

SNOCOM – SNOPAC Joint Task Force

Meeting Summary for March 21, 2017/ 9:00-11:00 a.m.

Location: Mariner Fire Station 11 Meeting Room

Note: *Follow-up action items are noted in italics.* Decisions are underlined.

Meeting Attendance:

Joint Task Force Members					
Bob Colinas	✓	Jon Nehring	✓	Rick Smith	✓
Al Compaan	✓	Brad Reading	✓	Roy Waugh	✓
Steve Guptill	✓	Bryan Stanifer		Ralph Krusey	✓
Staff Support Team					
Kurt Mills	✓	Karen Reed	✓		
Terry Peterson	✓	Sharon Brendle	✓		
Guests					
Angie Baird - SNOPAC		Dan Templeman - Everett		Rae Ann Weighter - Everett	
Susan Neely - Sno County		Steven Hellyer - Everett		Sandy Langdon - Marysville	
Brian Haseleu - Sno County		Sonja Springer - Lynnwood		Kathleen Junglov - FD1	
Scott James - Edmonds		Darryl Neuhoff - Marysville		Crystil Wooldridge - Mtlk Terr	
Dan Summers - SNOPAC		Jonathan Ventura - Arlington		Corbitt Loch - Lynnwood	
Eric Faison - Woodway		Kristin Garcia - Arlington		Tom Mesaros - Edmonds	
Shaun Greenmun - Mukilteo		Nate Nehring - Sno County		Bob Eastman - FD1	
Dave Turley - Edmonds		James Lever - Everett			

1. Welcome / Review of Today’s Agenda / Recap of JTF Status. Fire District 7 Commissioner, Roy Waugh, welcomed the meeting attendees, and asked everyone to introduce themselves. Karen announced that today’s meeting will be a chance to ask Kurt and Terry questions regarding assessment formulas and costing models that were presented at the last joint board meeting. She explained what the JTF had been tasked with and what steps they and the SNOCOM and SNOPAC Boards have taken since last July.

2. Q & A Session:

A. Part 1: Scenario Cost Modelling. Terry presented an overview of the cost modelling that provided projected costs based upon different options:

- 1) Status Quo.** This shows how much it will cost over the next 10 years to run the two agencies without consolidation, but with equivalent “normalized” service levels.

- 2) **Consolidated scenario (4A and 4B).** These two scenarios describe a fully consolidated agency. Scenario 4B keeps the SNOCOM facility as a warm back-up facility. To develop this scenario, the Director's reviewed each agency's history to determine future growth in calls for service, 911 calls, etc. They used the County's 2035 Target Growth Plan to estimate future population growth. With this information, they then projected where each agency may be in 2025. Together with data about number of calls over each hour of the day, this data informed the consolidated agency staffing requirements.

Terry described the staffing models and the answering standards used in the industry. When asked if the standards are met, he said that SNOPAC meets the standard about 90% of the time, with SNOCOM meeting it around 60% of the time. SNOCOM would need to add staff in order to equalize their service level with SNOPAC.

A request was made by SNOCOM agencies to provide them with a 10 year pro forma using existing staffing and service levels, rather than "normalized" service levels.

- 3) **Comparisons to the Matrix Study.** The Matrix study was completed in 2015 by an outside consultant at the request of the E911 Board. The Directors re-examined that report and determined they could provide a more accurate analysis. Some areas of different assumptions include the number of call takers and how other staff in the center can help answer calls. Terry referred to these other staff members as Call Taker Equivalencies (CTE). He and Kurt determined that rather than having 5 call takers at their busiest hour, they could reduce that number to 3 by utilizing CTEs for different periods throughout the day. These CTEs could be Police or Fire Dispatchers. Police Dispatchers are typically busier than Fire Dispatchers, and spend on average 5% of their time answering phones, while Fire Dispatchers could spend 25% of their time assisting call takers. Kurt explained that in addition to being busy, the PSAPs try to keep police dispatchers off the phone so that they'll be free to monitor the air and maintain an open lifeline with law enforcement.
- 4) **APCO Retains.** APCO is another national industry group, similar to NENA, which helps provide policy and guidance to dispatch centers across the nation. Taking into consideration the need staffed a PSAP 24/7, the amount of personal time off, breaks and training, APCO retains determined that out of a normal 2,080 hour per year work period, an employee is unavailable 551 hours. As a result, it takes 6.7 people to staff one workstation. Currently, dispatchers at the two PSAPs work different schedules; SNOCOM 6/3, and SNOPAC 5/2. One of the assumptions that was made in the consolidated model is that all call taker and dispatch staff would be on the 5/2 or 2,080 hour

per year schedule. Based on this, total operational staffing needs are calculated at 105 people. In addition, supervisory staff, are estimated at 16.

- 5) **Summary of Option 4B.** Both the future budget and agency assessments are calculated. The budget would decrease with a consolidated agency; most agencies would see a decrease in assessments, but not all. Maintenance and Operation expenditures decrease by about 14 percent due to economies of scale. Labor and benefits costs decrease. The consolidated plan includes no layoffs, but changes are expected from normal turnover or attrition.

Kurt spoke about the differences on the Administrative side at SNOCOM: They lack a finance department, and a human resources department. SNOPAC has these departments fully staffed. Following a request about providing a supervisory staffing model for the consolidated agency, Kurt explained that at some point an organizational chart will be developed, but that they're not ready to do that yet. The key reason is that the Boards directed them to development the scenario without layoffs. When administrative staff leave, they will re-evaluate the position to determine whether or not to fill the vacancy.

Kurt spoke about SNOPAC's current facility. Previously there had been an announcement that SNOPAC would be releasing a request an RFP for a study on a possible new site. He acknowledged some deficiencies in the their building, as well as SNOCOM's in terms of seismic reinforcement, but stated that the current SNOPAC structure has capacity that should be sufficient for a consolidated agency for at least 10 years. Therefore, they decided not to connect the upcoming facilities RFP to this consolidation study.

A question was raised regarding communication or negotiations with labor unions. Kurt said that the group has been keeping both unions apprised, along with all employees of both PSAPs. He added that there haven't been any formal negotiations, but materials that have been generated by the JTF have been made available on each agency's website.

- B. Part 2: 2017 Assessments Formula allocations.** Terry stated that the joint boards wanted to understand individual agency costs before looking into governance models. Based upon assumptions that were approved by both boards, the directors developed an assessment formula. It is a hybrid of the existing formulas.

Karen gave an overview on the assessment formula. She listed 4 major components:

- 1) How to divide costs between police and fire agencies
- 2) How to divide costs between individual police and individual fire agencies
- 3) How to insure that dedicated costs are not being subsidized by other agencies

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- 4) How a call for service is defined.

Principles were adopted by the boards (including items such as not subsidizing one another, and using readily accessible data to generate a formula). The meeting materials include a short table comparing the different formulas of NORCOM, SNOCOM and SNOPAC, as well as the recommendations of the Joint Task Force. The recommendations reflect the approach of assigning costs associated to the workload imposed by individual agencies. In terms of defining calls for service (CFS), the recommendation is that officer initiated traffic stops would fall under CFS, considering that those stops create real work for the dispatch center.

Terry provided a graphical walkthrough of the assessment formula.

- 1) A total budget is first developed
- 2) E911 revenues are applied
- 3) Four cost centers are developed (Police Dispatch Consoles, Fire Dispatch Consoles, Call Takers, Admin/Tech/Supervisor/M&O) to allocate costs to be shared by police agencies versus fire agencies.
- 4) These costs are then shared between individual police agencies, and individual fire agencies based upon the formula of: 54% CFS, 23% Assessed Value, and 23% Population.

Also provided was a breakdown showing the 2017 estimated assessment for each agency, if the agency were in place today using assumptions in Scenario 4B and the proposed assessment formula, as compared to actual 2017 assessments.

C. Written questions submitted prior to, and addressed at, the meeting:

- 1) **Will SNOCOM increase staff if options 2A, 2B or 3 are chosen?** Kurt explained the staffing model was created in order to equally compare service levels. Terry added that no decisions on staffing has been made by SNOCOM's board, but they are actively discussing the subject.
- 2) **Rent for SNOCOM's facility?** Kurt said that SNOCOM pays no rent now, but by 2023 they will negotiate with the City of Mountlake Terrace. Option 4B assumes rent will be paid for the SNOCOM facility at the same rate per square foot that SNOPAC currently pays, beginning in 2017.
- 3) **Summary pages for 2A, 2B and C show E911 revenues: why are the increases different from the decreases?** Kurt cited a few reasons: a) in the current formula, both PSAPs claim and serve the jointly served area of the county (150,000), b) once the different formulas are applied, the population shifted, and c) there was also a slight increase, year over year, to the E911 revenue.

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4) **What is the one-time special assessment in 4A and 4B in 2017?** Terry explained that this relates to the additional revenue from the 3 contract agencies. This is not a one-time amount and the spreadsheet will be corrected to apply this outside revenue in future years of the model.

5) **Option 4 means duplicate functions are eliminated; what would these be?** Terry had given an earlier example of finance, HR, recruitment services of applicants, certain service contracts. To the extent things can be eliminated, they will be (subject to the no layoff commitment). He gave another example: SNOCOM and SNOPAC each have separate Radio IP/Mobile VPN (Virtual Private Network) Systems that are managed by two separate IT staffs. Under consolidation, these systems would be merged into one. This would result in some natural cost savings in servers, equipment and maintenance. Karen added that this concept was captured in the M&O cost savings, but the internal staffing of these functions have not been included in that M&O figure.

Terry then stated that should consolidation occur between the two dispatch centers, the next question is whether or not SERS should also be consolidated. He added that when looking to the future to the new radio system that will be implemented, there is a clear recognition that radio specific technical staff are more like IT Generalists. If SERS consolidation is added to the picture, there is a potential for re-classification of some of the IT positions to work on the future radio system.

6) **Is equipment between agencies interchangeable and how old is the equipment for each agency?** Kurt answered that the phone, radio, and computer aided dispatch (CAD) systems are identical and interchangeable between the two PSAPs. Both agencies just upgraded the hardware and software of their 911 phone system. In all, both agencies have very similar core systems. Staff from one agency are familiar with and able to use the equipment at the other agency and vice versa. There are enough consoles currently at SNOPAC to support the staff from SNOCOM, but he and Terry would prefer to bring some consoles over to serve as backup in the event one was down for repairs or they needed one for training purposes. Terry added that when developing the maintenance and operation budget, he and Kurt counted the number of workstations they plan on replacing. There are 6 workstations at DEM that are basic, stripped down stations that lack full functionality: the Option 4 scenarios include funds to make these 6 workstations fully functional.

Answering a question about what the impact would be to the warm backup facility at SNOCOM if consoles were moved, Kurt answered that in the staff need to leave the SNOPAC facility, they would need to be split up between

DEM and SNOCOM. They would still be able to operate, but at a reduced level. Weighing the risks, he thought it would still be preferred to have the additional consoles at SNOPAC.

Another question was asked if two backup centers were really needed? Couldn't all the workstations be installed at SNOCOM? Terry answered that there is a potential for that. He added that from a budget standpoint there is sufficient funding for that or for installing fully functional consoles at DEM. Kurt added that the rent to DEM is around \$400-500 per month, and there are benefits to having PSAP workstations attached to the EOC.

- 7) **What are the balances of the reserve accounts?** The packet provided included fund balances for both SNOCOM and SNOPAC. In total, SNOCOM currently has \$2.9MM in fund balance; SNOPAC has \$17.8MM in fund balance. Kurt explained that besides a technical capital fund that covers their technical systems, a facility fund that is for facility costs, SNOPAC also has un-designated reserves. Some of these funds are earmarked for PTO (Paid Time Off) cash outs or liability. He added that they are trying to follow the best practice of having 3-4 months of operating revenue on hand. There was a question about whether the agencies have a policy that specifically addresses reserve accounts, and whether these reserves could fund some of the transition costs associated with the consolidation. Are those reserves currently committed or could some of them be utilized to cover those expenses? Kurt responded that if he receives that directive from his board, then he would examine that possibility, however, neither he nor Terry has done that analysis yet. Karen added that Kurt and Terry have made some assumptions based upon the ongoing funding of reserves, which is consistent with each agency's current commitments to funding reserves.

Answering another question concerning policies covering reserve accounts, Terry stated that at SNOCOM, the Budget Committee and the board typically address fund reserves as part of their budgetary process, and make any adjustments at that time. In addition, at year end, if there are underspent funds available, or additional 911 revenue, the board will make a decision on what to do with those funds, which historically has been to place in reserve accounts. He explained that SNOCOM doesn't have a policy that definitively states a certain percentage must be placed into a reserve account for a specific purpose. There are general policies that call out the reserve accounts and what they'll typically be used for.

- 8) **What would be the projected transition costs?** Terry explained that he and Kurt put together both a low and high estimate. The low estimate total is

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\$819,000, and the high estimate is \$1.5 million. Some of these expenses would include:

- Office space renovation at the SNOPAC facility
- Attorney fees for labor negotiations, the ILA and other contract issues
- Parking deficiencies. Could possibly utilize adjacent properties
- Technology transitions, including configuration changes of phone systems, moving consoles, etc.

9) **Option 4 attrition and rightsizing reduces dispatchers by 11 FTEs, and Supervisors are reduced by 4 FTEs. The concern is the net reduction in FTEs, particularly dispatchers, will impair the ability to meet the NENA standard of 90% of calls answered in 10 seconds.** Kurt explained that he thinks the staffing they recommended will meet the standard.

10) **The 10 year pro forma budget for Option 1 - stand alone, when compared against the 10 year pro forma for the consolidated option, results in cost savings in all labor centers except for Admin and IT.** This subject was covered previously in the presentation.

Kurt explained that when you look at the proposed assessments, there is roughly \$900,000 worth of savings year 1 based upon current 2017 assessments. About \$700,000 of savings go to SNOCOM agencies, and the remaining go to SNOPAC. When economies of scale at SNOPAC are examined, the reason SNOCOM is seeing an increased benefit is because they are taking advantage of the economies of scale that SNOPAC already has. He added that there is still some variability in who would pay more or less, attributed to the change in assessment formula. There is a substantial increase of \$230,000 to Fire District 1, because the current SNOCOM formula doesn't adequately assign the costs based upon the work that is being performed. This explains why every one of the fire agencies served by SNOCOM saw an increase. However, this increase was typically offset by the decrease to the law enforcement agencies. Since Fire District 1 doesn't have a law enforcement side and since they are the largest fire provider in Snohomish County, the change in assessment formula hits them the hardest.

Terry further explained that if a contract agency wanted to pay their bill directly, the consolidated agency will them a bill. For example, if Brier, who doesn't have a fire department but instead contracts with FD1, wants to pay for fire dispatch service directly, they can. This is the way the 10 year assessment projection is presented: contract city expenses will either be paid directly or rolled into the contract expenses paid to the service provider. The

breakout for assessments was provided so everyone could see exactly what the cost associated for each jurisdiction would be.

- 11) A comment relating to economies of scale was made, along with the recognition that SNOCOM agencies would enjoy more savings in a consolidation model than would SNOPAC's agencies. The request was that this situation be taken into consideration in further Joint Task Force discussions around governance.**

Kurt said that both boards independently identified four priorities for the project. Service levels and costs were the primary issues at both centers. Call transfers are a major service level issue. 45,000 to 55,000 call transfers, back and forth between SNOPAC and SNOCOM, occur every year. On average, transfers add about 21 seconds to the time to dispatch each call. If all these transfers are added up, citizens who have called 911 are spending 11 days on hold while a transfer is made.

High profile events show how transfers seriously affect those involved in the emergency.

Terry added that transfers between SNOCOM to SNOPAC account for 1 out of every 5 calls received. SNOPAC transfers 1 out of every 50 calls to SNOCOM. The majority of calls received in the jointly served area are law enforcement calls. While high priority calls can now be pre-entered with as much information as possible before the transfer is complete, the new software system still hasn't eliminated the transfers from occurring.

- 12) Could the transfer problem be solved with a consolidated phone system, along with some operational changes?** Kurt answered that while technology exists to operate with a single phone system, the many challenges associated with jointly administering that system would not be worth it. He also spoke about operational challenges of ensuring proper work load to meet call answering standards. Asked to elaborate, Kurt went on to explain that there are different staffing philosophies between the two agencies. If there's shortfall in staffing at one agency, calls would not get answered at the level that is acceptable. Terry pointed out that in the aggressive call processing model (Option 3), both agencies would stay stand-alone, they are both staffed up to meet the NENA call answer standard, and transfers are eliminated by following a "you answer, you enter" procedure. The problem with that method is that SNOCOM must make the decision to staff up to that level, at the same time its E911 revenue would be decreased significantly. And, anytime you have a call taker at SNOCOM, with the dispatcher at SNOPAC – physically in two different buildings-- you create some operational challenges

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along with officer safety concerns, since the people handling a call cannot easily communicate.

- 13) **If SNOCOM increases their staff to comply with NENA standards, and the two agencies remain separate, would you compare the capacity of the two centers as stand-alone agencies versus a combined PSAP?** Terry explained that anytime there is a large incident, there is a flurry of calls. In the Mukilteo shooting example, both centers experienced a flurry of calls. Similarly, when there was the stabbing at Alderwood Mall, there were 130 calls about that incident received at SNOCOM in a 30-minute window. Dispatch centers can't staff up for these occurrences, but they do staff up to the NENA call answer standard. The capacity issue boils down to size. If SNOCOM has 7 people in their facility at 1:00 in the afternoon, and there's this huge peak of call volume, how many calls can 7 people really handle, versus in a consolidated agency where there may be 20 people on staff? In the Mukilteo incident, SNOPAC had people on standby ready and willing to answer calls, while SNOCOM was flooded with calls which resulted in hold times and busy recordings for the citizens calling in.

Kurt noted that call transfers also create a gridlock within the center: if a call taker is making a transfer to the other agency, they must stay on the phone until the transfer is complete, even if the other center is backed-up. That means they're not available to answer another incoming call. When asked if a similar situation exists when a wind storm occurs, Terry responded that in the event of a forecasted storm, the centers usually have the opportunity to staff up for events like that.

- 14) **Could more detail be provided? Will other meetings be scheduled?** Roy responded and said if there are additional questions, those can be emailed in and the JTF will make sure those questions are answered. Questions and answers will also be published. He added that it is the goal of the JTF to make sure everyone is informed about the work the committee is doing.
- 15) **Have there been any discussion on how the start-up costs will be allocated?** Karen said that no decision has been made on the transition costs, but if everyone wants the project to move forward then the costs will then be refined and options discussed.
- 16) **Could the JTF take another look at administrative and IT costs, over the next 10 years, taking into consideration attrition, not layoffs. Could a staffing model be provided that would identify whether there might be some savings in the future by not re-hiring positions. Would the JTF articulate what those functions are that they might be bringing in house, including those that one agency has, but the other one does not.**

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- 3. Next Steps.** Karen summarized the requests received at the meeting. She said she understands that the material presented is important and feels it would be helpful to schedule another two hour session in a couple of weeks.
- 4. Closing Comments.** Terry referred to the spreadsheet for Option 4, and the first orange row shows the number of authorized dispatch FTEs, along with Supervisors, Admin and IT. He explained that when the number of authorized FTE positions for SNOCOM and SNOPAC are added together, there are 106 dispatch operation positions, 20 supervisors, and 32 Admin and IT positions. This number changes through the pro forma and through the efficiencies. In terms of assumptions, he and Kurt have tried to detail what those are in the footnotes on the pro forma. In terms of looking forward with the pro forma, all the common assumptions are at the top of the page, including salary increases, benefits, M&O, as well as costs attributed to salaries and benefits. Within the spreadsheet the FTE counts have been included, along with the costs associated per head count, as well as all of the assumptions.

Roy said another meeting will be scheduled soon, and encouraged everyone to send in their questions. The next topic to be discussed at the JTF is the governance model. He thanked everyone for attending today.

Meeting adjourned at 11:00.