

City of Gahanna

*200 South Hamilton Road
Gahanna, Ohio 43230*



Meeting Minutes

Monday, February 14, 2000

Commence following Finance Committee

9:00 PM

Council Committee Rooms

Committee of the Whole

Rebecca W. Stinchcomb, Chairman

Karen J. Angelou

Sherie James-Arnold

Michael O'Brien

L. Nicholas Hogan

Thomas R. Kneeland

Debra A. Payne, ex officio

ADDITIONAL ATTENDEES:

Jim McGregor, Sadicka White, Tom Weber, Jerry Isler, Raleigh Mitchell, Dennis Murphy, Wayne Howard, Reynoldsburg Police Chief Jeanne Miller.

PENDING LEGISLATION

Members Present: Debra A. Payne, Sherie James-Arnold, Rebecca W. Stinchcomb, Thomas R. Kneeland, L. Nicholas Hogan and Karen J. Angelou

ORD-0003-2000

TO ENACT CHAPTER 931, GAHANNA COMPREHENSIVE RIGHT OF WAY, OF THE CODIFIED ORDINANCES OF GAHANNA, TO PROVIDE FOR COMPREHENSIVE RIGHT OF WAY POLICY IN THE CITY OF GAHANNA

Recommended for Adoption, Consent

ISSUES**Joint Dispatching Report**

Howard introduced Jeanne Miller who has done the lion's share of the work; provided a copy of this report for your reading a while ago; provided a memo dated today that is an executive summary; at a crossroads where we need to make a decision; need guidance.

Howard continued that several recommendations came out of the report; first was to house the new center in the new Reynoldsburg Police Department; second was to change to 800 mhz trunk radio system; needs to be more study before serious consideration is given to that; City of Columbus owns most of the channels in the 800 system; Grove City has 8 and County owns 16; all of the 800 system for this Central Ohio area is locked up; if we go with them we are at their mercy; 460 system we are on is good for another couple of years; picked up another channel for the mobile data; if we can maintain what we have for the next two years the 700 and 900 systems will merge; then will have the ability to talk across the spectrum; could buy our own system and talk across the 800 system at substantially less money; think we should stay away from the 800 mhz system.

Howard continued that the study says combined dispatching will work; because of the size of the radio rooms and other equipment problems we have had, as well as some personnel issues, we have not had a Class A dispatch center; by combining them together the equipment standard will raise as well as the service standard; will have better coverage; is hard to maintain a conversation when there's a lot of background; think the combined dispatching is the way to go; would be less than candid to say 8 agencies are ready to move; could end up with 6 at this point in time; need to get some Council involvement; need to get Law Directors for all entities involved as to a contract.

Kneeland stated he was not a proponent of not going to 800 mhz system; differed at the beginning but now we have invested about a quarter million dollars in mobile data systems; what kind of impact will that have on use as we were on leading edge; will we end up paying a penalty. Howard stated thinks we have the ability to guide this and that it will not hurt us; don't need to jump on the 800 train; they are starting to have problems; we can jump on the beginning of the next train; can't think of any reason to take our mobile data information off that channel. don't know where Reynoldsburg is as to mobile data but can continue for our units; will not affect the relationship with the other units.

Angelou asked if we can have different levels. Howard stated we can run our mobile data on separate channel and will not hurt us; we could run and Reynoldsburg could also run one. Miller stated they were currently investigating a federal grant to do that; don't see that it would negatively impact you; would want all police agencies to go to an MDS base to cut down on radio traffic; if an officer wants any information today they have to call to dispatcher and put a LEADS check in system; with an MDS it is tied into system and officers do their own work. Kneeland asked that because of the alignment of the radio spectrum issue and the lower band radio for the data terminals, could we be forced off the lower band. Howard replied that they will not force us off that; what would happen is as radio technology changes those bands will become narrower; 8 years from now it may be forced off but that would be due to the life cycle on technology; FCC is saying currently we have 8 years; may be forced off with technology changing at that point; within 5 years that could be outdated.

Kneeland stated report talks about the purchase of a new 911 system. Miller stated that with consolidation and all jurisdictions being directed into one center, would need new equipment to handle that. Kneeland questioned new enhanced features and Miller stated that all we would require new equipment not sure there are new enhancements; currently working on technology for cellular phone location when 911 is called; that is not available currently.

McGregor asked the status of building in Reynoldsburg. Miller stated they are in process of hiring a construction manager; council and administration are putting out for bid yet this month; hope to break ground by May.

Angelou asked if any other communities were ready. Howard noted that Mifflin Township chose not to go with us at start; all safety forces need to be involved; if combined then all of Gahanna safety forces need to be involved; believe the Trustees are interested enough to at least talk; old adage build a field and they will come; if we can get it going feel others will be interested; some stay out until it is up and running but feel even nay sayers are going to be interested.

McGregor noted that we have been able to incorporate joint fueling with Mifflin, Jefferson and schools; also have joint vehicle maintenance; have built the fueling station and maintenance center; questioned if it was proposed that we pay a portion of capital improvements for building rather than machinery. Miller stated that facility as designed is designed for a 4 person dispatch center; this is not going to be big enough for future growth; Council is moving forward as designed but Communications Center is on an out corner of the building so if it would need to be expanded it could be.

Angelou questioned the loss of local control; are involved in some joint ventures; is important not for the Council but for Police Department itself to feel there is control. Howard noted that has been a concern from day one; needs to be equal representation; if you are involved you have the same amount of input; will be a Board comprised of 1 representative from each jurisdiction that would control the center; Elert stated it has been done and it is not that cumbersome; we went one step further and said they should elect a board of 5 and that would control; day to day operations would be under the direction of the Communications Director hired by the board. Miller stated that Reynoldsburg and Gahanna are certainly the big kids on the block in consideration of this; however, every jurisdiction would have an equal voice; in driving the process there is probably going to be a domino effect; the one agency that may have a problem geographically is the Pickerington Police Department and Violet Township Fire Department as they cross county lines; others have pretty much said they will come on board; we haven't heard any different.

McGregor stated it was a changing world of dispatching; talk to our dispatchers all the time; what if they give us a lower priority. Howard noted that with mobile data units police officers will be making a lot of their own calls; with LEADS computer in the cars the main thing left to the dispatchers will be the 911 calls; won't be a call for priorities by the individual departments. Miller stated it was very clear that all of us could be better served if the City and Townships could find some common ground to improve their current systems; clear to us that we have D+ facilities; even if this does not move forward think that some consolidation is necessary; strongly urge you to look at some consolidation; need to improve service; need to quit double dipping taxpayers for communication services; the bigger consolidation if it comes off is great but you need to look at a smaller consolidation if you don't want to move forward with this; my message to Reynoldsburg City Council has been to sit down with Truro Township and talk.

Hogan noted that we dial 911 now and we get transferred to the County; then they call us back; if Mifflin and City could come together it could make a difference. Miller noted it would make for a seamless communication for Police and Fire; in a major disaster we can all talk to one another quickly and effortlessly. McGregor stated that Mifflin is on the 800 system. Angelou stated Mifflin dispatching is done by the Sheriff; the most expeditious route would be for everyone to be on same system. Miller stated that fire services do a tremendous amount of mutual aid; Police Departments don't do that by virtue of the law; can't come into Gahanna and arrest a citizen; with fire service nobody cares what jurisdiction. Howard stated he would be the first to point out that police and fire don't talk on that radio in an emergency; our dispatchers have never dispatched fire before; New Albany Police Department has done both sides of the house.

Angelou referenced a recent news story about Philadelphia where a new system was put into place after a teenager died because they couldn't get through to 911 due to running license plates; went into another system that was a lower cost; pushed for a new 911 system and got it. Howard stated there won't be that much running license plates, etc; can't say none because there is always an exception. Miller noted there should be a tremendous reduction due to the mobile data system; makes officers more productive; an officer using a MDT with LEADS access makes an arrest once every 20 hours; without LEADS access once every 100 work hours.

Payne asked Chief Murphy's feelings on this. Murphy stated we are running a D effort; barely keeping our heads above water; am not an advocate of joint dispatching; we are on the leading edge of technology; have a problem if I have to go through a committee; am selfish about delivering services; am a proponent of joint dispatching with Mifflin and Jefferson; of 5 full time dispatchers feel there is now only 1 that can carry his weight; Motorola is notorious for getting everyone on board then rolling; once background is in place what is carrying the transmission is not important; would love to get on with Mifflin to save those precious minutes in dispatch; 2 years ago we gave Mifflin Battalion Chief one of our radios so we can talk in an emergency; they want to give us a 800mhz for the same reason; don't want to see dispatching leave our city; feel we do need a professional supervisor that eats, sleeps, and drinks LEADS; don't want a cop want to be to be in charge of a dispatch center; if we do joint dispatching and focus on 911 the computers in the cars will eliminate a lot of that traffic; still have citizens call in for a multitude of service.

McGregor noted that our current dispatch center gives lousy service and insults our residents; Upper Arlington when they didn't go to a joint operation spent \$1 million more to operate their own system; don't see us putting \$1 million in it; why would we upgrade to an operation at a level "C" when we can go to an "A"; look at our budget

every year; constantly add police but not dispatchers; priorities were right; now we need an "A" level operation.

In response to question from Stinchcomb regarding staff, Miller noted it is not important for the fire agencies to still have a staff person on duty to greet public; for the police departments it is more of an issue; is still a lot of walk in traffic for police. McGregor stated we have 2 clerks at the Police Department. Miller stated that Reynoldsburg has 5 full time and 1 part time. McGregor noted we could use existing dispatchers; also could move those clerks to work around the clock.

Payne asked if Murphy would be in support of a joint system if it was located in Gahanna. Murphy stated that where it is located is not critical; would feel more comfortable because we'd be the big guy; if strictly a 911 dispatch then it might be okay but we do more than 911 business.

Howard stated that up front it was said we won't save money initially; down the line it will save money; things that will be coming are the mandatory training as a combined dispatch center; do in house or send out but service will increase because we can set higher standards; because we are combined if the governing board says we are only going to do 911 what do we do about local service; what can you do if there isn't agreement.

Miller stated that all cities are in same position; we all get calls about when the parade is going to start, fireworks, first day of school, snow calls; all that information would have to be fed into the center's computer data base and would have to be able to call up those questions; one of the commitments is that if service is not going to be as good or better, then we could not move forward; why would you buy into a system where service is poorer; one comment about cost; don't know what Mifflin pays currently; Violet Township pays Pickerington \$4.69 an hour over the course of a year to have somebody sitting there 24 hours a day ready to dispatch them when that call come in; Pickerington's costs are far greater.

Angelou asked if there were any negatives to staying on the 460 mhz system. Howard stated that everything is scannable now; lot of people are moving away from the 460 system.

James Arnold asked about Civil Service; do they have their own or is each entity separate; whose rules apply; currently different rules for different cities. Howard stated that was one of the issues that does need to be agreed to. Miller stated there would have to be one set of rules; obviously State has a set of rules we could fall back on; ours are probably a little different than yours; this would all be under the new board - which rules, testing, etc. - also unions are involved and that would need to be worked out; if we chose to move forward, there is language in each contract; all we are obligated to do is let current employees know that their services after a said date would not be needed; job market is very tight; would probably recommend some of my dispatchers but not necessarily all of them; all would be eligible to compete; not sure of Gahanna's language.

Stinchcomb thanked Howard and Miller for all their work on this over the last 3 or 4 years; frankly don't see that we are coming any closer to a consensus. Howard stated there is a lot of agreement that we never had before. Miller stated there is a much clearer picture of the fiscal issues; made sense that we could save money; don't know that will not happen; can continue to underwrite a D+ facility and you will save money;

if you want an A system, need to do some hard thinking. Stinchcomb stated that Reynoldsburg seems to be making progress; Gahanna may not have made progress.

In response to question from Angelou, Miller stated that a combined facility gives a reduction in time from caller to safety person responding; gives us better trained dispatchers receiving the calls; gives us quicker emergency medical dispatch; can't give any emergency medical advice; could gear up to have that; gives us better quality equipment; your dispatch room is probably the best of the lot right now; is a palace compared to some of us; actually judge quality by the response time.

McGregor stated we would gain in the dispensing of accurate information, timely information, politeness. In response to question from James Arnold, Miller stated that current police dispatchers would need training for dispatching emergency medical; need training to do that. Howard stated there needs to be training for the dispatchers.

O'Brien stated he has never been one to go along with loss of control; was a consensus around this table when we all agreed on considering hiring a LEADS specialist for dispatching supervisor; D+ is not acceptable; don't see how Miller or Murphy could run a Department that has to be run by consensus; lot they need to do on their job has to do with being able to pick up a phone and make a decision; with loss of local control, the first time we have a hiccup our citizens will tar and feather everyone around this table.

Payne stated she had visited a dispatch center in Hamilton County; is a state of the art facility; is being done; is not a new concept to share dispatching; as we look at global economies we need to look outside the box; give better service to our constituents.

Stinchcomb stated she still sees a diversity of opinion. Angelou stated it is overwhelming just digesting at this point; need to look at the fact that for Gahanna to join Reynoldsburg what does that give us to increase from D level if Mifflin doesn't join; have to discuss with Mifflin. O'Brien stated he did not see where this would cost us \$1 million.

Kneeland stated the big driver to this whole issue is technology; pushing responsibility further out to the edge with the edge being the cruisers; putting tools in people's hands they haven't had before; giving new responsibilities to people; lived through my personal career going from a situation where we have ownership of a center, then becoming a regional center, and certainly there is merit in both positions; downfall that I saw is that you have to be committed up front for a regional approach so you have appropriate training, tools, and people and you can't shortcut at all; you break the system if you shortcut; have lived this the last 10 years; went from local control to 13 state but have seen the pitfalls; technology is the driver; is a face behind the phones but that person becomes a transparent pipeline to transfer of information; really keep in mind what the drivers are and what they are accomplishing; don't want to see us close the door on more of a consolidated effort in a regional type environment; there can be some big major pitfalls if commitments aren't given up front.

McGregor stated that if we try to improve we won't provide much better because Civil Service controls; Sgt. Brown is in charge now and doing an excellent job; but we won't lose one of those people we have and we will get more people like them; that's your only choice; feel it is time to move to an independent professional organization; tired of the mediocre hogwash that you get today and the false information,

Howard stated at this point they wanted to get the report on the table; needs to be looked at; really believe the combined dispatch center will save us money in the long run; will

provide better service; possibly can bring Mifflin underneath our umbrella so there is one dispatching for law enforcement and fire safety forces for our residents; eventually Jefferson Township has to make a decision on what they want to do; would be nice to say we can provide that service.

Payne stated it would be nice if other council members would have an opportunity to see the Hamilton County center and to ask questions. Miller stated the Hamilton County center has been in operation since 1948; there is a 12 to 15 agency dispatch center on the west side of Chicago with one of the entities being Palatine; 5 to 7 of those communities have populations over 125,000 and they have been combined for approximately 15 years. Payne requested a list of existing centers; asked Council to go to some of these centers if they have the opportunity.

Stinchcomb stated this item needs to be discussed again; need to come up with a list of concerns; make sure we are on the same page; need to look at cost control; need to look at future of technology; what are the drivers; civil service and staffing also need addressed; is no action plan in place.

McGregor stated another resource is Spanovich and Abraham; same dollar call was offered to us and were told not to go there; has not been one news article criticizing that system; excellent service today even though it is slower than we would like; won't pick up; can be a 6 minute to 9 minute lag time.

Angelou stated when push came to shove Gahanna has always paid the lion's share; townships participate and sometimes the school participates; feel we are farther than that; we will pay the lion's share if this is just between the township and us; jointly pay the lion's share if we go in with Reynoldsburg; if we only have a D+ system we better be doing something about that; D+ is not good enough.

Hogan asked if there was room on the second floor of this building since we are remodeling currently. McGregor stated there was. Stinchcomb stated there are serious considerations regarding space that need to be addressed; Reynoldsburg is ready to break ground; can take 4 dispatchers in new building even if they build with expansion in mind; even with renovations here, there are some space concerns.

RECOMMENDATION: Revisit this issue on March 27 with everybody bringing a list of their issues and concerns.

ISOBEL L. SHERWOOD, CMC/AAE, Deputy Clerk of Council, reporting