

## Minutes of the “Ad Hoc” Committee on Emergency Communications and Dispatch

The “Ad Hoc” Committee on Emergency Communications and Dispatch of the McLean County Board met on Thursday, February 27, 2003 at 1:00 p.m. in the ESDA Training Room, in the lower level, Law and Justice Center, 104 West Front Street, Bloomington, Illinois.

Members Present: Chairman Sorensen, Members Renner, Selzer, Sweeney

Members Absent: Member Hoselton, Johnson

Other Members Present: None

Staff Present: Mr. John Zeunik, County Administrator;  
Mr. Terry Lindberg, Assistant County Administrator;  
Ms. Christine Northcutt, County Administrator’s Assistant

Department Heads/  
Elected Officials Present: Sheriff Dave Owens; Mr. A.W. Cannon, Director, MetCom; Mr. Bill Gamblin, Director, ETSB, Chief Deputy Derick Love, Sheriff’s Department

Others Present: Randolph Township Fire Protection District, Chief Dennis Powell

Chairman Sorensen called the meeting to order at 1:04 p.m.

Chairman Sorensen stated that for the record, Mr. Hoselton is out of town and Ms. Johnson is running late and hopes to be in attendance later. For the purpose of establishing a quorum, County Board Chairman Sweeney will sit in as a temporary member.

Chairman Sorensen presented the minutes from the February 12<sup>th</sup> meeting. He asked if there were any corrections or additions. Hearing none, the minutes were accepted and placed on file as presented.

The first topic for discussion is the review of the Intergovernmental Agreement for MetCom. Chairman Sorensen stated that at the last meeting, the Committee agreed that there was substantial value in having a centralized dispatch center serving all the citizens and agencies within McLean County.

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The questions that arose had to do with whether MetCom, as a management entity, was meeting all of the needs.

Mr. Renner stated that he wanted to go on the record reaffirming that centralized dispatch is needed, but, perhaps, it can be housed under the County, in order to improve accountability.

Chairman Sorensen asked the Committee if they wanted to review a specific section of the agreement.

Mr. Selzer advised the Committee that there are two issues which he would like to point out. First, the MetCom Board is mainly a police board. Second, other provisions, which are included in the Intergovernmental Agreement have not been implemented, such as a community advisory board. Mr. Selzer further stated that he is 100% behind a centralized dispatch center. The employees and management of the current operation are working diligently, however, Mr. Selzer noted that there are structural issues.

Chairman Sorensen stated that Sheriff Owens and County Administrator, John Zeunik are present and due to their valuable knowledge and experience serving on the Board, are invited to participate in the discussion.

Chairman Sorensen asked the Committee if there were specific elements which could be changed to deal with the concerns raised by the Committee.

Mr. Selzer stated that the main issue is acceptance of responsibility and accountability of the system. He suggested that the Committee recommend a change to the Intergovernmental Agreement to have the Agreement mirror the ETSB Agreement so there is continuity at a Board level. Another option would be to have the department heads from ETSB and MetCom report to the same person.

Mr. Renner stated that it may be easier to alter the Intergovernmental Agreement, rather than try to disband MetCom and start over.

Mr. Selzer noted that there will still be two boards because of the State Law that created the ETSB.

Chairman Sorensen stated that he wanted to hear from Sheriff Owens or Mr. Zeunik on this topic.

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Sheriff Owens commented that the current structure can be problematic at times. He stated that the ETSB has to stay in tact due to State Law. The ETSB must take care of issues relating to 911 and enhanced 911. The ETSB membership is broader, in terms of community involvement. The membership consists of Sheriff Owens, the Bloomington and Normal Police Chiefs, three members representing rural fire departments, one representative from Emergency Medical Services, one representative from rural ambulance service, and one public member.

Sheriff Owens stated that trying to have one manager serve as the head of the ETSB and MetCom does not work. This was tried before with Bill Gamblin as the head of both entities. The demands of ETSB and MetCom are too much responsibility for one person.

Sheriff Owens noted that he has no major objection to combining the two boards, as long as centralized dispatch remains in tact. The current MetCom Director, Tony Cannon, has made improvements to the MetCom organization. Overall, the day-to-day centralized dispatch operations have improved. The present structure may not be the most efficient structure. There are many issues in changing the structure.

Chairman Sorensen stated that Article III of the Intergovernmental Agreement creates an Operations Board. Chairman Sorensen asked if an amendment that simply vests all of the operational board's powers to the ETSB Board would bring about this change.

Mr. Zeunik replied that ETSB would have to agree to accept those responsibilities. This was noted in Chief Civil Assistant State's Attorney, Eric Ruud's legal opinion (which was part of the packet of information passed out for this meeting). There would have to be another Intergovernmental Agreement signed by both parties. Mr. Zeunik stated that the Committee would have to ask Mr. Ruud for final clarification.

Chairman Sorensen stated that in reading Article III, he understood that if you amend the Agreement to state that the members of the Operations Board are the same as the members of the ETSB board, then there would be the same membership on both Boards.

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Sheriff Owens stated that the City Managers and County Administrator are not on the ETSB board, but are on MetCom Board. They are very key players on the MetCom Board.

Chairman Sorensen stated that he understands the importance of the Administrator and Managers. He informed the Committee that he did not think they had to be actual members of the Board to participate in the meetings.

Mr. Selzer stated that he feels that it puts the Administrator and Managers in an awkward position to be a member of the Board. He said that he didn't think it would be a problem for legislators to add or change members for the good of the "system" as a whole.

Chairman Sorensen asked Mr. Zeunik if he had a comment to add to this topic.

Mr. Zeunik stated that, in order to change the membership of the ETSB board, there would have to be a change in legislation. The current enabling law is very clear as to who can serve on the Board. The legislative intent of the current law was to maintain independence as it relates to establishing an E-911 system. One concern that the ICC has expressed is that Police Chiefs are appointed by the City Manager. So there may not be true independence on the Board.

Sheriff Owens stated that there are three agencies that fund MetCom. The ETSB is represented by Dennis Powell, who also represents the rural fire departments. There is also Sheriff Owens, the City Managers, the two Police Chiefs and the County Administrator. The entities that fund MetCom have representatives on the Board. If you broaden the representation of MetCom, it will not represent the entities that fund MetCom.

The ETSB board is made up of a broader base of the community and the funding for that entity comes from the telephone surcharge on wired phones and the surcharge on cell phones. Funding sources are different.

Chairman Sorensen asked Sheriff Owens if the ETSB and MetCom Boards had four overlapping members. Sheriff Owens stated that was correct. Chairman Sorensen stated that there are five additional members that are not on the MetCom Board.

Mr. Selzer noted that the membership of the MetCom Board is clearly tilted toward Bloomington and Normal, while MetCom serves the entire County.

Mr. Selzer observed that Bloomington and Normal have a quorum of the MetCom Board with their Police Chiefs and City Managers. He suggested that all of the entities that are served by MetCom should get together for a discussion regarding governance.

Mr. Renner asked if the Committee could propose what Chairman Sorensen had suggested, that is to vest the responsibilities of the MetCom Board into the ESTB Board.

Mr. Zeunik stated that when the decision was made to go to a centralized communications center, it was made very clear that the ETSB Board could not oversee a centralized communications center. The ICC and the State's Attorney's Office have been very clear that ETSB's responsibility is strictly to handle the enhanced-911 call. By that definition, ETSB's responsibility ends at the point that the call is passed to a dispatcher. Any subsequent action taken is a non-enhanced-911 function and E-911 dollars cannot be used for that purpose. As a result, the decision was made to create another entity to take care of that function. The MetCom Board was created based on funding. That decision created a lot of friction among other emergency service agencies. So the Agreement was amended to provide representation for Fire without requirement of any additional monies. Originally, the MetCom Board was going to be the Sheriff and the two Police Chiefs. That was changed because of the potential Open Meeting Act violations, since the Sheriff and the two Police Chiefs constitute a majority of a quorum on ETSB. As a result, the City Managers and the County Administrator were brought on the Board.

Mr. Selzer stated that everything is different now. Mr. Zeunik noted that the parties and the manner in which funding is allocated is still the same as envisioned in the Intergovernmental Agreement.

Mr. Selzer asked if the ETSB was contributing to MetCom from the very beginning. Mr. Zeunik responded that the ETSB is paying a percentage of expenses recognizing that there is a percentage of what MetCom does that falls under the use of the surcharge.

Randolph Fire Chief, Dennis Powell stated that is correct. He further stated that, in the beginning, he was supposed to be the fourth representative that was contributing to MetCom (representing the ETSB).

Mr. Selzer stated that the governance needs to be totally revamped. The situation today is different than it was when the Intergovernmental Agreement was drawn up.

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Chairman Sorensen stated that the charge to this Committee is to evaluate this situation and to provide specific recommendations. He stated that he does not know if those specific recommendations would be endorsed or accepted by the full County Board or anyone else. It provides a beginning conversation.

Mr. Selzer cited State's Attorney Charles G. Reynard's letter of August 1, 2002, Article VII, paragraph three, it states that the MetCom Board and ETSB Board can legally co-exist if the County Board amends the Ordinance to appoint Administrators to ETSB, then all current members of the MetCom Board will also be members of the ETSB.

Mr. Renner asked Chairman Sorensen if the Committee agrees to this concept, in theory, what should be done next.

McLean County Board Chairman Sweeney stated that the Committee has not identified any specific problem with the current MetCom operation. The Committee has only stated that the current structure is a problem. Secondly, the County, the Town and the City all have to agree on any appointments to this Board. Chairman Sweeney further stated that MetCom's operation has gotten much better over the last couple of months.

Mr. Selzer asked why is the Committee looking at the Intergovernmental Agreement if the structure of MetCom is working so well.

Sheriff Owens noted there are two separate issues, radios and communications. They should not be lumped together.

Mr. Tony Cannon, Director, MetCom, stated that there is not a problem dispatching police, fire, and EMS on different radio systems. He stated that the only problem is that Sheriff Owens and his deputies cannot hear on their current radio system.

Mr. Sweeney stated that Mr. Cannon may have stated it more clearly, but that is his point.

Mr. Cannon stated that dispatch centers across the nation dispatch off of several different radio systems.

Mr. Selzer asked Mr. Cannon if Bloomington Fire Department is having good luck with its radio system. Mr. Cannon replied that they applaud the EF Johnson System.

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Mr. Cannon stated that the issue is with the Sheriff's radio system. It would be ideal if all agencies used the same system, but MetCom has the ability to communicate with all of the agencies.

Chairman Sorensen stated that the Committee was formed for two reasons. First, the Committee is to deal with the radio communications problems that exist in the Sheriff's Department and in the rural agencies. Second, the Committee is dealing with operational concerns with MetCom. Chairman Sorensen stated that the Committee acknowledges that MetCom is in much better shape than it was six months ago. There were, in the past, operational issues. The concern with these issues has been that the MetCom Board would take limited responsibility and ETSB Board would take limited responsibility. Chairman Sorensen stated that is the reason that this Committee was formed. Chairman Sorensen stated that if the Committee finds that MetCom is functioning in an acceptable manner, then that is fine. There is still the issue of the Sheriff's radio problem.

Sheriff Owens advised the Committee that Bloomington and Normal's move to the 400 MHz radio system was basically out of frustration. Outside consultants from the federal government were brought in to look at every avenue to make the system work. In August, 2001 the MetCom Board and ETSB finally began to understand the problems and how expensive it would be to remedy these problems.

Sheriff Owens informed the Committee that Normal had their old 400 MHz equipment in storage. Normal decided to use the 400 MHz equipment again. Bloomington purchased a system that worked better than the EF Johnson system. Bloomington and Normal were making a move to protect their officers in the field.

Sheriff Owens stated that the radio issue is a public safety issue. The Sheriff's Department deputies put their lives on the line every day. Sheriff Owens noted that his only goal is to have reliable radio equipment.

Mr. Renner stated that there are two definite issues. The first issue of MetCom structure is probably not going to be resolved today. He suggested that the Committee turn its attention to Sheriff Owens' radio equipment.

Mr. Selzer said if there is not going to be a resolution to the issue of MetCom's structure then, the subject should be closed.

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Motion by Selzer/Sweeney to recommend doing nothing with the MetCom structure under the present Intergovernmental Agreement.

Chairman Sorensen advised the Committee that Mr. Renner has requested that a roll call vote be taken. Chairman Sorensen stated that to vote yes is to recommend that the Committee do nothing with the MetCom structure.

Mr. Selzer	Yes
Mr. Sweeney	Yes
Mr. Renner	No
Mr. Sorensen	Yes

Motion carried by a vote of 3-1.

Chairman Sorensen stated that the next item on the agenda is communications options and he turned the floor over to Sheriff Owens.

Sheriff Owens stated that, at the Committee's request, he had presented a written report on StarComm 21 and Clear Talk. Sheriff Owens and his staff are currently testing the Pyramid in car repeaters in one of his cars with the existing equipment. They will continue to use the equipment for another a week or two and return to the Committee with a report and recommendation.

Sheriff Owens informed the Committee that the only radio system that he has been able to test is the Clear Talk system. If you buy the right portable and mobile equipment, it can be utilized with both StarComm 21 and Clear Talk. He stated that he is looking for short term/interim solutions that can lead to a long-term solution. He stated that he doesn't care what option is chosen as long as it meets their needs.

Sheriff Owens noted that he knows cost is a consideration. He informed the Committee that he is aware that there could not be a more inopportune time to be asking for funding for a radio system.

Mr. Renner asked Sheriff Owens if the estimate of \$460,000 would increase if they were to buy equipment that would work on both the StarComm 21 and the Clear Talk systems. Sheriff Owens replied that he had obtained that quote from a Motorola salesperson. It is all new equipment and it will work on both systems.



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Mr. Renner asked if the monthly fee would be higher by signing a one-year contract with Clear Talk. Sheriff Owens stated that the County would have to discuss that with Clear Talk.

Mr. Renner stated that there is an obvious problem with the current system. If the Board waits until August when StarComm 21 is available, the Sheriff's Department would be the guinea pigs. Mr. Renner asked Sheriff Owens if the Board chooses Clear Talk for a short term (possibly a one-year contract), would the County be able to convert to StarComm 21 with minimal additional cost.

Sheriff Owens replied that the radios would have to re-programmed and the cost would probably be very minimal. He suggested that when equipment is purchased it should be equipment that is able to work on both an analog and digital system. That way it will be able to work with both systems.

Mr. Renner stated that it doesn't appear that there are a whole lot of options other than what Sheriff Owens has suggested.

Chairman Sorensen stated that, on behalf of the Committee, Request for Information letters have been sent out to Clear Talk and StarComm 21. He stated that, in order for Clear Talk to be a viable option, an additional tower must be constructed. Immediate Countywide coverage is not available with either system.

Mr. Selzer stated that the bottom line is that Sheriff Owens has declared this to be a public safety issue. Mr. Selzer recommended that the Committee give the Sheriff what he wants.

Chairman Sorensen stated that ultimately the responsibility for the Sheriff's radio system falls to the McLean County Board. The County Board members helped create MetCom along with the members of the Bloomington City Council and the Normal Town Council. He noted that the Committee is doing the right thing by trying to find a viable solution to this problem.

Chairman Sorensen stated that he doesn't feel that the Committee should meet before hearing back from StarComm 21 and Clear Talk. However, he stated that the Committee must put together an interim report to be presented to the County Board at the March County Board Meeting.

Mr. Selzer stated that he is anxious to hear the results of the tests with the Pyramid repeaters because that could be a temporary solution. He suggested that the Committee meet when Sheriff Owens has some results.

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Mr. Renner asked Sheriff Owens how long it would be before they could get some results from the Pyramid repeater tests.

Sheriff Owens stated that they can have testing done in a week. They have specific locations that they want to test and compare with the Clear Talk system. He suggested that the Committee speak with the actual officers that perform the tests on the system.

Chairman Sorensen asked the Committee if they would like to meet on Monday, March 10<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 p.m. The Committee agreed.

Mr. Selzer confirmed that the purpose of that meeting would be to get a report on the Pyramid repeaters and look at a short-term recommendation.

Mr. Renner asked Chairman Sorensen if the Committee will receive the information from StarComm 21 and Clear Talk by March 10<sup>th</sup>.

Chairman Sorensen stated that March 10<sup>th</sup> is eight days before the information is due, so it is very doubtful.

There being nothing further to come before the Committee at this time, Chairman Sorensen adjourned the meeting at 2:34 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Christine S. Northcutt  
Recording Secretary