

Broward County Consolidated Communications Committee

Report and Recommendations
for Cooperative Consolidation of E-911 Communications
In Broward County, Florida

March 7, 2012

Fact Sheet & Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)



Broward County Consolidated Communications Committee Fact Sheet

- In 2002 Broward County residents overwhelmingly voted to amend the Broward County Charter to provide for the establishment and funding of a communications infrastructure for fire and emergency medical services to facilitate closest unit response for life threatening emergencies. (*Broward County Charter Section 5.03(A)*)
- Significant changes and advances in technology (including the expansion of cell-phone use for 9-1-1 communications), the growth of Broward County, and the economic downturn resulted in the police, fire and city management professionals to call for an exploration of issues beyond simply development of communications infrastructure set forth in the amended charter language.
- A major challenge for Broward County E-911 communications centers are “misdirected” calls. “Misdirected” calls are those cell phone 911 calls routed by cell phone towers to a dispatch center other than one that can actually dispatch emergency units. Managers agree this occurs frequently and represent a substantial number of calls countywide; two centers reported misdirected calls represent 5% and 10%, respectively, of total call volume. As a result, there is a time delay associated with the gathering of information and then subsequent transfer to the dispatch center that can provide assistance. Strong consensus that a cooperative consolidation of E-911 communications, adherent to the principles and consensus points developed herein, would reduce significantly such routing problems, and thereby substantially improve public safety.
- The Public Safety Committee of Broward County League of Cities, The Fire Chiefs Association of Broward County, the Broward County Chiefs of Police Association, The Fire-Rescue Services Council, The Broward City/County Management Association and the Board of Directors of the Broward League of Cities all overwhelmingly adopted and supported a resolution calling for an implementation process for cooperative consolidation of E-911 communications and dispatch.
- The goals are to improve service and safety for residents and emergency personnel, establish consistent performance metrics for all residents, eliminate delay in transfer of emergency calls, employ the best technology available to expedite emergency response, and facilitate closest unit response. Additionally, there may be an ability to conserve resources by reducing the number of dispatch centers, thus reducing the financial burden on taxpayers.
- The Broward County Consolidated Communications Committee was created and tasked with developing a plan for the cooperative consolidation of 911 and dispatch within Broward County. The committee consists of representatives from Fire Chiefs, Police Chiefs, City Managers, elected officials through the Broward League of Cities, and the Board of County Commissioners.
- The process was designed to be inclusive of all stakeholders and viewpoints, including labor union and technical support staff.

- BCCCC meetings are governed by the rules of open government, with supporting data and documentation available on-line for public review. The Committee/Sub-Committees have collectively held 24 meetings, with over 300 Committee-person hours of analysis, discussions and deliberation during Committee meetings alone.
- The Consolidated Communications Committee created (3) three sub-committees:
 - Governance: Examine issues related to the governance structure of consolidated dispatch.
 - Funding: Develop a funding mechanism predicated upon a fair and stable approach to funding.
 - Operations: Develop a consolidated operations model for consideration.
- The full Consolidated Communications Committee took recommendations from the three (3) sub-committees. The BCCCC issued a final report for consideration by the Broward League of Cities and the Broward County Commission. In summary:
 - Governance: After reviewing hundreds of pages of studies and reports from other communication consolidation models around the country, and with due consideration to the historical context in Broward County, four potential governance models were developed and considered. The principles of any model must include representative governance by the participating agencies, a professional management structure with uniform metrics, transparency of reporting for metrics and funding, and direct responsibility over an Executive Director by the governing board for any proposed regional model. While it was believed an independent district would be most desirable, such a model was not deemed likely due to legislative impediments. Therefore, the BCCCC recommended for further consideration one of two models – (a) a regional model where the Board of Directors would have hire/fire authority over the Executive Director through the Broward Sheriff operations; or (b) a similar model operated through Broward County Government.
 - Funding: The BCCCC accumulated cost data for dispatch communications county-wide. Thereafter, the Subcommittee identified three potential funding options, with the fundamental principles of fairness and future stability of funding paramount:
 - Municipal Services Taxing Unit (“MSTU”), millage set by the Broward County Commission and dedicated to E-911 and associated communications only.
 - Service agreement predicated upon usage, population, taxable value, or some combination of those three.
 - County funding through Ad Valorem
 After consideration by the full BCCCC of the funding history and options, there was broad consensus that Broward County should maintain not less than the current dollar funding level in the new consolidated organization in the immediate future (during the transition period of approximately three years) and the County’s funding in future years should be in the same proportion as its initial funding in the consolidated organization, disregarding transition costs. Additionally, the gap in funding between that level of county funding and the total operational costs of the consolidated model should be funding via ad valorem through a Municipal Services Taxing Unit (“MSTU”).¹

¹ This recommendation is based upon the current information available to the Committee, does not represent the recommendation of individual committee members on behalf of their respective municipalities or agencies, and necessarily leaves the decision to adopt this recommendation to the prerogative of the individual municipalities.

- Operations: The BCCCC reviewed a large volume of data from regional communication consolidation models developed around the country, including case studies, individual reports, and guidelines issued by governing and certifying bodies. Thereafter, the Subcommittee developed a PSAP operational survey and took presentations from all the PSAPs, with the exception of City of Plantation, who chose not to provide any information. Based upon criteria adopted by the overwhelming majority of the Operations Sub-committee (including hurricane rating; flood plain; year built; diversity of power, telecom, and data resources; existing and available future capacity; proximity to the coast and parking (minor consideration)), the Operations Subcommittee has presently excluded Ft. Lauderdale, Margate, and Pompano from further consideration as regional sites. Plantation was also excluded from further consideration due to a lack of data provided to the Subcommittee.

The Operations Subcommittee agreed that the technology exists to house all communications in a single site, but such would not be desirable due to environmental concerns and no single site presently exists to meet the needs listed herein. Additionally, there was agreement by the professionals that dispatch services in this day and age are and can be handled for municipalities without communications being physically housed within the particular municipality.

Therefore, a three centers model was presented by Broward County Communications Technology Division for consideration, based upon the current “flee-to” capacity, which could absorb expected personnel and were technologically designed to meet the criteria. The model structure is flexible based on the actual final site recommendations by the committee, understanding expansion beyond the three sites may require significant evaluation and capital funding.

- Next steps: The BCCCC concluded the next steps should include the development of a Broward County Consolidated Communication Implementation Board, funded and tasked with the implementation of a cooperative E-911 consolidation. The Board should be comprised of City Managers/Administrators from all interested municipalities, the County Administrator (or designee), the Sheriff (or designee), a representative from the Broward County Chiefs of Police Association, and a representative from the Fire Chiefs Association of Broward County. The meetings of this Implementation Board must be governed by open-meeting and “sunshine law” principles.
- **If approved, the initial stages for implementation could begin during the next fiscal year (October 2012), with full implementation requiring additional time to develop of model agreements, performance standards, planned parallel redundant operations, and acceptance by the participating municipalities.**

Meeting notices, agendas, minutes, and other information are maintained on the Fire Chiefs Association of Broward County web site: http://www.fcabc.com/Comm_BCCC.php

Broward County Consolidated Communications Committee Frequently Asked Questions

Why was there a need to consider consolidation of Emergency 911 (“E-911) communications?

In 2002, the voters of Broward County voted overwhelmingly to change the Broward County Charter to provide for a communications infrastructure for fire and emergency medical services that would facilitate closest unit response for life threatening emergencies. At that time, there were 13 dispatch centers (also referred to as Public Safety Answering Points, or “PSAPs”) throughout the county.

Significant changes and advances in technology (including the expansion of cell phone use for 9-1-1 communications), the growth of Broward County, and the economic downturn resulted in the police, fire and city management professionals to call for an exploration of issues beyond simply development of communications infrastructure set forth in the amended charter language.

In 2011, the Public Safety Committee of Broward County League of Cities, The Fire Chief’s Association of Broward County, the Broward County Chiefs of Police Association, The Fire-Rescue Services Council, The Broward City/County Managers Association and the Board of Directors of the Broward League of Cities all overwhelmingly adopted and supported a resolution calling for an implementation process for cooperative consolidation of E-911 communications and dispatch.

Is the expansion of use of cell-phone communications for 911 calls an important consideration in whether or not to consolidate E-911 Communications in Broward County?

Yes, a major challenge for Broward County E-911 communications centers are “misdirected” calls. “Misdirected” calls are those cell phone 911 calls routed by cell phone towers to a dispatch center other than one that can actually dispatch emergency units. Managers agree this occurs frequently and represent a substantial number of calls countywide; two centers reported misdirected calls represent 5% and 10%, respectively, of total call volume. As a result, there is a time delay associated with the gathering of information and then subsequent transfer to dispatch center that can provide assistance. Strong consensus was that a cooperative consolidation of E-911 communications, adherent to the principles and consensus points developed herein, would reduce significantly such routing problems, and thereby substantially improve public safety.

What are the goals of a cooperative consolidation of communications?

The overall goals of a consolidation of E-911 communications are to improve service and safety for residents and emergency personnel, establish consistent performance metrics for all residents, eliminate delay in transfer of emergency calls, employ the best technology available to expedite emergency response, and facilitate closest unit response for life threatening emergencies. In addition, it is possible such consolidation could achieve significant savings of taxpayer dollars through economies of scale and combined operations.

Why was a Consolidated Communications Committee formed?

For the past decade, as part of the obligation to implement a communications infrastructure for fire and emergency medical services, the County has been working towards achieving interoperability of communications amongst the different municipalities. A feasibility study performed in 2010 resulted in the conclusion that consolidation was not only feasible, but desirable from a public safety perspective.

Who was on the BCCCC who issued the final report?

The full Committee had 22 members representing Police Chiefs, Fire Chiefs, City Managers, 2 County Commissioners, the Fire-Rescue Services Council, the Broward League of Cities, Broward Sheriff's Office and representatives of the different types of dispatch model cities. The Committee had professional public safety representatives, city managers, and elected officials.

Why is consolidating E-911 communications important to residents?

The professionals agree, not only as part of the BCCCC but from throughout the country, the goals are to improve service and safety for residents and emergency personnel, establish consistent performance metrics for all residents, eliminate delay in transfer of emergency calls, employ the best technology available to expedite emergency response, and facilitate closest unit response. Additionally, there may be an ability to conserve resources by reducing the number of dispatch centers, thus reducing the burdens on taxpayers.

Is this expected to improve E-911 service?

Yes, one of the primary goals was to ensure that the public safety standard meet or exceed all national standards for all residents of Broward County. With the increasing popularity of cell-phones over land lines, this is critically important as the current system has a delay associated with transfer of cell phone E-911 calls. In addition, this consolidation will be one of the next steps towards developing a fire and emergency rescue closest unit response for life threatening emergencies.

Is this the first model of consolidation in the United States?

No, this is not the first model. In fact, the Committee took in published case studies and FCC reports on other successful E-911 consolidation efforts from throughout the United States, and analyzed those models. In fact, the course followed in Broward County in this consolidation effort is very similar to other successful models: desire to consider consolidation of communications; feasibility study; consolidation committee input from professionals and elected officials; and implementation board or committee efforts towards final transition.

Were there any meetings where data or information was considered?

Consolidated Communications Committee meetings were governed by the rules of open government, with supporting data and documentation available on-line for public review. The Committee and Sub-Committees held 24 meetings, with over 300 Committee-Person hours of analysis, discussions and deliberation during Committee meetings alone. Each of the sub-committees considered information and data not only focused on Broward County, but also from around the country harvested other communication consolidation models and experiences in regional communications.

Does the technology exist to be able to take calls and dispatch fire and police even if the communications center is not located in that particular city?

Yes, not only does the technology exist today, but dispatch of fire and police is presently performed in Broward County in some cases from outside the city of service. So, there is some level of consolidation already in place. There is unanimous consensus amongst the professionals that the technology does exist to dispatch the police and fire rescue services of a respective city outside that particular city. In fact, there are quite a few examples from around the United States where dispatch services are consolidated and regionalized.

How will this impact the ability to keep up with technology changes?

Our society is becoming increasingly reliant on mobile communications. Next Generation 9-1-1 (NG 9-1-1) is the concept recognizing that the current public safety communications systems are not capable of handling text, data, images and video which is becoming increasingly common in personal communications. As a result, there are efforts by the United States Department of Transportation to facilitate such technology and communications nationwide. Minimizing significant capital, implementation, and upgrade costs, as well as ensuring consistent unified approaches in the region, depend on consolidation of the underlying E-911 communications.

Where will the communications centers be located?

The Committee was not tasked with choosing the specific centers. Choosing centers will take into many considerations based upon professional and expert analysis, including but not limited to hurricane strength of a building, redundancy of power and data, availability of space to absorb the personnel and infrastructure. However, there was consensus reached that this consolidation could be achieved from the 11 centers in 2010 to 3 centers when consolidation is complete.

The report recommends 3 centers. What if one of the centers is knocked out by a storm?

Since 2008, the County has been working to develop “flee-to” sites. These are hardened communications centers which could be used by other communications centers in the event of a major storm, whether wind or rain. Importantly, the Committee received a report that the current “flee-to” sites are able to handle the full call load for the entire county once staffed. Furthermore, if one of the 3 sites is inoperable for any reason, the other 2 sites would have capacity to continue the call load.

Will any dispatchers or call-takers be laid off?

E-911 communications has some of the highest levels of personnel turn-over and attrition. As a result, other consolidation models from around the country predicted there would be no lay offs. Possible savings from personnel developed through consolidations should in all likelihood be handled through attrition. However, the goal was not to reduce personnel forces, but rather to ensure the same highest level of E-911 performance for all residents, visitors, and businesses throughout the County.

How would consolidation of communications be funded?

There are a number of options. Presently, all taxpaying residents contribute to E-911 Communications through their ad valorem taxes paid to Broward County. Additionally, some cities pay extra through contract with a contract provider or for their own dispatch centers. The Committee considered 3 potential options for funding: Municipal Services Taxing Unit (“MSTU”) (which will serve to identify and protect the funding source for the participating entities); Fee for Service from each city (based on any one of a number of service or population based formulas); ad valorem through the County.

After consideration by the full BCCCC of the funding history and options, there was broad consensus that Broward County should maintain not less than the current dollar funding level in the new consolidated organization in the immediate future (during the transition period of approximately three years) and the County’s funding in future years should be in the same proportion as its initial funding in the consolidated organization, disregarding transition costs. Additionally, the gap in funding between that level of county funding and the total operational costs of the consolidated model should be funding via ad valorem through a Municipal Services Taxing Unit (“MSTU”)¹.

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What if I am happy with our service in our City?

Like many other models of cooperative consolidation of E-911 Communications from throughout the United States, the proposed model assumes that each City will make their own decision. However, like all other models from around the country, achieving the highest level of service is the goal; in some cases, that may mean reduced errors and delays. Therefore, for all residents, the purpose is to provide the best and highest quality public safety performance.

Will there be any cost savings?

There is a strong potential for cost savings long term. In fact, it is estimated that the costs savings overall could be 20% of the operational costs county-wide, plus the enormous savings on capital and maintenance costs as technology is upgraded regularly.

However, the primary goal and motivation of this process was to improve safety and ensure highest quality performance of E-911 dispatch for all residents and public safety personnel no matter where you are in the County when you need help.

When will the recommended consolidation of E-911 communications occur?

The process for implementation requires significant expert and collective deliberation. There are many technical factors which must be considered and tested. Agreements on providing stable and equitable funding and representative governance of participating municipalities must be drafted and considered. Even once final, the actual transition of sites would require parallel operations. Therefore, this is expected to be a multi-year process. However, the transition steps could begin in the coming fiscal year.

What are the next steps?

The Committee recommended that the County Commission establish a Consolidated Communications Implementation Board, with funding to provide for the hiring of an executive director to oversee the process of implementation, the retention of necessary experts to ensure technical and structural integrity of the planned consolidation, and with full representation of all cities who want to participate in the next step of consolidation. This Implementation Board comprised of City Managers/Administrators from all interested municipalities, the County Administrator (or designee), the Sheriff (or designee), a representative from the Broward County Chiefs of Police Association, and a representative from the Fire Chiefs Association of Broward County. The meetings of this Implementation Board must be governed by open-meeting and "sunshine law" principles.

Where can I go to see the minutes and the information generated by the BCCCC and Sub-Committees?

Meeting notices, agendas, minutes, and other information are maintained on the Fire Chiefs Association of Broward County web site:

http://www.fcabc.com/Comm_BCCC.php