

Comments from individual members of the Regional Dispatch Working Group – 10/05/2022

Working Group members were asked by Commissioner Morrison to provide feedback to the draft memo that was shared with the group on 09/28/2022. The following comments were submitted by Working Group members.

From Brian Peete:

My feedback for right now revolves around the lack of readily accessible expertise with Terry slated to leave. In my humble belief, the State should consider making a recommendation to employing a highly knowledgeable project manager or company to help meet the recommendations that will come from the Committee and the Legislature. These could potentially include: 1) Monitoring the targeted timelines of the proposed Regional Centers moving and provide reports to the DPS Commissioner, 2) Ensuring the equipment and infrastructure purchased by the proposed regional teams will operate effectively and as intended, 3) Coordinating with DPS to ensure the requirements in the grant applications are met and are correct, 4) Provide SME advice and guidance to the proposed Regional Centers as they build, 5) Provide contingency plans in the event some Regional Centers may not be able to support the amount of municipalities they have agreed to assimilate.

From Barbara Neal:

In the report, we see the number of agencies expected to shift from Department of Public Safety communication centers to the regional centers. What are these agencies and what is the annual call volume for each? In other words, how much of an impact will this initial grant funding have on workload concerns voiced by DPS?

It appears that 65 of the 81 non-state agencies are accounted for in this initial proposal. What is the expectation for the remaining 16 agencies....and again, what is the call volume for those agencies?

Were the applicants required to provide a timeline for completion of their projects? If so, that would be useful information for the working group.

From Drew Hazleton:

In my opinion, the proposed funding does not provide for support for “regional” dispatch centers. It does provide support for dispatch centers, but does so without any standards that need to be met. It further fractures the communications structure in Vermont which will result in response delays and bad outcomes. In Windham County we will have five operating dispatch centers, with two or three active in each incident. I believe this proposal will meet the goal of removing work from DPS but will not provide modern or efficient dispatching services to the state.

From Paul White:

First, a couple of minor suggestions.

In the first paragraph (Overview) it says: “The Department... has publicly communicated the need to shed agencies from its PSAPs’ workload.” Use of the term “PSAP” in this instance may imply to some readers that DPS is looking to divest its 911 answering role, which in my understanding is not the case. Perhaps re-word this sentence to talk about “the need to shed agencies from its dispatch workload” instead.

Under “Project Application”, current language says: “The State of Vermont in partnership with the Homeland Security Unit (HSU) of DPS, created and distributed a request for proposal...”. The State can’t have a partnership with itself. How about “The State of Vermont through the Homeland Security Unit...” instead.

As for the “Project Results”, not being privy to the complete proposals that were submitted or to the scoring methodology that was used by the scoring committee, it is difficult for me to comment on the proposed funding amounts or on the value of the proposals. At first glance, and based on Commissioner Morrison’s comments to the working group, it appears that DPS is proposing to give away a lot of money simply in an effort to “get money on the street” with not a lot of return on the investment. For example, the plan includes giving the Chittenden County project more than three-quarters of a million dollars to take just one police department away from DPS’ dispatch responsibility, a police department that VSP only dispatches for on a part-time basis no less. Or in another example, it is planned to award \$2.4 Million (more than one-third of the total amount planned to be awarded in this grant process) to the City of Montpelier to take two small fire departments, one EMS agency, and one police department from DPS’ responsibility. The awards do not appear to be data-driven. If the goal of this exercise is to get relief for the VSP dispatch centers as quickly as possible, then all efforts should be put behind helping the proposed Rutland County dispatch center get successfully off the ground with the 32 agencies that they are proposing to take with them. Use the Rutland County

proposal as a test case and nurture it to ensure that it succeeds. Once that center goes online then you might have some valuable lessons learned to use for future projects, which might cause you to do things differently once armed with that knowledge.

It appears that this grant process is encouraging the prospective "regional" dispatch centers to continue to operate in silos absent a state-wide plan for interoperability. Rather than throwing millions of dollars at 11 different applicants and 11 different proposals in the hope that some of them might be successful in taking some of the workload off DPS, I submit that it would be a better use of funds to choose one or maybe two applicants that will provide the Department with the greatest "bang for the buck". Use that agency as a test case, do everything possible to ensure that it has a high likelihood of success, and learn from their experience. Next, I propose that a portion of the appropriated funds be used to engage two consultants.

One consultant would be tasked with assessing the existing infrastructure to determine what the needs are on a state-wide basis for a network of regional dispatch centers to function properly. From the working group's conversation with Terry LaValley, we were informed that the State does not know where all of the "dead spots" are, does not know how many new towers or how many channels would be needed to eliminate the dead spots, and does not know whether the existing network has the capacity to support all of the proposed regional dispatch centers if operating concurrently. Before enabling the creation of additional stand-alone dispatch centers, shouldn't we get an idea of what the overall needs are on a state-wide basis?

The second consultant would be tasked with advising the State and the proposed regional centers on best practices for governance. If the State is going to provide funding for the creation of new regional dispatch centers, it is reasonable to assume that the State would retain some level of oversight to ensure that dispatching services are being provided to all communities in Vermont in an efficient, consistent, and equitable manner. Regional dispatch centers should be designed uniformly to ensure interoperability, should be built at the community level to serve the needs of local public safety stakeholders, but should also be built to State specifications. A proper governance structure should be in place prior to awarding grant funds to any entity proposing to open a new dispatch center or expand an existing center.

Lastly, I submit that the time allotted by the Legislature for this working group to do its mandated work (by December 1st) was grossly inadequate and there needs to be an extension of that deadline. The working group cannot deliver a meaningful report without the benefit of the information that would be gathered through the two consultants described above.

No other Working Group members submitted written comments.