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**State of Vermont**  
**Department of Public Safety**  
45 State Drive  
Waterbury, Vermont 05671-1300  
<http://dps.vermont.gov/>

Regional Dispatch Working Group Meeting Minutes  
Date: August 3, 2022  
Time: 8:30-10:00 EST

Regional Dispatch Working Group Members present:

- Lance Burnham
- Paul White
- Brian Peete
- George Merkel
- Anthony Cambridge
- Drew Hazelton
- Robert Schalacher
- Mark Anderson
- Barbara Neal

Admin Support present:

- Mandy Wooster

Members of the Public present:

- Steven Whitaker
- Trevor Whipple

Regional Dispatch Working Group Members absent:

- Jack Helm

1. Call to Order
2. Approval of Agenda

Agenda will be approved at next meeting pending review. Posted on the DPS Commissions and Boards website under Regional Dispatch

3. Approval of Minutes of July 27

Meeting minutes will be approved at next meeting pending review. Posted on the DPS Commissions and Boards website under Regional Dispatch

4. Discuss Scheduling of Meetings

Recording of Meetings – opinions on whether we record the meetings? – Not recording meeting unless others oppose.  
Department of Libraries – State Agency Public Meetings – need to post? - No consensus on whether to post here.  
Meeting Schedule for conflicts – There are conflicts going forward. Paul White will be out for part of next week's meeting. Vice Chair will take over the meeting following Paul White's departure at the next meeting.

- Created a Vice Chair, self-nomination for Brian Peete
  - Seconded by Mark Anderson
  - All in favor of Brian Peete being Vice Chair. No voiced opposition.

5. Introductions

- a. Since not all members were present last week, let's do quick introductions again
- b. This is considered an open meeting. The link has been provided to the public via the DPS Committees and Boards website.

6. Review of legislation and recent memo to stakeholders

Discussion:

Paul White – Reviewed the appropriations bill. Must consider how dispatch services are considered statewide. Must consider by town or service provider. Need to identify inequities in current system. How are we going to tackle this?

Lance Burnham – That work is complete. For the past two years he has worked extensively on this. Shared his screen of “Dispatch Fee Worksheet 02-06-2020” listing Current PSAPs and services per state. This is already done by town. This document will be shared with the group.

Paul White – Do we have it by town – who they are dispatched by and what are they paying?

Lance Burnham – Yes, just need to change a few items and provide it for the next meeting.

Barbara Neal – We should confirm with these agencies that nothing has changed? Each town can tell who the police, fire, EMS are.

Paul White – Do they include what they currently pay?

Lance Burnham – Yes, it can be cross referenced. It is way out there – each agency is vastly different, and some are difficult to determine what they are paying.

Barbara Neal – There are a number of VT response agencies that are dispatched by out of state dispatch centers. This is captured on her list. We will need to figure out who needs to be accounted for on this list.

Mark Anderson – Do you have a total number on how much is spent on dispatch per year statewide?

Lance Burnham – No, that would be a daunting task.

Drew Hazelton – Do you have data on cost for services from out of state?

Barbara Neal – Do not have that data.

Lance Burnham – If we contacted those agencies, it is a matter of public record. Just a matter of making those phone calls.

Paul White – Contacting the dispatching agency would be fewer phone calls than calling each town.

Drew Hazelton – Some services are paid by volunteer funding and some are paid by the towns.

7. Discussion of the work group's charge -

What can realistically be accomplished in four months

Paul White – We have such a broad mix to come up with what each municipality pays. What do we

actually have to accomplish and what can we do in four months? Open to any suggestions for tasks and task order. Some have been more involved in the preceding discussions than he has.

George Merkel – Everybody is receiving services. Those that are paying, and we need to establish how many departments are not paying. Overall, for the State – who will be dispatching for whom? Are there other entities looking at becoming providers? You have a need and providers. Do we have enough to take care of that? Each center would have a threshold for capacity (agencies). Shelburne has 30 agencies – how many more can they handle, or do they need to let some go? Need to establish the need. If State is no longer a dispatch provider – who can pick them up and who can handle them. If we have 9 now, how many do we need to add.

Paul White – These are going to be recommendations. When the State decides they will no longer dispatch are they going to shop around or will it be dictated by State, geography, etc.?

Brian Peete – In the beginning there were a lot of folks that identified what they could do. Perhaps we start with those and then come up with a contingency – if it will take longer where will the agency go after that?

Paul White – Looking at the report, it is supposed to include long-term funding that does not unduly affect taxes? Going to need help with that. Recommendations on timeline and an identified reduction in workload at the State dispatch centers.

George Merkel – If you are digital (radio), can you talk to a department that uses analog? Concerned about this as the State maintains specialty teams. If some are digital/analog/inscription, we need to take it into consideration. This presents an issue.

Anthony Cambridge – This was certainly an issue for him when they went to Shelburne. Same with Valcour. Been at the mercy of the dispatch center.

Mark Anderson – Can talk about the dispatch center – where a person takes the call, but we are ignoring the infrastructure. Commissioner Schirling said they would provide the infrastructure. In Windham County we do not have digital radios – is there funding for this? There is no fairness and equity in the current system.

Anthony Cambridge – Doesn't want to be at the mercy of Shelburne – reality is up until 3 years ago we were paying per call and now paying \$45,000. There is a neighboring agency paying \$15,000 to the State. We are locked into Shelburne based on what was decided 30 years ago.

Paul White – Is it the right thing to do to have a municipality or a Sheriff's dept owning these centers? Are they keeping prices down at the expense of another? The Sheriffs/Chiefs change (turnover). Is that the right model or should they be independent or neutral hosts?

Anthony Cambridge – In PA, they had a regional county dispatch center. Was amazed at how good it was and it was fair based on parameters.

Brian Peete – Think we should look at a regional model, there are going to be a lot of costs for brick and mortar – with no allocations for this. The State is going to have to realize there will be money needed for start-up. We need to work on the recommendations and costs to include revenue sources. Might want to put something out there like a survey to ask the questions we don't know the answers to – what are the concerns? Use this as a building block for legislature and groundwork.

George Merkel – Major concerns are cost and service oriented. Who is going to provide the service? Someone in Middlebury probably isn't going to be comfortable having Newport dispatch. Like the idea of a regional system – such as Middlebury. There are different regional challenges for rural / urban areas. Like the idea of a board made up of stakeholders. Do not like the idea of shopping around for the best deal – this causes problems.

Mark Anderson – Changeover of Chiefs/Sheriffs – we need to define who has this responsibility. Ex. Sheriffs provide civil process – need to define who is responsible for the model, such as a regional communication district – a governing model and select the representatives.

George Merkel – Is it foolish to think we could have regionalized service funded by State funding?

Mark Anderson – Probably run into a funding issue – such as we need \$10 million and the State gives us \$5 million. This is a State responsibility for access to communications for State services. The State needs to support the enabling of dispatch services. Ex. Stowe in Lamoille County – got a pilot paid back to the town for funding their own dispatch. The county be the secondary fall back. Where's bandwidth, where's funding, where are the services?

Anthony Cambridge – Each county faces its own challenges. Determine based on call volume. We are paying based on our use. If we use it more, we pay more.

Lance Burnham – How would regional centers impact agencies that already have their own centers? Like Burlington? Would they be forced to go to this regional center?

Mark Anderson – I would propose a “may” not a “shall” for regional dispatch. People could say that they would provide their own.

Paul White – The problem with the “may” is what if someone doesn't want to? Have a Sheriff that doesn't want to be bothered with standing up a center? Who is responsible?

Mark Anderson – Requirements could be a “shall” and the funding could become a “may”.

George Merkel – Knows of agencies making sure they have something in place that have received federal funding from a DHS Grant. When you get that money, there should be a responsibility to provides services for others too. Some things need to be well thought out and then we make the best choice. If you put the “may” in there it will go sideways. This will cause problems. This needs to be State driven with equal representation. Determine the need and go with it. Include those with grant funding to provide services – there is a responsibility here. The system is broken.

Brian Peete – Going back, there are several locals that are willing to carry additional agencies. Would be weird to have separate counties with different models? VSP already has that infrastructure, and we can piggyback on it. We should choose a handful of centers to get us up and running. As we are looking at the governance model, it would remain with the current governing model.

Mark Anderson – The county shall be responsible for identifying the model for their county – no one is stepping up in Bennington. That should be on the county to identify who is going to be responsible.

Paul White – When you say the county is responsible, who is that? The Sheriff? Judges?

Mark Anderson - The Assistance Judges. Not sure who would receive the funding. This is where we have disparities across the state. There are agencies willing to fill the gaps. Let's take a step toward a regionalized model and then work on the issues. Shouldn't have FDs calling to NH because no one was willing to field calls.

Drew Hazelton – What is our objective? – are we looking for cost effectiveness, a system where we are all on the same system (not fragmented between 911 and dispatch), local control? What is the objective besides getting the State out of dispatching?

Paul White – That is a valid point. The crux of legislation is to get the State out of dispatching. Our goal is to come up with a system to take its place. What it looks like needs to be determined.

Anthony Cambridge – Should be based on fairness and equity. People are making money off some agencies.

George Merkel – How long have you been in this business, Barb?

Barbara Neal – 1994 – starting as a volunteer dispatcher, then VSP dispatcher, and then moved to Williston as a supervisor before going to the 911 board.

George Merkel – Lots of experience, what do you think would work best?

Barbara Neal – Don't have a complete answer, but a statewide governance model might cause pushback on the State prescribing how it needs to be done. There is a working statewide model for the 911 system / board but that only covers the 911 communications. Don't know much about operating at a county level and whether it is doable. Going to need buy-in from all levels. Paul mentioned that the legislation has a goal of getting DPS out of dispatch. I know that is what DPS wants but is that the goal of the Legislature? Could we say we don't agree and push back on the legislation?

George Merkel – Barb's experience helps frame this conversation. A lot of time and money has been spent. Everything is driven from emergency dispatch and 911. Don't want to repeat mistakes from the past and create something that isn't effective and sustainable. Concerned about the impact it will have on all agencies.

Lance Burnham – Don't want to reinvent a wheel. We have NH, MA, (neighboring States).. what do they do? MA operates regional centers. Perhaps get more information on funding and operation to have a blueprint to work from. We could seek information from our neighboring States.

George Merkel – NH is similar.

Barb Neal – NH has two 911 centers and a number of dispatch stations across the state. MA has over 150 individual 911 centers that also dispatch. They have more municipal levels in MA.

Mark Anderson – In NH, might have similar bifurcation/separation of services. If single stage dispatching is a goal, we might not want to use NH. MA everything is based upon the towns.

Lance Burnham – NH, if the town's population is X – they are required to have a police agency. Is it the same for dispatch?

Trevor Whipple via chat: I believe Grafton County in NH also runs a large dispatch center. In Haverhill NH. The currently Sheriff is Jeff Steigler, former Bradford VT Police Chief. He might have some valuable insight.

Paul White – The bill does not specifically say for us to come up with a path to get DPS out of the dispatching services. Our report is for recommendations on funding, timeline for the transition, and to identify the reduction of resources and where to direct them.

Barbara Neal – The conversation started with the DPS position. For us to report on how the changes will impact DPS it follows this thought. DPS needs to be part of the solution.

Paul White – If we are trying to arrive at the best services, we know that having VSP dispatching all fire and EMS is not the best model. We have to look at the whole gamut.

Barbara Neal – The objective is to make sure every entity has access to cost possible solutions that provide equal services. Need to provide same level of service regardless of size of the agency. Equal services at an affordable cost with no impact on property taxes.

Drew Hazelton – Like to add the ability to communicate during large incidents. Biggest barrier is communications and challenges of information going to some but not all dispatch centers. Currently we have to call a trooper by phone to get the most up to date information. Key information needs to be shared and not be fragmented – ensure agencies responding together are all dispatched through a system that communicates. Need to be operationally effective communication.

## 8. Next steps

Paul White – Can we identify next steps for next week?

Lance Burnham – Will look into NH regional centers and work on agency lists and their dispatch centers with Barb.

Barb Neal – Pull the updated information of dispatch per town that the report will require.

Lance Burnham – Those agencies (Mark, Brian,..) once you are set up, have you considered price and what you would charge / determine cost for the agencies you would take on?

Mark Anderson – Broadly yes, one model is based on what the town can pay. One is a population model based on call volume, and there is a hybrid of those two models – to address models over time (deal with spikes in one year that are not consistent).

Brian Peete – Works with partners with a number based on anticipated call volume (formula based). It is then spread out to their agencies. Wants to do a study to find out how many personnel are needed and what the cost would be, then break it down to agency. Would be good to have funding from the State for smaller agencies that cannot afford to pay – if it will bankrupt them.

Paul White – RFP that came out – is that money that was appropriated?

Lance Burnham – it is the appropriations – DHS have a RFP process that worked thus we used it.

Robert Schalacher – Trying to do something in Rutland – need to understand how this will come together for funding. Trying to move forward but what if the committee comes up with something different?

Barbara Neal – When are the applications due and when will money go out?

Mandy Wooster – Applications are due by 9/2/22 and appropriations will not be distributed until after the Commissioner reports to the JFO in September and she receives approval.

Paul White – Don't see this being done prior to 9/2.

Lance Burnham – We are keeping JFO informed.

Mark Anderson – There were two pending crises (risk of failure of dispatch centers) that were taken into consideration for the appropriations. Legislature said that DPS needs some discretion in this solution in case a failure was to happen.

Paul White: Lance is going to look at NH Model and share the agency list to give us a place to start next week.

## 9. Solicit for public comment

Stephen Whitaker – In reference to recordings, lots of folks not aware and did not participate in the last meeting. Should record the meetings to allow people to come up to speed. Not recording denies that opportunity. Ask for a legal opinion – don't do it for the obligation but out of common sense.

Need to define what additional administrative assistance you might need, such as an analyst. Mandy is going to need back up from department staff. Barb also has people for that capacity.

Need to deal with capital costs for infrastructure updates (frequencies). That statewide assessment needs to be done and the cost of upgrades identified before you can define cost requirements for funding.

You can't do governance later – Montpelier is not happy. Governance and Technology planning are prerequisites. Ask for funding to not be released before the criteria is met.

The County side judges are not going to have the capacity to put their heads around this. Should not be put on the election of side judges. County lines – not topographically possible to work with county lines.



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