

**City Council
&**

City Council Standing Committees

BUDGET AND FINANCE

ORDINANCES AND ADMINISTRATION

Thursday, February 18, 2010– 6:30 p.m.

Present: ***BUDGET & FINANCE:***

Councilor Steven Curcuru, Chair; Councilor Paul McGeary, Vice Chair;

Councilor Jacqueline Hardy

ORDINANCE & ADMINISTRATION:

Councilor Sefatia Theken, Chair; Councilor Ann Mulcahey, Vice Chair, Councilor Verga (alternate)

OTHER CITY COUNCILORS PRESENT:

Councilor Joseph Ciolino

Absent: **Councilor Bruce Tobey**

Also Present: Police Chief Michael Lane; Fire Chief Phil Dench; Jeff Towne; Officer Jeremiah Nicastro, Gloucester Police Patrolman's Association; Firefighter Phil Bouchie, Firefighters Union representative; David Anderson; June Steel; Sunny Robinson; Rosalee Nicastro

The meeting was called to order at 6:36 p.m. A quorum of the City Council was present and acknowledged for the record.

1. Regional 911 Emergency Dispatch Center

Councilor Curcuru, Chair of the Budget & Finance Committee outlined the format for the evening, reminding those present that this was a public “meeting”. **Jim Duggan** started by saying Gloucester has two of the finest public safety departments around. This is in no shape or form a slight against anyone in those departments. It is really to evaluate if there is a better way of doing things that could benefit the City of Gloucester. Regarding the question of cost; we’re all concerned. The budgets are dynamic and that changes as priorities change. The Administration is of the view that the proposed Regional 911 Emergency Dispatch Center is a worthy investment and fully realizing the choices of the many priorities that need to be made. Three main reasons for joining the proposed Regional 911 Emergency Dispatch Center: the management audit made strong recommendation for it, a thorough report. There is the specialization of the dispatchers. It is career path occupation, well controlled, with training, technology and Emergency Medical Dispatch certification; and finally, staff efficiencies.

Fire Chief Dench stated that EMD means Emergency Medical Dispatch. No one in the Fire Department is certified currently in EMD. If they’ve done it, they’ve done it on their own. Years ago some money was put aside and several firefighters were certified in EMD. This is a continual recertification process; you can’t just certify one time and be done. The program was discontinued due to lack of funds. The EMD process begins when a medical emergency call comes in. The dispatchers, who have flip cards to go through, talk the caller through lifesaving steps depending through the nature of the emergency, like providing CPR to a victim of a heart attack. This is a very important component to the emergency medical system. It is a quick intervention process at every step while help is on the way. The Regional 911 Emergency Dispatch would have all certified EMD call takers and dispatchers.

Police Chief Michael Lane referenced the previous presentations and said up front that he does favor this which a big step with some uncertainty. It is a big change in the way the department does business. Right now, there three officers are inside the dispatch facility around the clock at the Gloucester Police Station. To staff the facility for eight hours requires five officers to fill three positions, due to days off, vacation time, sick time, etc. It takes 1.7 officers to fill one position. It takes 15 officers to staff the dispatch facility around the clock each year. That comes out to \$1,055,000.00 over the course of a year. If this proposal is accepted, they would negotiate with the unions to be able to move two of the officers assigned to dispatch by reassigning them to the street. Instead of three officers in there, there would be one inside, a house officer who would wait on the public and would also have the assistance of the watch commander. If they became extremely busy, they would call in an officer from off the street to help out. He believes that is a good thing. They have a need for other officers on the street. The Police Department is top heavy now with three in and four out covering the rest of the City. It would be a good thing. We would be putting \$700,000.00 of assets out on the street for a payment of the \$492,000.00 (\$16.26 per capita). We would also lose the e911 salaries grant and the e911 training grant. We’re not just throwing that money into the wind. We’re getting of two officers per shift onto the street. He may need to redistribute the officers differently; but regionalization will make its way into Massachusetts sooner or later, one of the last states to grasp the concept. It is the norm in most other places. It is time for a well trained civilian dispatch to be put in place in public safety. These are good, hard working men. They’re well trained in the street; and it’s where they do their best work.

Officer Jeremiah Nicastro, President of the Gloucester Police Patrolman’s Association delivered an address to the Councilors (on file) speaking on behalf of the GPPA outlining their opposition to the proposed move to a Regional 911 Emergency Dispatch Center.

Phil Bouchie, President Gloucester Fireman’s Union spoke of visiting a regional dispatch center where he felt the situation was inadequate. He gave the example where they were inundated with calls which he felt was chaotic and not of a high professional caliber. The Center he was referring to was in Pennsylvania. He felt Mr. Dubas was misrepresenting the way a 911 Center is run. The total cost of \$1.5

million is annual an subsidy from the State. He gave examples of comparables of salaries and health insurance for the center's employees. \$2+ million for the City, and other communities will pay less, being controlled by eight little communities. It is good for the little communities, not for larger communities. It is not affordable for this community right now, and the City doesn't need to rush into this either. It will be too large. It is not an efficient way to dispatch emergency personnel. Their record-keeping does not work well. There is immediate feedback on mistakes in-house in our Fire and Police departments, but it doesn't work that way with regional dispatch. There will be no cap. They will not reduce police and firefighters in our City, so the Administration said but he was doubtful of that fact.

Mr. Duggan rebutted Officer Nicastro's and Firefighter Bouchie's remarks. He wanted to have another opportunity for Mr. Dubas to return to speak before the Council. In terms of cuts, the Administration has committed that the existing levels will hold. They will be looking in the future to increase manpower in both departments. Locked in for 10 years is incorrect. It is five years. Each town gets one vote, which is correct. That is the legislation is written and how it is being applied. At the table there will be a finance committee; at the advisory level will be each of our chiefs. At the finance table will be the mayor or Mr. Towne at that table. We are confident that will bring great value to that table. In Phase 2 to sign up then it hasn't been discussed yet nor known when that start. The system has no flaws or no problems, there's no room for improvement. There was mention of the audit, the Chiefs involved. They didn't have regional dispatch where they were. They were in the business to look where the best situations were and what regional dispatch was and how it worked and that's how they came up with that recommendation. It is not unique. Regional dispatch can work and does throughout the country. The fact of the information through the Deputy Chief in Scranton PA, that is because there aren't any advisory committees and the chiefs were not at the table during the start up. That is why that situation is changed for the formation of this regional dispatch. Sheriff Cousins and his team can come back for the public hearing.

Councilor McGeary asked about the Verizon money that comes to our 911 Emergency Dispatch.

Chief Lane said he understands that Verizon takes 75 cents from every cell phone provider and that is forwarded to the State 911 fund which is then is forwarded to the cities and towns. Gloucester received in FY2009 \$48,000.00, and in FY2010 it was \$59,000.00, and an E911 training grant was received for \$109,000. If the City goes to a regional 911 dispatch that money goes with it. The \$59,000 is out of \$1,055,000.00 payroll for the 15 positions that staff dispatch full time all year around.

Councilor McGeary asked if some of this money available to enhance the police computer systems.

Chief Lane said Verizon does all of the maintenance of the 911 system and gives the department the equipment. They do have the salaries and training grants.

Councilor McGeary said the technology issue is moot as Verizon takes care of that. With regard to the radios, there's a lot of talk about dead spots on the radio system around the City. This does effect communications of cruisers on the road.

Chief Lane said they did work on the Lanesville repeater, and a few dead spots were fixed and also in the valleys of West Gloucester as well as a tower problem on Kondelin Road. They want the City off the tower, but that can't take be done. Verizon will come down and help eliminate dead spots.

Councilor McGeary the center doesn't affect this.

Chief Lane said they would have a base station at the center and the department would have a desk top communications and in the cruisers. They'd be communicating through the existing system.

Councilor Hardy asked what happens to existing equipment if we go to the regionalization in Middleton.

Chief Lane said it comes out with little chance of coming back.

Councilor Hardy said through comments, if the system was going down you communicate through the local communities; and if the equipment goes away, why it all has to go back. We have to start over again to get to where we are already.

Chief Lane said they would take all the 911 equipment out.

Councilor Hardy asked what the savings of any kind in personnel are.

Chief Lane said there is a savings if we take two of the three people out, which is \$700,000.00 in resources back to the street. All the 1212 calls would go to Middleton. If the caller is adamant they want an officer, they'll send an officer.

Councilor Hardy said if 1212 goes up to Middleton and she called from her house, she'd get Middleton.

Chief Lane agreed saying she would get a civilian dispatcher.

Councilor Hardy said if she calls from a cell phone, it will go to State police barracks. With all the upgrades why would that still occur.

Mr. Duggan said that is the way system works now with cell phones. They would love to explore that possibility and don't have the answer to that question if cell phones would go to Middleton instead, and he'll try to get that answer for the Councilor.

Councilor Hardy said for years as Ward 4 Councilor that Lanesville has been handicapped with frequent response delays and doesn't see the response from Middleton to the Lanesville line being timely.

Mr. Duggan said the process is you pick up the phone, you get a dispatcher; that dispatcher will dispatch the police cruiser in your area. He didn't feel response time will suffer. You will get a dispatcher, and you will get a police response. It will go through the same process if you call Middleton.

Councilor Hardy said the reason to regionalize is to improve service. Then why not open the Bay View Fire Station. We should invest locally first.

Councilor Ciolino said that Verizon supplies the up-to-date 911 equipment, and was told that what we have and what we'd get will be exactly the same.

Chief Lane said we have the up-to-date E911 system. There are things you could have like call counters, call rotators; those are the bells and whistles which can be tomorrow's requirements. It is an up-to-date E911 system in Gloucester.

Councilor Ciolino said you can assure the citizens of Gloucester it is very good.

Chief Lane replied the basic 911 system is excellent. Verizon has been here doing some mechanical updates and at their back up is Beverly. Dispatch is a cramped space; not very nice. Current standards

recommend 200 square feet per person. There is maybe 250 square feet for three people now. It does need upgrading and improvement; but the equipment is state of the art, received in 2004.

Councilor Ciolino said you would agree; if we were to try to build a new municipal building, wouldn't the math dictate that the new building would be more efficient.

Chief Lane said a new police/fire complex should it come to pass, that the in-house communications would be in place, but that he'd still say the City should look into professional dispatch. These guys are best on the street. and it's where they belong and do their best.

Councilor Ciolino said that the thrust should be getting a new facility here. Please explain what exactly the Fire Department does with the 911 calls. They go to the Police Department, then what.

Chief Dench said that they get the call. The caller states what they need. The police hit a button which transfers the call to the Fire Department who stays on the line to make sure the call is transferred, then the fire dispatcher listens to the caller and dispatches the correct apparatus.

Councilor Ciolino said you don't you have anyone qualified to answer these phones, if you have the police answering your calls

Chief Dench said once the call is transferred, the call belongs to the Fire Department. The fire dispatcher then gathers the information. A police officer doesn't cut into the call and says how to handle the situation.

Councilor Ciolino if the call came in from Middleton, what changes for the Fire Department, if someone has a 911 call that needs an ambulance or fire apparatus.

Chief Dench said that the Chiefs will set their criteria as how they want the dispatch handled. When they receive the call in Middleton, they'll reference the card that tells them what to do dispatching from what he told them to do under all these different scenarios. If the Police Chief decides that one cruiser goes to the call then that is how it will be handled.

Councilor Ciolino couldn't see spending the extra money not knowing what kind of real benefit will be realized.

Chief Dench said the dispatcher will be able to do EMD with the caller while the apparatus is being dispatched. They will be able to give the caller information how to handle their emergency, as the call unfolds while help is on the way.

Councilor Ciolino said we'll still have a dispatcher still in Gloucester.

Chief Dench said that is to be determined. They still may have a house person that stays there. That is to be determined.

Councilor Verga noted Chief Lane spoke of \$700,000.00 assets back on the streets, as well as Chief Dench. How does the City pay the \$480,000.00.

Mr. Duggan said it would be come off the cherry sheet from the Department Of Revenue. That's how it would go directly to the regional communication center. They look at other areas where revenues are

increases like the new option taxes and Proposition 2-1/2 and growth is hovering around \$2 million annually for revenue coming in.

Councilor Verga said in his eight years on the School Committee, they weren't adding a lot on the school side to the budget. And added revenues get gobbled up right away. He didn't see the budget cuts that are going to get this paid for.

Mr. Duggan said the technology, records management – the City will not have to make that investment. The advantages come through savings here. It's really a matter of where we want to invest. Every year the Administration moves forward where they feel the City should invest, and this is one.

Councilor Verga said this is to confirm unlike vocational school, if we don't join now they won't say you can't come back at a later date. We're not out for good if we say no.

Mr. Duggan said if we evaluated and witness it, and if we knock on their door later, we'd be let in. It is possible they could say they're at capacity and Gloucester would have to wait until Phase 2.

Councilor Verga said we have an opportunity here to look at what priorities are. The City needs to look at priorities. What is it going to be between all the large projects.

Mr. Duggan said as Chief Dench was saying earlier, the Chiefs will be able to determine what to say if we want the 1212 calls to go to Middleton which is not set in stone. They can modify it quarterly.

Councilor Theken said if this passes when this will begin in 2012 according to Mr. Duggan. We're looking to remove Civil Service for the Police Chief position. She spoke of her personal emergency on September 11, 1997. She felt someone certified at a regional center could not have told her what to do. You can't put a price on the personalities that we have here and the hometown personal touch. We don't have certified dispatchers, but they are professional people on staff. If the Fire Department is on divert, and it went to Beverly and she then called 1212 and she would get an instant response locally. We would be diverted to Middleton on that non-emergency line. What if the caller doesn't speak English? We deserve the specialty of a local dispatch. She gave examples of the 911 system and wasn't confident with the information presented on the Regional Dispatch. What is Middleton going to make of a fishing vessel in trouble? We may be able to compromise. They came and promised everything to us. Why do we have to rush? Why can't we wait to see what happens. Put the training in your budget. Every year a chief has come in front of us with cuts. Put your certification in. You can say you won't lay anyone off, but we don't know what the next Administration or what the next chiefs are going to do.

Mr. Duggan said you made comment about who may not be here, but we can't the elective process to mar what's best for the City. Making this move forward in this kind of investment at this point is the best thing for the City. It is not a popular recommendation. We've had discussions with the Council. He understands the union position and the other side. We can't let that dictate the decision. Touching upon the Voke, it is really a matter of we won't be giving up the local Voke. We will pay the bill for two things. This would be a stand-alone regional system. Gloucester is not unique. The situations you described are not unique. They happen day after day. People need public safety assistance. The delivery of those services can be maintained efficiently, maybe even improved. We have a beautiful, amazing community. At any time something can happen. He expressed his empathy for Councilor Theken's comments.

Councilor Theken said we have to go for the best. Over her last 10 years as a Councilor with fire stations closed, we're still working on how we're going to survive. Don't rush because it's our lives. Many citizens are just asking for time to be taken in this decision. You can't leave that window alone at

the Police Department. You can't take those three dispatchers out and leave one alone. You can't protect those officers that way.

Councilor Mulcahey she has been to all three elderly public housing facilities in her ward, and they're not very happy about this. They're a group that is t likely to use 911 the most. Their concerns are like anyone else - is help going to get there on time. Her constituents told her they didn't want the Regional 911. She asked the question of Mr. Dubas when he presented at the last Council meeting how they would triangulate a cell phone emergency call, and said it would be seconds. It can't possibly be seconds and doesn't believe it. She believed our Fire Department needs EMD trained staff and would encourage the training. You have to know the people of your City. We have to accommodate them; they're paying the bills.

Councilor Curcuru said most of his questions have been answered, but total costs include the annual grants.

Mr. Duggan responded it was \$556,000.00.

Councilor Curcuru said speaking hypothetically, put two new stations at the Fuller, what could we build for an annual payment of \$556,000.00.

Mr. Duggan said he looked into that kind of scenario of building one large station to house Police and Fire and had a discussion with an architect whose company does only stand-alone public safety buildings and combined public safety buildings. They advised him, as an example, for a 30,000 square foot building, it would be \$275.00 per square foot plus soft costs, totaling \$10 million dollar. Borrowing over the course of 20 years, level debt service would be \$725,000.00 per year. An equal principal schedule over 20 years, Year 1 would be \$875,000.00; and in Year 20, \$520,000.00.

Councilor Curcuru noted it's a bit more money to go to regional 911. In the Police and Fire audit it was recommended to move to a regional 911 dispatch center. It did recommend also a new police and fire facility. Would the City be able to sell the police property on Main Street and the Central Fire Station now and apply those monies realized to the debt if we built the new station.

Mr. Towne responded that you would be able to put the money in a special fund to pay down debt service. If you had an idea how much it could be and sell in a reasonable amount of time, the City could be in short term debt and convert to long-term debt. The City would sell the buildings and pay down the debt over time.

Councilor Curcuru asked if there was an idea of what a said combined civilian dispatch would cost.

Mr. Duggan said doing an area study of civilian dispatchers, it averages out to be \$20 an hour for a full-time dispatcher at 40 hours per week. Its 40 hours not 35 hours because as with other City employees, we want them to be sure they can cover the entire shift. On an individual health insurance & dental plan it is \$47,637 annually and \$56,323 per position for a family plan.

Councilor Curcuru asked what are you talking yearly with three shifts.

Mr. Duggan said taking the existing situation, two officers are out and placed on other police operations. The dispatch center would now consist of two individuals; one civilian dispatcher, the one house officer and the street supervisor; and that is how it would play out per shift.

Councilor Curcuru said the Fire Department would have one house person, and the Police Department would have one house person, one dispatcher and one shift supervisor and then said it takes 22 weeks to train a police offer at the Police Academy. How long is the training to become a dispatcher.

Officer Nicaastro said the training is a couple of days.

Councilor Curcuru said 22 weeks to be a police officer is more qualified.

Officer Nicaastro said they are more qualified to advise based on training and experience.

Councilor Curcuru said the idea is to want to keep it in Gloucester and the Administration looking to go regional. Two new stations, and then keep it all here.

Officer Nicaastro said he represents a union, but will say that he could swallow a civilian dispatcher in Gloucester more than in Middleton.

Councilor Hardy asked if the City used to have civilian dispatch before and if so why did it fail.

Chief Lane said that they were CETA workers; it was probably that they weren't properly trained.

Councilor Hardy asked how many days did the Chief think it takes to train a dispatcher.

Chief Lane said it is a 40 hour course. There is a 40 hour course, the full soup-to-nuts training, which includes EMD. The agency which provides it mainly gives the course out of our area, and they have been asked to come north of Boston. They will do it in Rockport, and the Gloucester Police department will send officers to it.

Councilor Hardy asked about dispatchers and prevailing wages.

Chief Lane said there is a prevailing wage on federal jobs that the flaggers on the Essex road work are billing out at \$51.00 an hour. The flagger gets \$35 per hour, and they just increased their rate.

Councilor Hardy asked what would happen at the Police Department with regard the need to have in-house officers to do prisoner checks.

Chief Lane said the watch commander can do it, checking prisoners every 30 minutes. In the future there is a possibility that anytime anyone in Essex County isn't going to be bailed right away, that prisoner would go to Middleton which will apply to females as well. As an administrator he welcomes it. Prisoners are a necessary evil; and if there is a facility that can house women for the weekend, that'd be a great improvement.

Councilor Hardy commented that the Administration said we wouldn't lose jobs; and she agrees that we need to keep jobs here.

Chief Lane said in the rest country sheriffs do a lot more than here. They patrol; do lock up. Sheriff Cousins wants to do patrolling. He's come a long way and runs a good ship up there.

Councilor McGeary asked about communications regarding narrow band broadcasting for Police Department radios.

Chief Lane said that is something we have to do and regional dispatch won't cover. They'll have to look at their cruisers and hand-held radios and have to see if they can be reprogrammed. In a week or two the radio company will come down to see what has to be narrow banded.

Councilor Hardy noted she asked at the last meeting whether or not the Administration had reached out to our surrounding communities.

Mr. Duggan said he is sending a letter very shortly to see if they would sit at table to see what might come out of such a meeting. He stated the Administration's job is to present new concepts and ideas to the Council. They do listen to everyone. They can all concur is that we are going to work together to advance what is best for Gloucester.

Councilor Hardy asked Mr. Duggan to word the letter to the surrounding communities so that it was a direct invitation and not to leave it open ended.

Councilor Curcuru asked for a motion.

Councilor Hardy said a motion would not be motion to vote up or down but to advertise for public hearing which has a different set of guidelines.

MOTION: On motion by Councilor Hardy, seconded by Councilor McGeary, the Budget and Finance Committee voted 3 in favor, 0 opposed to advertise for public hearing on the matter of the Regional 911 Dispatch Center and to leave the language for the wording of the advertisement to General Counsel of the City.

MOTION: On motion Councilor Verga, seconded by Mulcahey, the Ordinances and Administration Committee voted 3 in favor, 0 opposed to advertise for public hearing on the matter of the Regional 911 Dispatch Center and to leave the language for the wording of the advertisement to General Counsel of the City.

Councilor Hardy, after conferring with the Councilors, set the date of the public hearing as April 27, 2010 at 7:00 p.m. in the Kyrouz Auditorium. The City Clerk was instructed that after speaking to Legal Counsel for the wording to place the advertisement for the public hearing. Further, that this is not something that has to be done by the City Council but something the City Council wants to do; the Council wants to hear from the general public.

Councilor Curcuru thanked everyone for attending.

MOTION: It was moved, seconded and voted UNANIMOUSLY to adjourn the Joint B&F and O&A Meeting at 8:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Dana C. Jorgenson

Clerk of Committees