

Cedar County Joint 911 Service Board
1410 Cedar Street
Tipton, IA 52772
(563) 886-3355

A Special Meeting of the Cedar County Joint 911 Service Board was held on May 6, 2019 at the Cedar County EMA Administrative Offices at 1410 Cedar Street, Tipton. Those attending included Warren Wethington, Chair, Cedar County Sheriff; Jon Bell, Cedar County Board of Supervisors; Greg Wagner, Mayor of Stanwood; Scott Spengler, Mayor of Durant; David Furry, Mayor of Mechanicsville; Sue Hall, Press; Tim Malott, Director Cedar County EMA/911; Jodi Freet, Cedar County EMA/911; John Hanna, West Branch Police Department; Tim Horihan, Mechanicsville Police Department; Jacob Koch, Chief, Mechanicsville Fire Department; Kevin Stoolman, Chief, West Branch Fire Department; Andrew Gruman, Durant Fire Department; Jared Semsch, Chief, Durant Fire Department; Sean Paustian, Chief, Tipton Fire Department; Derrick Lange, Lowden Fire Department; Mike Anderson, Bennett Fire Department; Dan Sander, Clarence Fire Department; Bill Klawiter, Chief, Stanwood Fire; Brad Ratliff, Tipton Ambulance Service; Lonni Koch, Mechanicsville Ambulance Service; Linda Coppess, Stanwood Ambulance Service; Whitney LaMaack, Lowden Rescue; Francis Fisher, Lowden EMS;

Chair Wethington called the meeting to order at 6:30pm.

Mayor Spengler/Durant made a motion to approve the agenda; motion seconded by Bell/Board of Supervisors. Motion carried.

Chair Wethington explained the purpose of the meeting, which is to discuss a potential plan for the changes/adaptation of the 911 system. He explained that there have been several workgroup conference calls with the vendors serving both Cedar County and the departments operating in Cedar County. He explained that progress was made in the second/third meetings of the workgroup, and stated that he asked the vendors plainly as to the best method of fixing the problem. Wethington is not necessarily looking for the cheapest way to fix the problem, but the correct way to fix the problem. All vendors agreed that everyone needed to be taken completely off analog, and that paging should be moved to its own frequency, using an existing Cedar County frequency. Tim Malott clarified that this change will completely remove analog paging from interacting with digital fire. The cost for this change is estimated to be between \$40K - \$50K. Wethington explained that the reason why the vendors are proposing to completely do away with analog is that it is interfering with the current digital network. He commented that if there are radios being used in the departments that still have analog

programed, then if the analog frequency is used, it will wipe out simultaneous digital transmission on the same frequency. The removal of the analog frequency/transmit is a way to avoid human error in using the radios. Wethington then yielded the floor to Malott for further information. Malott advised that it is likely that departments are unaware of the analog transmission mentioned a few of the departments who have been transmitting on analog. Klawiter/Stanwood and Stoolman/West Branch disputed that their departments are transmitting in analog. After discussion, it was determined that it is likely that West Branch's weather siren is causing the department to be showing analog transmission. Wethington advised all cities that if they are activating tornado/weather sirens on County Fire Analog, this will need to be changed to a city-based frequency due to the disruption being caused on County Fire.

Malott went on to state that by moving paging onto its own channel (currently the Cedar County TAC Channel), then this will cease interruptions on County Fire. The paging will still be done through analog, and the TAC Channel will become the paging channel, ceasing all disruptions (caused by paging) on the County Fire Channel. Malott reiterated that departments will be paged out on TAC, then respond on Digital, and there wouldn't be a need to scan analog/digital on County Fire Channel. In order to complete this recommendation, we will must modify the FCC license to change the transmission level, purchase new cabling, make additional changes in the back room at dispatch. Malott also advised that certified letters have been sent to all departments that have been transmitting on analog to ask them to cease all transmissions on analog. He also shared that he has found out the City of Martelle has been using Cedar Fire Analog for transmissions and that Linn County has a bridge on County Fire, of which we were not aware. Koch/Mechanicsville also advised that there is some other department transmitting on County Fire; he believed this to be a secondary roads department or a semi-trucking company. He believes that on some mornings, he is picking up other transmissions on county fire.

Ratliff/Tipton Ambulance Service asked if the \$40K estimate includes fixing the North Tower in West Branch. Malott advised that West Branch has a separate frequency for paging, and this would likely need to change the programming in the repeater. Malott further stated that Johnson County Dispatch will be notified as they page West Branch through our system, and Scott County will be advised of the change as they page Durant over the network. He stated that nothing can be done until the FCC approves our request for change. This request to the FCC may take several weeks to approve; responders will need to be patient until that time. Wethington reminded that we not only need to take care of our own network, but also need to work with those communities (Atalissa, Wilton, West Liberty) that respond into Cedar County. This may just be a training issue, or a wrong frequency issue.

Koch/Mechanicsville asked if an analog lock-out could be done so that transmitting could be locked out on analog until FCC approval is obtained for the changes. Malott and Stoolman/West Branch advised that this has been discussed. Bell/Supervisors stated that this would end up in multiple programming costs. A discussion was held regarding mix mode, and the occurrences on the network when a responder transmits on analog immediately after receiving a page. Malott explained that we are using the same frequency, and putting two different modes through the frequency, which is causing some of the problems. Malott advised that the reason for the meeting is to fix what is going on. He further stated that a motion is made to move forward, but this is not something that needs to be bid as long as the ceiling for the motion is under \$50K. This would move paging from County Fire Analog onto its own channel.

Wagner/Stanwood advised that he was on the workgroup call and would like to see the other vendors bid on this project, rather than having Graybill complete task.

Furry/Mechanicsville stated that he has a concern with \$50K being spent; his recollection is that the vendors had until May 1, 2019 to resolve the issues, and then if the issues weren't resolved, then an outside company would be retained to evaluate our network. Malott advised that he is working to obtain quotes from outside vendors to evaluate the network; he believed that this had been sent out. Furry reminded all that they have been down similar paths in which a good deal of money was spent to get something to work, yet it didn't work. He was under the understanding that an expert was to be hired to evaluate the network and provide direction. He stated that if the board spent \$50K, and the solution didn't work, then the money would be spent and would still need to spend additional funds to hire the consultant to evaluate the situation.

Klawiter/Stanwood commented that there are four vendors being used by the various departments, and he doesn't see the benefit of the digital network. He expressed that there are no specifications or SOP. Wethington asked for clarifications regarding a SOP; Klawiter stated that all radios should meet certain P25 requirements, code requirements, so that all radio programming is the same. Discussion was held on standardization of the network. L. Koch/Mechanicsville asked if all vendors were working together; Wethington advised that until recently, not all vendors were communicating with one another. Wagner/Stanwood voiced his concern that only one of the vendors is getting all of the money. He stated that he has been a part of this group for 7 ½ years; he believes it is time to look for another contractor. J. Koch/Mechanicsville advised that he is paying \$500 per programming trip. Wagner/Stanwood believes the best thing to do is to bring Elert back into the mix to look at the network; it was noted that Elert has been purchased and is no longer doing business.

Stoolman/West Branch advised that there are still issues not being discussed, and mentioned the problem of the repeat/echo. He mentioned that we are not sure if there is going to be a fix to that situation. Malott advised that all radios are having the repeat/echo problem; it is not tied to one specific manufacturer. Stoolman/West Branch also mentioned coverage problems, garble/traffic/walking on top of others. He doesn't feel that \$50K will solve these issues. Wethington stated that he had received an email from Racom indicating that more money will need to be spent in West Branch, and asked Stoolman if this is correct. Stoolman/West Branch stated that Randy Johnson/Racom has been brainstorming on this issue, despite the fact that he didn't sell Cedar County its current system. Johnson/Racom doesn't believe that Cedar County should rush into anything, and leave paging as it is. Johnson/Racom advised simply removing the analog transmit and leave paging system alone to see if this assists with current issues. Wagner/Stanwood shared that Terry Harris said the same thing. Stoolman/West Branch advised that dispatch needs to be aware of any traffic prior to paging, and he feels that there are still significant coverage problems. Discussion was held regarding dispatch procedures; Nick Frommelt/Clarence discussed policy and processes. Additional discussion was held as to why Cedar County transitioned from analog to digital; Malott advised that the transition was made upon the request of the responders. Malott further advised that law had been using digital for their transmissions and various first responders wanted to know when they could switch to a digital network.

Furry/Mechanicsville returned to the purpose of the meeting; he thought that all was settled and that the Service Board would be looking for a vendor to advise as to what to do with the network. Malott advised that we have received one proposal; he was tasked by the Service Board to find a non-partial vendor. He is waiting on additional proposals. Furry/Mechanicsville feels that we should wait until we have an outside opinion before we put more money into the network. Malott advised that we cannot take action on this tonight as it is not on the agenda, but did share that the first proposal has been received for this process of evaluation. Discussion was held regarding the evaluation process.

Wethington commented that the board need direction; responder lives are on the line when the system does not work. He needs input as to what the board needs to do. He asked if analog needs to be shut off and used for paging only, as the current system isn't working for all. Stoolman/West Branch asked about the process for shutting off analog; it was determined that all radios need to be reprogrammed. Stoolman advised that this study will take time, and then a plan will need to be established.

Malott advised that he is just finding out that new vendors need to be brought into the mix as he is not aware of all vendors that the jurisdictions are using. Malott also mentioned that he

has been asked if there is a system comparable to ours that is working; Des Moines County is using the exact system, but all radios are newer and are only 1 or 2 different types and they do not have the number of outside vendors that Cedar County has. They did, however, stay analog, but are not having the issues we have. Malott advised that the vendors are recommending (1) lock out all analog transmitting and (2) move paging to its own frequency due to the volume of calls received. A discussion was held as to the volume of calls being dispatched on county fire; call volume is increasing. Stoolman/West Branch shared that as scenes become more and more busy, everyone begins to talk over each other.

Frommelt/Clarence stated his concern that there were not nearly the number of problems while on analog transmitting from locations such as Anamosa, Cedar Rapids and the University of Iowa. He stated that Clarence now has limited coverage when transmitting from Anamosa, and feels that the network is becoming terrible. Wethington advised that digital has a limited range; it has the same transmission and coverage as analog to a certain range, and unlike analog, the digital signal will simply drop.

Malott further elaborated on Wethington's comment; he stated that transmission from St. Lukes is a bonus. The same frequencies are reissued throughout the nation, and APCO tries not to overlap frequencies. Cedar County is licensed only to transmit/operate within the county's boundaries. Frommelt/Clarence related a situation where his service was in need of a paramedic, and questioned the safety of not being able to communicate on the radios outside of the county boundaries. Wethington stated that he doesn't necessarily agree with the FCC guidelines, but the transmission aren't supposed to work outside of the county. Frommelt stated that he is completing forms for additional information, but is not getting feedback. Wethington asked Frommelt if there are any other frequencies to use to contact other agencies, but it was determined that these agencies are likely on 700/800. A particular mention was made regarding Area Ambulance who, per comment from Frommelt "has some fancy system that works." Discussion was held regarding the different radio systems surrounding Cedar County, including 800 MHz. J Koch/Mechanicsville stated that all surrounding agencies are using Harris radios that can flip, and these should have likely been the radios that were purchased.

Stoolman/West Branch discussed Iowa County, which just upgraded to a new 800MHz system at a cost of \$4.5 million dollars. He mentioned that Iowa County is smaller than Cedar County and Iowa County bought all new radios for fire/PD; Malott advised that Iowa County bonded for this purchase. Malott advised that the implementation of the current system started in 2010 and the discussion took place over four separate meetings. The question of bonding came up at that time, and it was quickly shot down. Malott stated the current system was built using grant

funds, and the County has not paid any funds towards the current system. The Sheriff's Office has paid for Law Ops on their own; Wethington asked the group that if no one is happy with this system, should the thought of a bond issue be floated? And, if the bond was successful, would the 911 Service Board be dictating the types of radios used on the system, along with the authorized vendors? Further discussion was held regarding the potential information to be obtained from a professional study.

Stoolman/West Branch made the motion to remove analog transmit from all radios, with the exception of dispatch for analog paging transmission. Wagner/Stanwood seconded this motion. Further discussion was held regarding standard programming; Bell/Supervisors suggested calling another meeting to set those specifications. Wethington advised that we need to allow the vendors to tell us the SOP as the vendors know what needs to be done. Motion died.

Stoolman/West Branch made the motion to make analog receive only, take away all analog transmission except for dispatch, to be removed by June 15, 2019. Wagner/Stanwood seconded this motion. Motion carried.

Wethington addressed the room and asked if there was anyone in the room that has evidence that anyone on the 911 Committee/Service Board is taking gratuities from a vendor. There was no response. Wethington advised whether or not individuals like a vendor, he keeps getting feedback that a particular vendor is giving gratuities and kickback to Malott. Wethington does not believe this to be the case; he asked for evidence or meaningful information to support this assertion. If there is a need for investigation, he will bring someone in for a full investigation. He repeated that if anyone in the room knows, or strongly feels, that a vendor is providing a kickback, he needs to know in order to bring in an independent agency. Wagner/Stanwood commented that there is just one vendor getting awful rich off [Cedar County]. He commented that we've worked with one vendor for 7 ½ years, and said vendor cannot figure out the issues with the network. Wagner further stated that when he wants to bid something, it is not sent for bid. He commented that the board can bid at any time, it doesn't matter the dollar amount. Wagner would like to see the 911 Service Board bid more than we do now. Wethington advised that we are working with several vendors to get the system working, however, we need to deal with the issue at hand. He stated that the board can bid if they wish, but if there are allegations of immoral or untrustworthy behavior, he needs to be informed. If there are not any formal allegations, then the rumors need to stop and the issue needs to die. Wethington stated that the board can bid anything, but the hand grenades coming from the side-lines need to stop.

Spengler/Durant asked if the upcoming study would allow for the option of scrapping the old system, and rebuilding from the ground. Wethington advised that this directive can be made.

Ratliff/Tipton Ambulance believes that we should be meeting more often to try to get the radio issues resolved. Stoolman/West Branch agreed. Wethington stated that he will be dedicating additional attention to 911. Malott advised that as this suggestion is not on the agenda, we cannot vote upon it. The next meeting is July 11th.

Frommelt/Clarence asked if someone would be notifying the other non-Cedar County based response units regarding the decision to cease analog traffic; Wethington advised that this information has been sent via certified mail. Discussion was held regarding who was notified regarding the analog traffic; Malott reminded all that if an agency is not on our license, they shouldn't be on our frequencies.

Paustian/Tipton asked how secondary calls (i.e. department is already out on a call and an additional, unrelated call for service arises) would be dispatched; Wethington advised that a process has been established for this.

Wagner/Stanwood made the motion to adjourn the meeting; Motion seconded by Spenger/Durant. Motion carried

Meeting adjourned at 7:28pm.

Minutes approved July 11, 2019