

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, January 23, 2003 at 1:00 p.m. in Room 700, Law and Justice Center, 104 West Front Street, Bloomington, Illinois.

Members Present: Chairman Sorensen, Members Renner, Johnson, Hoselton, Selzer

Members Absent: None

Other Members Present: County Board Chairman Sweeney, Member Owens

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, Interim Director, MetCom; Mr. Bill Gamblin, Director, ETSB; Chief Deputy Derick Love, Sheriff's Department

Chairman Sorensen called the meeting to order at 3:06 p.m. He stated that he recommend that a quorum be set at four members, rather than three due to the importance of the issues at hand. He stated that the Committee has three basic responsibilities. First, the Committee needs to look at the intergovernmental agreement that established MetCom, evaluate it and return any findings that the Committee feels is appropriate. Second, the Committee needs to look at the emergency radio communications for the Sheriff's Department and the rural communities as a critical issue. Finally, the Committee is to present reports and any recommendations to the McLean County Board in the March Committee cycle. He stated the primary purpose for convening the meeting so quickly after the County Board meeting was to acknowledge the fact that there is much material and information to sift through in a short amount of time. Chairman Sorensen then opened the floor for discussion.

Mr. Selzer passed out a sheet of issues/questions that he had prepared. There are three key areas that he would suggest that the Committee address. The first issue is the infrastructure/technical aspect. The second issue is to look at the finances. The Committee needs some sort of cost estimate. The third is the management/operations aspect. He then presented four questions he would like to ask the "users" of the system:

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1. Based on your current knowledge of the Countywide radio system, how would you rate the cause of the system failures?
2. Assuming a good solution is developed using the current radios and manufacturer, would you have a problem using that equipment or knowing that the equipment is being used as the primary emergency dispatch system?
3. As a taxpayer, are you willing to help pay some additional dollars if we can guarantee you that the solution will correct any problems and provide safe/quality service?
4. Do you have any suggestions relative to design, financing or operations?

Mr. Hoselton stated he would like to have all of the information that has been gathered by the previous "Ad Hoc" Radio Committee. He mentioned that he was aware that the Sheriff had made a map of the County and divided it into grids that have excellent communication and areas that don't. Sheriff Owens responded by stating that they did testing of the "Clear Talk" system by grid Countywide and that he would be happy to provide any information to the Committee that his office has gathered. Mr. Hoselton said he would also like to see the original bids which were received for this project.

Ms. Johnson stated she would like to see the minutes and the findings of the previous "Ad Hoc" Radio Committee. Sheriff Owens responded he would provide the minutes to the Committee. Ms. Johnson said she would also like to have someone address the Committee regarding the towers and the design of the current system. Mr. Renner noted that the Committee is interested in the historic background in order to have all information available and not to place blame. Ms. Johnson said she agreed with Mr. Renner. She said the goal is to fix the problem.

Chairman Sorensen suggested a three-phase methodology: Phase I – Discovery; Phase II – Problem Identification; and Phase III – Problem Resolution/Recommendation.

Chairman Sorensen recommended that the Committee spend the next two weeks digesting information. He suggested the Committee needs a single point of contact for information requests and it should be the Administrator's Office. He asked the Administrator's Office to keep track of all requests and distribute copies of reports and other pertinent information to the entire Committee. The Administrator's Office can then publish an official document with all of the information and resources that have been made available to the members of the Committee. If the members of the Committee wish to request information that is not available to the Administrator's Office, then do so and get a copy to the Administrator's Office as quickly as possible for distribution to the other members

of the Committee. Chairman Sorensen suggested scheduling a second meeting at which time, he would like to invite two individuals to present information to the Committee. Chairman Sorensen suggested that Sheriff Dave Owens, who is the chairman of the "Ad Hoc" Radio Committee, explain the material that he will be distributing to the Committee over the next couple of weeks. The second is Gary Huber, who is retired from State Farm after working in wireless communications. There is a third possible guest, Mr. Bill Blumgren who is responsible for communications at ISU. Chairman Sorensen would like to schedule a third meeting during the week of the February 10th. Ms. Johnson asked if the Committee members could suggest additional speakers. Chairman Sorensen said that would be fine as long as there aren't too many with the short amount of time that there is to work out this issue.

Ms. Johnson asked if the Committee was looking for a radio for the Sheriff's Department or for the entire County. Chairman Sorensen said that it was his perception that they were searching for the Sheriff's Department and for the rural agencies.

Mr. Selzer said again that he would like to hear from the users of the system and from the community whether it be a mailed survey, an internet survey or if they are invited to a meeting to speak. Chairman Sorensen asked the Committee members what they thought would be the best way to collect the information. He then asked Sheriff Owens what he thought would be best. Sheriff Owens said his staff would be happy to share their experience with the Committee. The rural communities may be better served with a survey. Mr. Hoselton stated that the rural communities probably don't have a lot of experience with the radio and that the people that the Committee would probably want to hear from probably won't respond. Sheriff Owens said that the rural communities of Chenoa, Colfax, Lexington, Gridley, Heyworth, LeRoy, McLean, Stanford and Danvers all use the system and would answer a survey or would be happy to speak to the Committee to give their feedback. He said the problems with the system are Countywide and they are not limited to select areas.

Chairman Sorensen stated that Sheriff Owens brought additional information to the meeting. A logging of recently reported radio problems and a map of where the problems occurred in the County. The actual specific problem reports and older problem reports will be available in the Administrator's Office for anyone who would like to look through them.

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Chairman Sorensen asked the Committee if they would like for Mr. Renner to create a survey. Ms. Johnson said she would like to give the officers in the rural communities the opportunity to come to a meeting so the Committee members can ask specific questions. Mr. Renner said that, perhaps, the questions on the survey could be more general to give the users an opportunity to create their own agenda and to give the option to come and speak to the Committee as well.

Mr. Hoselton mentioned that he was not a radio expert and may need some additional information in order to help solve the problem.

Mr. Selzer stated that the majority of people that he has spoken with say that it is the "system" that has problems. Perhaps, it is not the E. F. Johnson system that is bad. The present system may not implemented or designed correctly. Perception is reality and if people think it is bad, then ultimately it is. He stated that it may not be possible to get a system within the County's budget that will meet our needs. Even cell phones cut out in certain areas.

Chairman Sorensen stated this is all healthy conversation and it will ultimately help get to the answers that the Committee seeks. He asked the committee if they could schedule a meeting for February 6th or February 7th. The Committee agreed to set Friday, February 7th at 1:00 p.m. as the next meeting date. The third meeting was scheduled for Wednesday, February 12th at 1:00 p.m.

Chairman Sorensen commented that from his perspective he understands that there is a real problem/issue at hand that requires attention quickly. He has communicated with the Sheriff and strongly encouraged him to add NexTel phones to the complement of equipment in squad cars. He has also encouraged the Sheriff to reimburse any deputy at the same rate that we pay for service on the other NexTel cell phones. He sees this as a temporary solution until a more permanent solution is reached. He intends to approach the Justice Committee in the February meeting cycle and advance an emergency appropriation amendment to cover any budget shortfalls in the Sheriff's Department. The Sheriff's Department will probably need eight to ten phones. The approximate cost per phone is between \$30 - \$36/month.

Motion by Renner/Johnson to recommend approval of the recommendation to add NexTel cell phones to the complement of equipment for all Sheriff's squad cars and to reimburse any officers who have already purchased NexTel cell phones.

Motion Carried.

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Mr. Renner stated he has every confidence that the Justice Committee will approve this motion, but if it does not pass, he will devote \$1,000 of his stipend as Justice Committee chair to pay for this.

Mr. Owens asked that notices be sent to all members of the McLean County Board for these meetings. Chairman Sorensen responded that by rule of the County Board Chairman, in the future, notices of the Committee meetings will be sent to all Board members.

There being nothing further to come before the Committee at this time, Chairman Sorensen adjourned the meeting at 1:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Christine S. Northcutt
Recording Secretary