



EAST BATON ROUGE PARISH COMMUNICATIONS DISTRICT

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Meeting Minutes

June 19, 2024 – 2:00 p.m. CDT

East Baton Rouge Sheriff's Office
8900 Jimmy Wedell Drive, Building B
Baton Rouge, LA 70807

The East Baton Rouge Parish Communications District Board of Commissioners met at the East Baton Rouge Parish Sheriff's Office on the 19th day of June 2024 for a duly noticed regular public meeting.

The public meeting was called to order by Chairman Gautreaux.

Commissioner Evans gave the Invocation.

Commissioner McDavid led the Pledge of Allegiance.

The Chairman called roll:

Present: Chairman Sid Gautreaux, Commissioner Wade Evans, Commissioner Designate Chris Becnel (by Commissioner Waites), Commissioner David McDavid, Commissioner Michael Kimble, and Commissioner Michael Denicola

Absent: Commissioner Myron Daniels

The Chairman found that a quorum existed.

Others Present Included The Following:

Director Jim Verlander, Legal Counsel Henry Olinde, Scott Lazarone CPA, Brenda Welch (EBRPCD), Todd Campbell (EBRPCD), David Luker (EBRSO), Ricky Klug (EBRSO), Renee Cashio (EMS), Tammy Armand (CP), Barbara Winn (NGA911) and Larry Powenski.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Commissioner McDavid moved to approve the minutes of the May 15, 2024 meeting. Commissioner Kimble seconded that motion. The motion unanimously passed.

OLD BUSINESS:

Financial Report

The financial report was presented by Scott Lazarone, CPA.

The presented financials are through April 30, 2024.

Cash was \$11.96 million and Accounts receivable of \$559,000. Total assets were \$13.2 million. Expenses are at or below the watermark. Total fund balance is approximately \$13.2 million. Much of this fund balance is non-spendable because it is a prepaid asset or committed to a capital project. Revenues of \$2.8 million are approximately 36% of budget and slightly ahead of the 33% watermark. Interest income was \$167,000, which is almost 85% of budgeted interest revenue and more than double the 33% budgetary watermark. Expenses are below the 33% watermark.

Commissioner Kimble moved to approve the financial report. Commissioner Evans seconded the motion. The motion unanimously passed.

North Tower Project

Todd Campbell began the discussion.

Henry Olinde presented the Motorola proposal for the purchase and installation of the tower and equipment. This proposal was bid out through Ascension Parish. The total price of the proposal \$2,186,749.35. Commissioner Evans asked if this price was in line with what the district was expecting. Mr. Olinde advised that it is his understanding that the state has appropriated approximately \$712,000 that would assist with this project and if that amount is taken into account, the pricing would be close to what the district was expecting to pay for this project.

In response to Commissioner Evans' question, David Luker (EBRSO) confirmed that the wi-fi project is still underway and is separate from the tower project.

Commissioner Kimble confirmed with Messrs. Campbell Luker and Olinde that the next step to getting the tower completed is the approval of this proposal.

Commissioner Kimble moved to approve the Motorola proposal subject to approval of the final documentation by Mr. Olinde. Commissioner McDavid seconded the motion. The Chairman asked Mr. Luker to confirm that the planned location of the tower is still

the correct location for the tower and the coverage area of the tower is maximized. Mr. Luker answered that it was and directed the Board to the tower coverage map in the Motorola proposal. The Chairman then called for a vote on Commissioner Kimble's motion and it unanimously passed.

CAD Update

Joe Thompson reported on this.

System testing for the next CAD upgrade, 23.1.3.5, is being conducted. If everything checks out then the upgrade should be installed in the next couple of weeks. After that the next CAD upgrade will probably not be available until the first few months of next year. That future upgrade, Mr. Thompson predicts, should have many new features that will be good for the district in the long term.

911 Upgrade

Joe Thompson reported on this.

Completed the move back to the East region. There will be a soaking period to ensure there are no issues with system. If there are no issues then the district can proceed to move all agencies to NGA911.

Director Verlander introduced NGA911 executive Barbara Winn who was sent at the district's request to help with the implementation of NGA911's system and resolve issues.

Ms. Winn addressed the Board and assured it that she is here to assist and understands the issues. She advised that she will be here until the project is finished. She believes that once the district is completely off of the legacy system, it should reap benefits.

Report on Percentage That Comm District Pays for Salaries for City-Parish

Commissioner Denicola presented several reports to the Board on the percentage of employee costs paid by the district, the reason for this and the costs of the employees.

The district is paying 73% of the salary of ECO's. When EMS hires ECOs, it starts them off at step 13, salary and benefits total for these employees is \$95,545. The district pays 73% of this or 69,748, and EMS pays 27% of this or \$37,752. The district believes that it can directly hire employees for approximately \$66,000 per year. Seven new EMS ECOs would cost the district \$488,232.56, and seven new direct district employees would cost the district \$462,000. EMS employees, which are more medically trained, cost the district only \$3,747.51 per employee/year or \$1.72/hour.

Commissioner Evans noted that he's previously seen that EMS employees cost the district approximately \$114,00 each and he asked where that number came from Mr. Lazarone explained that the numbers on Commissioner Denicola's report only reflect salary and benefits. The IGA, however, requires the district to pay employee cost items in addition to just salary and benefits. These additional items bring the actual average cost of step 13 employees to approximately \$108,000 per employee. The \$114,000 number that Commissioner Evans mentioned would probably be the average cost per EMS employee (across all pay steps).

Commissioner Evans stated that long term the district might consider, as EMS employees drop off through natural attrition, the district could procure employees through a private vendor and keep costs from continuing to grow. Commissioner McDavid asked whether a person would want an EMT on the phone if a family member were in critical condition.

Mr. Lazarone further pointed out that his understanding is that the Project Retains report showed that 7 more employees were needed to answer 911 calls but that this really only means 5 employees (i.e., 73% of 7) to the district. Ricky Klug and Tammy Armand stated that the purpose of the report is to just measure the number of call takers needed to answer 911 calls and does not include dispatch duties.

Commissioner Evans pointed out that if the district needs 7 more call takers it would have to have more than 7 more employees because it only gets 73% of each employee. There was discussion and dispute on this point.

Mr. Olinde suggested that, in order to avoid confusion, in the future the board should just decide how many employees the district needs and pay 100% of those employees. This would be less confusing than the current arrangement in which the board pays different percentages of the costs of different employees.

Director Verlander advised the Board that the data directly from the VPR system shows that the number of 911 and administrative line calls in the Parish has actually been declining. He presented reports to the board with this data.

Commissioner Denicola disagreed with the call volume data. He believes that the call volume has increased, Commissioner Denicola stated that when people call 911 they need help badly and the people in the Parish need and deserve a medically trained person on the other end of the phone. Director Verlander disagreed. Medically trained personnel should not be tied up with calls from barking dogs, stalled vehicles and non-medical calls. These calls can be answered by 911 call takers and the medical calls could be quickly transferred to EMS EMT's who could be waiting and available instead of being tied up with non-medical calls. This is the way it is done elsewhere.

Commissioner McDavid pointed out that the current structure with EMS call takers has been in place for many years and he believes in it.

Commissioner Evans stated that he cannot support a motion to add more employees at this time unless some other options besides EMS employees are presented.

Chairman Gautreaux pointed out that there is merit to both points of view and believes that any solution should balance them out.

Commissioner Evans asked if there is some training that non-EMT call takers could have. Commissioner Denicola responded that there are other places that use EMT's and that medical responses are involved and complicated and medically trained call takers are better able to handle this.

Commissioner Kimble pointed out that emergency service always plan for the worst and provide maximum resources to the citizens. That is why medically trained call-takers are needed.

Commissioner Evans pointed out that at other PSAPs in the Parish EMS medically trained personnel don't answer 911 calls. The question is whether the job of the district should be to answer the call and get it to medically trained personnel. Commissioner Kimble reiterated that medically trained personnel should be the people answering the phone.

Renee Cashio pointed out that the Project Retains report showed that 9 /10 employees needed to be hired to provide the district with 7 employees.

Discussion ensued on all of these points between board members and members of the audience.

Commissioner Kimble clarified that the EMS employees at the communications center are cross-trained and some answer 911 calls and some dispatch.

Ricky Klug stated that the Project Retains report says that 7 more people are needed to answer the number of 911 calls based on everything that comes into the call center.

Commissioner Denicola asked if anyone remembers where this issue stems from. He reminded everyone that the issue was that EMS was not answering the phone fast enough. They need more call takers. He reiterated his belief that call volume is rising.

Commissioner Kimble reminded everyone that this discussion is about what additional employees are going to cost, which he understands should mean benefits and salary. He asked Mr. Olinde if this was correct. Mr. Olinde responded that the IGA requires that the district reimburse many other costs in addition to the salary and benefits and that what the employee would cost the district under the IGA would have to include these other items. Mr. Olinde suggested a flat fee arrangement with the City Parish would provide much better cost control incentives than the current reimbursement arrangement.

Ms. Cashio pointed out that EMS does not always know what the costs are and that is why the reimbursement arrangement is necessary. Mr. Lazarone pointed out that the district gets a bill for any extras. Commissioner Denicola pointed out that the district gets a bill for the same amount of money every month. Messrs. Lazarone and Verlander responded that the district does get such a bill every month but then it gets billed for any additional costs at year's end and has been sent such a bill this year.

Chairman Gautreaux voiced his opinions on the issue. Whoever is answering a call must be in one location, The Board needs to make sure that there are enough call takers available to answer calls. This means that medical personnel need to be available to answer calls. With respect to voting on additional employees, the question of employee costs is not clear enough to make a decision.

Mr. Olinde advised that budget discussions are coming up with the City Parish and the Board will have to decide on a budget. That may be the best time to make this decision. Chairman Gautreaux voiced his agreement and advised that he can call a special meeting for the budget and this issue if necessary.

Commissioner Kimble moved that the Director Verlander, EMS and City Parish finance meet and come to agreement on this issue and come back to the Board. There was no second.

Commissioner Evans stated that he would like to see other alternatives for providing additional employees.

Commissioner Evans made a substitute motion that Director Verlander get a proposal from EMS and also get other options for obtaining additional employees. There was no second.

Director Verlander noted that at prior meetings relating to the IGA three board members (Commissioner Denicola, Commissioner Daniels and Commissioner Kimble) were there and no other commissioners could attend because of open meetings law concerns. There was some discussion of this point.

Commissioner McDavid moved to approve hiring the additional employees. There was no second.

Chairman Gautreaux and Commissioner Evans both expressed their belief that Director Verlander's job duties require him to meet with the City Parish and come up with a plan to move forward. Mr. Olinde confirmed this.

NEW BUSINESS

Recent Developments

Jim Verlander reported no recent developments.

Administrative Matters

Director Verlander noted that with progress being made on CAD, NGA and the North tower project the district is gaining momentum and moving in the right direction.

Commissioner Evans asked about the effect, if any, that the City of St. George will have on the district or the Board. Chairman Gautreaux expressed his belief that the new City will request a seat on the Board. In response to the Chairman's inquiry, Mr. Olinde advised that under current law the Metro Council will have to fill a current spot on the board with a St. George representative or the Board can ask the legislature to change the law to allow St. George a seat.

Legal Updates

Henry Olinde advised that he will have to get all of the tower documentation signed. Other than that he has no updates.

Adjournment

Commissioner Evans moved that the meeting be adjourned. Commissioner Denicola seconded that motion. The motion unanimously passed.