

**YAKIMA COUNTY FIRE DISTRICT 4
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
SPECIAL MEETING
April 5th, 2021**

The meeting convened at 3:00 pm at East Valley Fire Station 40. Those present via Zoom were Commissioner David Ramynke, Commissioner Les Riel, Commissioner Ben St. Mary, and Captain Keith Schrank; at Station 40 were Chief Dale Hille, Captain Andy Babcock, Captain Ryan Evers, Administrative Director Jenifer Huitt, and Administrative Assistant Katelynn Hogan.

Chairman Ramynke called the meeting to order.

CURRENT SITUATION & HISTORY WITH SUNCOMM

Chairman Ramynke gave the floor to FC Hille to review our experiences both positive and negative and just make sure we are all on the same page on what the next best steps are for our district.

FC Hille explained that the potential of changing dispatch has been discussed for several years. All the Fire Chief's and BOFC's need to be in agreement to move dispatch from SunComm to Lower Valley successful. District 5 BOFC is requesting is a letter of intent from all the upper valley fire district's boards that they support this move or they will not proceed further. So far Fire Districts 2 & 12 are onboard, District 9 is a maybe, and the others have all voiced to FC Craig that they will support it with District 4 & Selah onboard. FC Hille requested our BOFC to sign a letter of interest in moving dispatch from SunComm to Lower Valley.

Over the last few weeks/months we have had a lot of times where we have to call dispatch 3-5 times before receiving a response from a dispatcher. SunComm is very low on dispatchers and have organizational issues. Fire calls are secondary to all police calls regardless of the severity of the emergency (even phone calls and warrant work). Most of the negative issues that have been voiced have either been tested out and work arounds are in process. Chairman Ramynke verified with FC Hille that our biggest issue unmet needs. The City of Yakima when getting dispatched to a fire automatically get assigned their working frequency, the name of the incident, etc. and this happens very rarely if at all for the other fire districts. Chairman Ramynke commented that the lack of support from dispatch seems to be a safety concern. Commissioner Riel noted that lower valley dispatch charges about \$10.00 less per call. FC Hille detailed that Ken Shipman believes the cost will increase to about the same amount as what SunComm charges since they will need to hire another dispatcher.

Commissioner Riel asked if it would be possible to get FC Craig, FC Hille, FC Shipman and Joey Weedin to have an in-person meeting at the West Valley Fire Station on May 20th at 6 pm and requested FC Hille to contact them and invite them to the meeting.

UPCOMING POTENTIAL IMPACTS TO SUNCOMM

SunComm has been increasing their costs each year and lower valley dispatch costs have been stable. SunComm acknowledges there are ongoing problems, but have no plans for fixing them. As time goes on this issues will only get worse because Yakima County Sheriff's Office (YSO) will be joining SunComm soon, and the Training Center has looked at possibly switching in the future to SunComm and would not consider going to lower valley.

POTENTIAL RADIO & RADIO SYSTEM SUPPORT

Chairman Ramynke asked what costs we can expect for equipment and gear. FC Hille stated we will maintain the same radios and possibly apply for grants to get some new radios. The infrastructure upgrades would be on the tower side of it through the commissioners and they are actively working on that currently. The directive to bid the upgrade would be for the same equipment that is already being used in the lower valley. And this would be the same cost whether we stay SunComm or move to lower valley estimated at \$100,000-200,000 at this time.

Commissioner Riel asked how they would bounce off our repeaters from the lower valley. Cpt Babcock stated they have a tower up on elephant that basically over shadows East Valley and they can tap into all the tower in the upper valley from there. They have to bridge it between the two dispatches and it can go all the way up the Nile. FC Hille said we would be dispatched on a different frequency from lower valley so it would look identical to what we have now. We will lose silver and gold tactical, but lower valley has 4-5 different tactical frequencies available.

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CONCERNS OVER MOVE

Commissioner St. Mary wanted to make sure SunComm does not have control over needed frequencies. FC Hille explained that 911 reception will always be through SunComm and then the calls are routed to whichever dispatch it needs to go to. SunComm does have control over some frequencies, lower valley has frequencies that we can switch to with some radio reprogramming, and this will not put us at a disadvantage and we will not have to pay for them. Commissioner St. Mary wonders why YSO is switching dispatch from lower valley to SunComm.

Chairman Ramynke asked if there was a 3rd party/unbiased resource available to truly represent all upper valley fire interests that knows how this all works. FC Hille stated Ken Shipman is the representative for all of the upper valley in the radio process. He works with Raycom, Yakima, Spillman issues, and all those types of things. Joey Weedin at Raycom is also with West Valley Fire Department and he is also very involved in this system and gets the quotes for the equipment. Those are only the 3rd party people I am aware of. Ken Shipman would be happy to sit in on a meeting to explain it in a way we can understand it. Cpt Evers recommended Joey Weedin and he has no vested interest in the lower valley other than working on their towers and he's with Naches Fire.

Commissioner Riel noted that SunComm knows we are looking at moving. Has there been any conversation with SunComm on the possibility of fixing any of the issues? Are they trying to win us back as customers? FC Hille answered no; Wayne Wantland wants to make no commitments because he is in an interim position. They are working toward doing a few things, but no, no one has. FC Hille met with Brad Coughenour before he left SunComm and asked if all fire moved to lower valley dispatch if it would affect SunComm and the response was 'No, it wouldn't affect us a bit.' District 5 has not asked us to switch dispatch, they are not courting us, this has caused extra work for them in figuring out how to staff dispatchers, contracting out any IT issues, they do not need us, we approached them because of our issues with SunComm.

POSITIVES OF MOVING DISPATCH

FC Hille stated that there is no question that this is a big move and will have a rippling effect, and there will be questions. The biggest justifications or rationales are having a dedicated dispatcher for upper valley fire departments that will not be dispatching law, warrants, paperwork, answering phones, etc. And there will be a dedicated dispatcher for lower valley fire. They will only cross over when there are a substantial number of incidents in other areas that require it, or a large enough incident that they need assistance, and they will have a supervisor on-call or on-site that has a full panel to work also. So, there is a potential of 3 dispatchers when needed. Commissioner St. Mary noted that it seems like a personnel issue more than anything else with SunComm. FC Hille commented that all of us would be in favor of a common dispatch system, but the reality of it is that we are supposed to have a dedicated fire dispatcher now but we don't. It is obvious by listening to the radio, when nothing is happening on a frequency and it takes 3-5 calls to get a response it is obvious there is a problem. When bringing this issue to management at SunComm the response was "Yep, there's problems out there", and FC Hille got the same answer from FC Markham, and it looks like it will take at least a couple of years to fix the issue and YSO joining SunComm will delay this further.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Cpt Babcock is concerned that we do not have any input operationally with SunComm, will this be available through District 5 and how would it work...would we have monthly meetings. FC Hille stated we have not gotten this far into details yet. We are not molding to District 5's dispatch; we will figure out how to work together. Commissioner Riel suggested that operational issues be handled through the Fire Chief's monthly meetings and any IT or tower issues would be taken care of the Communications Committee which is made up of Fire Chief's and Commissioners. Chairman Ramynke noted that it would be great if we had a committee working with SunComm, but as long as we have an organized, collective voice

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representing the upper valley fire districts. FC Hille noted we have not had any luck with SunComm or Yakima City in dealing with these issues in forever and believes we will have a much better shot though District 5's dispatch. Cpt Schrank would like whatever is best for our district and agrees with what has been stated. There are big problems with Yakima County and they need to be fixed. It all needs to be together in an Emergency Operations Center like Tri-Cities. We all need to work together and it is not happening; our county is way behind. FC Hille stated we do have numerous issues; however lower valley refuses at this time to join SunComm. Commissioner Riel stated we need someone to work on a grant and it will take 6-8 years to get it going, however no one is working on it. Cpt Evers stated there were several meetings in the last 3 years and everyone looked to Ken Shipman at those meetings because he was the only one that any financial plans and future direction; when it stated he was going in his own direction the meetings stopped. No one in the upper valley is setting aside funds for future upgrades/planning that may be needed. The City of Yakima creates bigger issues because they hire the seasoned dispatchers which leaves SunComm short-staffed and constantly looking for workers. FC Hille agrees that emergency operations are ideal together. This may be a small step in getting the Fire Departments in one place, and the Police in one place, then there is only one merge to make. FC Hille said the City does have some planning in place and implementing it, but does not communicate this information to the radio users' group. This lack of communication seems to be systemic in Yakima County. At the last Chief's meeting Commissioner Linde never answered a question. Everything he was asked was answered with political rhetoric that meant nothing. We need to stop kicking the can down the road and move dispatch. Every time there is a major event the one thing you hear is that they were not prepared and we need to take care of this. Cpt Shrank stated we need to stop letting the City make all of the decisions. Chairman Ramynke supports the letter of interest. Commissioners Riel agrees and supports everyone discussing this matter at the May 20th Business Meeting. Vice-Chairman St. Mary agrees.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no other business Chairman Ramynke adjourned the meeting at 3:53 pm.


Chairman David Ramynke


Commissioner Les Riel

Attest:


Vice-Chairman Ben St. Mary


District Secretary Jenifer S Huitt