

EMERGENCY DISPATCH SERVICES & POLICE LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE IN THE BOROUGH OF CARLISLE

Special Report to the Carlisle Borough Council and Mayor
Prepared by Matthew Candland, Borough Manager
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INTRODUCTION

In late 2012, Borough Council directed the Borough Manager's office to work cooperatively with the Mayor and Chief of Police to evaluate and answer two questions. The first question was whether the Borough should continue providing its own primary emergency dispatch services or whether it should have the Cumberland County Emergency 911 Center provide this service.

The second question was whether, with the impending retirement of one of the Police Lieutenants and other changes within the department, the two Lieutenant structure should be maintained.

Over the past four months I have (1) conducted an exhaustive review of the current Carlisle and Cumberland County Emergency 911 Center dispatch services, (2) consulted heavily with Mayor Kronenberg and Chief Margeson concerning both dispatch and the police department's leadership structure, and (3) consulted with numerous county, fire and borough uniformed and non-uniformed staff and other officials regarding their views on both questions.

More recently I carefully reviewed Chief Margeson's April 26th memorandum outlining his recommendation to continue providing in-house dispatch services and maintaining the two lieutenant leadership structure. I have attached Chief Margeson's memorandum to this report.

This report provides a summary of what I learned and my answers to the two primary questions. I have tried to keep this report as short and as succinct as possible but realized that there is a large amount of information to report and consider. It is my hope that this report will provide the necessary information upon which a sound decision can be made.

I. BOROUGH OF CARLISLE POLICE DISPATCH

The Borough of Carlisle is one of 16 (out of over 1,000) municipalities throughout the State of Pennsylvania with police departments, and the only municipality in Cumberland County, that provides its own dispatch services.

The Borough's dispatch service is currently housed in the Carlisle Police Station. This building, which was constructed in 2004, is equipped with a generator that provides back up power in cases of outages. While it is equipped with a backup generator, the Station is not equipped with an uninterrupted power system that provides uninterrupted power between the time of a power outage and the time it takes for the backup generator to start. Without such a system calls could be lost during a power outage. While the building was well built, it was not constructed to withstand extreme conditions such as hurricane winds and other extreme weather.

When a Borough resident needs emergency police help he/she currently either calls 911 or 243-5252, which is the general number at the Police Station. The majority of the emergency calls in the Borough are currently directed to the 5252 number.

If the resident calls the 5252 number, the Dispatcher is not able to immediately identify any information such as the name of the caller, his/her location, or any other information other than possibly his/her number through conventional caller ID. So, if the caller is unable to talk or does not know their location, determining where to dispatch an officer could be very challenging and time consuming. If a resident calls 5252 for a fire or EMS emergency, the Dispatcher must inform the caller that they must hang up and call 911.

If the resident calls 911, the call is connected to the Cumberland County Emergency 911 Center. Here, a Call Taker answers their call. Immediately upon receiving the call, the Call Taker's computer screen is populated with information about the caller such as the name of the land line account holder, the phone number, and location from where he/she is calling, and, in the case of a cell phone caller, the phone number and approximate location.

After hearing the caller's explanation concerning the nature of the emergency, the Call Taker determines how the call should be processed. It is important to note that, on average, it takes approximately 30 seconds or more for a caller to provide this explanation. If the Call Taker decides that the emergency requires Carlisle Police response, he/she forwards the call to the Borough's emergency line (not the 5252 line).

The Borough typically has one Dispatcher on duty per shift. When the County 911 Center forwards the emergency call to Carlisle Police it is this Dispatcher who answers the call. The Carlisle Dispatcher, who answers both the 911 and 5252 lines, decides which line to answer if both are ringing. This can be difficult since emergency calls are made to both lines. It is presumed, however, that the 911 line would be answered first. In this case, the other line could go unanswered.

Upon answering, the caller again repeats the 30 second or more explanation for the call. Once the County Call Taker, who stays on the line and listens to the caller repeat the explanation, determines the information has been adequately conveyed to the Carlisle Dispatcher, he/she hangs up.

The Carlisle Dispatcher does not have the same computer screen as the County Call Taker. As a result, it is necessary for the Dispatcher to ascertain information from the caller such as who he/she is, their location, etc. As the caller conveys the information, it is my understanding that the Dispatcher manually writes it down on paper. Once the Dispatcher understands the nature of the call and the response needed, he/she places the caller either literally or figuratively on hold, gets on the Borough's radio and issues the dispatch to police.

The Dispatcher then alternates between talking with the caller and with the police who have been dispatched. The Dispatcher is available to the police for any additional support during the emergency. If, however, another emergency call comes in the Dispatcher would either need to put the then emergency caller on hold or end the call so that he/she can answer the next emergency.

At some point after the emergency call has been made and processed, the Dispatcher will enter the information he/she previously manually wrote down on paper and the result of the call into the Borough's computer records reporting system, Metro.

Should the Carlisle Police need information from the Cumberland County Emergency 911 Center concerning a particular emergency call (or the County needs information from Carlisle Police) they either call or email the request to the County. The County then, in most cases, sends a FAX or an email copy of the report to Borough Police.

The cost to provide the current Borough emergency dispatch system is approximately \$224,000 per year. This figure consists of:

\$204,000	Salaries and benefits for three full time and several part time employees
\$3,500	Commonwealth Law Enforcement Assistance Network (CLEAN) terminal
<u>\$16,500</u>	<u>Metro records management system</u>
\$224,000	Total

The above does not include costs associated with the Borough's radio system (i.e. replacement radios, repairs, radio system replacement, etc.) which vary from year to year. The Borough's current analog radio system is reaching the end of its useful life and will need to be replaced either with updated versions of the current analog system or with a new digital system. This cost, which could be well over \$100,000, is not included in the total.

II. CUMBERLAND COUNTY EMERGENCY 911 CENTER DISPATCH

The Cumberland County Emergency 911 Center dispatch services are housed in the County's Emergency 911 Center located just outside the Borough of Carlisle. This building was constructed just a few years ago and was built to withstand extreme weather and conditions and is equipped with three backup generators and an uninterrupted power system. This means that, even during a power outage, there is no loss of power to the 911 system and so no calls are lost.

If a Borough resident decides to call 911, the call is directed to the Cumberland County Emergency 911 Center. As in the previous scenario, a Call Taker receives their call. Immediately upon receiving the call, the Call Taker's computer screen is populated with information about the caller. This information can include the location of the land line from which the caller is calling or the approximate location of a cell phone caller. There are several Call Takers and Dispatchers on duty at any given time so if another 911 call comes at the same time it is simply rolled over to the next Call Taker or Dispatcher.

Once the Call Taker determines that it is an emergency call, he/she forwards all of the pertinent information immediately to the appropriate Fire, EMS or Police Dispatcher without having to place the caller on hold. While the Call Taker continues to speak with the caller to obtain information, assist the caller in dealing with the emergency, calm the caller, or do whatever else is needed to help him/her, the Dispatcher is simultaneously dispatching police. When the dispatch is sent out, all of the police agencies on the radio system are able to hear the dispatch. As a result, if a police officer from another jurisdiction in Cumberland County is closer to the call than an officer from the jurisdiction dispatched he/she can respond.

As the Call Taker continues to gather information and type it into the system, the information is saved into the C-Net records management system. There is no need for any additional data entry. Once the responding officer arrives at the scene and the Call Taker determines it is appropriate, the call ends.

III. EVALUATION OF EACH DISPATCH SYSTEM

During the study period, there were three primary questions by which I assessed the information I gathered:

1. Which dispatch service would provide the highest level of emergency dispatch services to our residents?
2. Which dispatch service would provide the highest level of radio and dispatch services to our police personnel?
3. Which dispatch service would be most cost efficient?

Highest Level of Emergency Dispatch Service for Residents

Based on my research, it is my opinion that utilizing the Cumberland County Emergency 911 Center for the Borough's primary emergency dispatch services would provide enhanced service to our residents for the following reasons:

- If a Borough resident calls 911, County dispatch provides at least a 30 second or more faster response than Carlisle Borough dispatch. In some cases, the time savings could be significantly more.
- County dispatch provides immediate critical caller information to the Call Taker/Dispatcher including call origin and location. This can be critically important if the caller is unable to communicate on the phone.
- County dispatch can dispatch and communicate with the caller simultaneously. This can be invaluable in the case of someone who needs someone to stay on the phone with them. It also provides quicker police response adding to the previously mentioned faster response.
- 911 is the universal emergency number in the United States, however, in the past, the Borough has not encouraged residents to use 911 but rather seems to have encouraged them to use the 5252 line. A resident trying to call 5252 in an emergency could get mixed up on the number to dial and not be able to get through. This could require additional time to hang up and make the call through 911.
- Switching to County dispatch would require Carlisle police to convert to the County radio. This will provide true interoperability with other municipal police departments, fire departments, EMS and other agencies during an emergency event. All of this means more a more comprehensive response for residents.
- Our residents are currently paying for two dispatch services: Cumberland County Emergency 911 Center and Carlisle Police dispatch. Switching to County dispatch would prevent Carlisle residents from paying twice for the same service.
- The Cumberland County Emergency 911 Center is a state of the art facility, constructed to withstand extreme weather and conditions, and is equipped with three backup generators and an

uninterrupted power system that ensures that no calls are lost in the case of a power outage or the brief period between a power outage and the time it takes for a generator to start. The Carlisle Police Station is not constructed to these high standards nor is it equipped with an uninterrupted power system.

- The Cumberland County Emergency 911 Center, in the extreme case that the 911 Center is rendered inoperable, can deploy a mobile 911 Center which is a specially designed vehicle that would allow the County 911 Center to continue providing emergency dispatch services. Currently, there is no such alternative for Carlisle dispatch.
- The Cumberland County Emergency 911 Center utilizes a records reporting system (C-Net) that would provide greater accessibility to a uniform set of records.
- Utilizing the 911 Center as primary emergency dispatch services would negate the current practice of calling the 5252 line where the Carlisle Dispatcher is unable to determine the origin or location of the call. This can present a serious situation if the caller is a child or someone who is otherwise unable to communicate or describe their location. If a call is made from a land line the Dispatcher would only be able to determine the origin or location through the use of some kind of a crisscross directory.
- The current Carlisle radio system is not compliant with Project 25 or APCO 25 standards. APCO 25 is a suite of standards for radio communication for Federal, State, and Local public safety agencies in North America. The Cumberland County Emergency 911 System is in compliance with these standards. More detailed information concerning these standards can be found at www.apcointl.org.

Highest Level of Service for our Police Officers

Based on my research, it is my opinion that having the Cumberland County Emergency 911 Center provide primary emergency dispatch services would provide enhanced service to Carlisle Police officers for the following reasons:

- The Cumberland County Emergency 911 system would provide interoperability with 16 other police agencies, Cumberland County, numerous Fire and EMS entities, Borough Public Works and other agencies that may be responding to an emergency. This would provide more and a greater variety of resources for responders in short term and long term emergency events.
- Interoperability would also provide police officers with backup during those times when they are in trouble with an emergency event they are unable to handle without support. This will result in greater officer safety.
- Currently our officers have two radios in their patrol cars. Switching to County dispatch would require only one radio.
- Currently our officers cannot effectively and efficiently communicate with other Borough staff. Utilizing County radios, however, would allow for effective communication with Borough Public Works, Water/Sewer Plants, and other Borough departments.

- County radios have encryption capability which allows police to communicate in especially sensitive cases without being heard on scanners. Borough radios do not have this feature.
- The Borough radio system is based on analog technology. This technology will likely not be supported in the near future. Further, it will also likely be difficult to find replacement parts.

Most Cost Efficient Service

Since the Borough already owns a number of County radios, the cost to switch to County dispatch would include only the cost of purchasing additional radios. Since the Borough’s residents already pay for the Cumberland County Emergency 911 Center through the County tax, no additional salary cost would be required.

The Borough finds itself at a very opportune time. With its current analog radio system aging and soon may be obsolete, the Borough will be facing a significant cost for the purchase of new radios regardless of whether it switches to County primary dispatch. Either the Borough will be purchasing new analog radios or new County digital radios.

While figures were not gathered for the cost of new analog radios, figures are available for the additional county digital radios. According to Chief Margeson, we currently have 34 County radios. If we were to transition to the County system, he estimates that we would need to purchase an additional 16 mobile radios and 6 portables.

Ted Wise, Director of the Cumberland County 911 Center, estimated that each mobile radio, which would include a V-TAC repeater, would cost approximately \$9,000. He estimated that each portable radio would cost approximately \$1,600 for the standard model and \$3,000 per portable for the upgraded model. Assuming we used the upgraded portable, the total cost would be approximately \$162,000 (\$144,000 for the mobile units and \$18,000 for the portables).

A summary of the net cost/savings is described in Section V below.

IV. 2nd LIEUTENANT POSITION

The second question under consideration is whether the Borough should retain the second Lieutenant position following the retirement of Lt. Barry Walters and possible changes to dispatch services. While it appears that this would be feasible, to do so would require some restructuring of responsibilities and tasks.

The two Lieutenant positions currently share responsibilities as follows:

Fields Operations Lieutenant

- Patrol Section:
 - Platoons 1, 2, 3, 4
 - Community Policing
- Criminal Investigation
- General Investigation

Administrative Services Lieutenant

- Administrative Support
- Communications (i.e. radios & dispatch)
- Information Technology
- Accreditation
- Parking Enforcement

Drug Law Enforcement

Community Services Officer (CSO)
School Crossing Guards
Evidence/Property Management

If the Borough were to reduce the number of Lieutenants from two to one, it would need to reassign, reduce, or eliminate the responsibilities currently assigned to the Administrative Lieutenant. I would not presume to outline a comprehensive way to accomplish this but would defer to the Mayor and Chief of Police. I would, however, offer a few possibilities as examples. In doing so, I have relied heavily on some of the suggestions Chief Margeson made in his memorandum:

- Place the supervision of Administrative Support and the Community Services Officer (CSO) under the Chief of Police.
- Reassign Parking Enforcement from the Police Department to the Finance Department. This would require relocating two of the three personnel currently at the Police Station to Borough Hall. The CSO would remain under police as indicated above.
- Eliminate Citizen Police Academy (which is not being done this year).
- Communications (radios and dispatch), to a large extent, would be moved to the Cumberland County Emergency 911 Center.
- Information Technology could be housed with the Borough's outside firm with whom it currently contracts for IT services. The Police Department could assign an IT Liaison who would contact the firm when IT services are needed.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

In studying these two questions (Dispatch and the 2nd Lt. position), it becomes clear that they are interconnected. In other words, making a change in one seems to necessitate a change in the other.

Following extensive discussions with Mayor Kronenberg concerning these questions, I learned that his first preference is for the in-house dispatch services and the 2nd Lieutenant position to remain as they are currently structured. If, however, the Council determined that these changes are needed and should be made, Mayor Kronenberg indicated that he would be agreeable, as would I, with the following recommendations

- *The Borough Police discontinue its in-house dispatch services and begin utilizing the Cumberland County Emergency 911 Center for primary emergency dispatch services.*
- *The Borough Police, in light of the first recommendation, discontinue the position of Dispatcher and create two full time and one or more part time employees. These employees would provide administrative and customer service support 16 hours per day seven days a week, for residents and police officers. While this position would likely have a different job description than the Dispatcher position it would ensure that many of the customer service and administrative support services provided by the Dispatcher are maintained.*

- *The Borough Police, and other Borough departments, discontinue the use of its aging analog radio system and begin using the County's digital radio system to provide interoperability with other agencies and with each other to enhance emergency response and officer safety.*
- *The Borough Police maintain a one Lieutenant structure upon the retirement of Lt. Barry Walters at the end of 2013.*

Chief Margeson, in his April 26, 2013 memorandum, outlined a number of concerns he called “issues for consideration” regarding a change in primary emergency dispatch to the Cumberland County Emergency 911 Center as well as the reduction from two Lieutenants to one. I believe Chief Margeson made a number of compelling arguments in this memorandum that warrants a response.

Below I have listed each of his “issues for consideration”, in the order that he listed them, and provided a brief explanation of how I think each is addressed by the above recommendations.

Cost – the annual cost for the Borough to provide its own emergency dispatch is approximately \$224,000. Having the County provide this service will cost the Borough a one-time investment of approximately \$162,000 to purchase new radios. As mentioned previously, this should not be viewed as a new cost because, due to the age of our current analog radio system, an investment in a new radio system will happen regardless of which route we take.

Based on the above recommendation, it would cost approximately \$140,000 per year to fund the two full time and one or more part time administrative employees to provide customer service and administrative support to residents and police officers 16 hours per day seven days per week.

The cost savings from going from two Lieutenants to one would be approximately \$110,000 per year (including benefits).

With the above in mind (not including the purchase of a new radio system), the annual savings to the Borough would be approximately \$194,000.

Closing the Police Station – Chief Margeson rightly observed that if we simply discontinued providing emergency dispatch services, our citizens would see a reduction of customer service. In an effort to alleviate this, again based on Mayor Kronenberg’s recommendation, two full time and one or more part time employees would be hired to staff the police station 16 hours a day seven days a week.

The Police Station would be open from 8 a.m. to 12 a.m. and closed from 12 a.m. to 8 a.m. It is our hope that, in the future, we can encourage our residents to contact the Police Station with routine requests for information between 8 a.m. and 12 a.m. and to utilize our new and enhanced website which will likely contain most of the routine information they are seeking.

Support Services Performed by Dispatchers – hiring two full time and one or more part time administrative employees will allow us to provide most of the customer service and administrative support to police we now are providing. Additionally, Cumberland County Emergency 911 Center indicated that they would be willing to provide routine event information for non emergency callers and that they would be willing to forward non emergency calls to any other number we provide them.

New Radios – With the currently aging analog radio system, the Borough will need to purchase a new radio system regardless of how it decides to proceed with dispatch. So, the cost of radios could be viewed as a fixed cost. Using the county radio system will allow for effective and transparent interoperability, which we do not currently have. Further, the County system will allow for the use of encryption which will allow our officers, in particularly sensitive situations, to operate beyond the reach of scanners.

Records Management System (RMS)

While the C-Net system may be perceived by some Carlisle Police personnel as less desirable than Metro this may be so due to unfamiliarity with the C-Net system. C-Net is a countywide data entry system and would allow data to be shared more easily with the County and many of the surrounding municipalities.

Downtown Carlisle Camera System

The 16 existing cameras and 42 Housing Authority cameras scheduled to go on-line will remain useful as an after the fact investigation tool. In addition, the 911 Center has informed us that during a significant incident the camera feed could be streamed to their Dispatcher at the 911 Center. Finally, the administrative employees that would be hired would still be able to monitor the cameras as before and have access to the county digital radios to inform officers of events occurring between the hours of 8 a.m. to 12 a.m.

Cell Phones

Purchasing officers a cell phone for additional communication capabilities seems reasonable. Cell phones through the Borough's Verizon plan are purchased at no cost and the monthly package for a cell phone without a data plan costs the Borough only \$35 a month. Since each vehicle has a computer with 4G internet access, a smart phone would not be necessary.

911 vs. 243-5252

The long standing tradition in the Borough of calling 243-5252 instead of 911 for emergency calls is a cultural tendency that should be changed. 911 is the universal emergency number throughout the United States and its use is repeatedly taught to our youth due to the superior technological capabilities of emergency centers as described above. The current 5252 line, even with additional hardware or software installed to enhance its capabilities, would not compare to the capabilities provided to Dispatchers on each call at the 911 center.

Status of Carlisle Police Department Dispatchers

One of the most important questions to consider in light of the above recommendations is how the Borough would assist each of our current Dispatchers with such a transition. Below are possible actions the Borough could take to assist our Dispatchers in the event we stop providing primary emergency dispatch services. The Borough could:

1. Reassign two existing Dispatchers to the two proposed full-time administrative positions at the Police Station.
2. Provide assistance and training to meet the County dispatcher standards and assist in becoming a County Dispatcher.

3. Reassign existing Dispatchers to other Borough position as they become available.
4. Provide a severance package to be determined at a later date.
5. Assist existing Dispatchers with a job search outside of the Borough of Carlisle (resume writing, job hunting, etc.)

VI. Final Thoughts

I recognize that is an extremely important and sensitive issue. The Borough of Carlisle Police Department has a rich and proud history of providing outstanding public safety services to Carlisle residents. For this we should be both proud and optimistic. Adopting the report's recommendations will allow our Police to provide even better services for our residents.

I want to thank Mayor Kronenberg and Chief Margeson for the cordial and professional manner in which this issue was studied and evaluated. The Mayor and Chief were open, honest, and forthright in sharing information and sharing their views. It was my intent and hope that I adequately reciprocated.

End of Report