribers responsible for conversion of radios. From a taxpayer perspective, it would make more sense to bundle the capital and subscriber expense to provide the community with an operable system.

Mr. Flewelling described the positive and negative details of each alternative. The stand-alone option has the least risk but is the highest cost alternative. The remaining two options offer some cost savings but increase the level of risk. Mr. Flewelling addressed inquiries about the different levels of risk associated with the Pierce County and WSP alternatives.

Discussion ensued on the systems and channels used by WSP and Pierce County. The new system would afford the ability communicate with multiple jurisdictions, multiple agencies, and with other regions. Interoperability with Pierce County or Lewis County would require 18 tower sites in Thurston County. Pierce County

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owns 4 towers located on the Thurston County east border. The major cost reduction for the Pierce County or WSP alternatives is the cost of the core of approximately \$2 million.

Mr. Flewelling described the previous funding method prior to the 2002 passage of the sales use tax for emergency communications. Following the passage, TCOMM eliminated all user fees by all subscribers. One of the funding models could include user fees; however, TCOMM's goal is not to reinstate user fees with the priority to seek funding that does not require user fees.

Mayor Kmet noted that the user fees were substantial for most of the jurisdictions with Tumwater paying more than \$100,000 annually. When the sales tax measure passed, elimination of user fees resulted in substantial savings to the City.

Mr. Flewelling reviewed the recommended alternative and the Board's recent action. The consultant recommended developing a strategy to identify the source of funding for capital and operating costs of a new system. The stand-alone alternative is a good fallback should a future partnership fail or not meet expectations. TCOMM representatives should determine whether a two-county system with either a Joint Use Agreement or a Full Regional Partnership is preferable to a single county system. If a two-county system is preferred, TCOMM should begin negotiations with Pierce County for either a Joint Use Agreement or a full System Partnership. If not, TCOMM should pursue a joint use agreement with WSP.

Councilmember Sullivan offered that after purchasing a stand-alone system, TCOMM could approach Lewis, Mason, and Grays Harbor Counties for potential partnership opportunities.

Mr. Flewelling reported the steering committee forwarded a recommendation to the TCOMM 911 Administration Board covering maintenance of a VHS system to afford operability with neighboring counties, wholesale replacement of subscriber equipment, acknowledgment that partnerships could bring a return on investment but emphasis should be on meeting the primary needs of the county, and a recommendation against a Pierce County partnership as it was deemed to be too complex and assumes too much risk to be considered a viable option.

Last week, the TCOMM 911 Administration Board issued a resolution concurring with the recommendation to replace the public safety radio system and directing the Executive Director to pursue funding options for the Administration Board of Directors' consideration.

Councilmember Dahlhoff commented that as the newest member of

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the Administration Board, she attended the last meeting. All members supported the stand-alone alternative.

Mr. Flewelling responded to questions about potential power failures and described the redundancy of the public safety radio system during incidents of power failures.

City Administrator Doan described and characterized the risks and benefits of each alternative.

Councilmember Oliva asked about the timing for moving forward. Mr. Flewelling replied that the review was triggered by the ending of manufacturer support for the dispatch console at the TCOMM 911 Center at the end of 2018 and the bay stations at all towers ending in 2020. The transition is anticipated to take three years to complete.

Mr. Flewelling shared that following a briefing to the Thurston County Board of County Commissioners, concerns were conveyed about funding. Some discussions with other agencies suggested considering the Law and Justice 3/10^{ths} sales tax that could be available. During subsequent discussions with the Thurston County Prosecutor and the Sheriff about the option, some interest was conveyed. However, that decision would be the responsibility of the County Commissioners.

COUNCIL RETREAT PLANNING:

City Administrator Doan introduced the topic and the information provided to the Council. The next retreat is important as it serves as a guide to assist the Council and City in developing the next biennium budget. He recommended beginning with a review of the past and desired future, whether to add goals, and a review of priorities. An outline builds on previous retreats with the retreat beginning on a Friday afternoon and continuing all day on Saturday. Information was included on three major topics of conversations of housing & homelessness, parks & recreation, and a potential conversation on increasing efforts with the brewery property owners (historic and newer properties).

City Administrator Doan addressed questions about tying featured speakers to retreat goals.

The Council discussed and agreed to schedule the retreat May 18-19 at the Tumwater School Administration building, primary topics of discussion would include housing and homelessness, parks and recreation, and a review of brewery redevelopment options, retention of the Friday evening/Saturday meeting format, attendance of department heads, and exploration of options for inviting a featured speaker during the Friday session,

Councilmember Cathey recommended the brewery should not be the

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overarching discussion during the retreat.

City Administrator Doan reviewed the purpose and some of the goals the retreat is designed to achieve with the ultimate goal of the Council providing future direction to staff. The brewery discussion would update the Council on the status, recent actions, and future options, such as a change in course or pursuing existing strategies.

Mayor Kmet left the meeting to attend the Planning Commission meeting.

Mayor Pro Tem Cathey commented on the importance of Councilmembers advocating for interests during the retreat. She cited her experience of advocating for trees. Adoption of the issue within the strategic priorities often makes a difference. City Administrator Doan urged the Council to share ideas and revisit goals as the City has some capacity with the completion of some goals.

**MAYOR/CITY
ADMINISTRATOR'S
REPORT:**

Councilmember Sullivan advised of her absence during the March 20 Council meeting because she is traveling to Washington, D.C. to attend a transit conference.

ADJOURNMENT:

With there being no further business, Mayor Pro Tem Cathey adjourned the meeting at 7:20 p.m.