

FINAL REPORT

Joint Emergency
Communication Center Subcommittee

December 11, 2006



Johnson County Council of Governments

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Introduction

There are currently two primary and one secondary public safety answering points (PSAPs) in Johnson County. The two principal PSAPs are operated by the Johnson County Sheriff's Office and the Iowa City Police Department and perform similar functions. Together they provide radio communication services for all law enforcement and emergency response entities in Johnson County. The secondary PSAP is operated by the University of Iowa.

In 2005 the City of Iowa City and Johnson County contracted with GeoComm Consultants to conduct a planning study for emergency response radio communication upgrades which will be needed in the near future. One of the recommendations of the GeoComm study was to evaluate the feasibility of a joint emergency communication center for Johnson County in lieu of the existing separate communication centers. Accordingly, in June 2006 the Urbanized Area Policy Board of the Johnson County Council of Governments appointed a subcommittee to further study and evaluate implementation of a joint emergency communication center.

The following subcommittee representatives were appointed:

Barry Bedford, Coralville Police Chief
Henry Herwig, Coralville City Council
Sam Hargadine, Iowa City Police Chief
Andy Rocca, Iowa City Fire Chief
Pat Harney, Johnson County Board of Supervisors
Lonny Pulkrabek, Johnson County Sheriff
Steve Spenler, Johnson County Ambulance Director
Jim Wozniak, North Liberty City Council
Regenia Bailey, JCCOG Chairperson

Jeff Davidson, JCCOG Executive Director, was appointed as facilitator for the group. The subcommittee met seven times between July and November 2006. The issues addressed by the subcommittee in evaluating the proposed joint emergency communication center included:

1. How will it be governed?
2. How will it be operated?
3. What are we going to build?
4. Where will it be located?
5. How will we pay to construct the system?
6. How will we pay to operate the system?
7. Should we consider other possible users of the system?

The goal for the JCCOG subcommittee was to resolve each of these issues and provide the information to the JCCOG Urbanized Area Policy Board. The Board will then consider whether or not to proceed with hiring a consultant who can resolve specific technical issues and design the facility. The following report is a summary of the subcommittee's recommendations.

In addition to the above-mentioned subcommittee members, the following individuals assisted the JCCOG Joint Emergency Communication Center Subcommittee:

Steve Atkins, Iowa City City Manager

Jim Baker, Iowa City Police Department Systems Analyst

Gary Cohn, City of Iowa City Information Technologies Service Coordinator

John Grier, Iowa City Fire Department

Ellen Habel, Coralville Assistant City Administrator

Brian James, North Liberty City Administrator

Mike Sullivan, Johnson County Board of Supervisors Administrative Assistant

Jim Thayer, Johnson County Sheriff's Department IT Services Coordinator

Tom Widmer, Iowa City Police Department

How Will It Be Governed?

- The ***area of jurisdiction*** for the proposed Johnson County joint emergency communication center will be all of Johnson County and any other contracting entities outside of Johnson County.
- The ***purpose*** will be to provide emergency communication services.
- ***Eligible membership*** will be all incorporated areas within Johnson County as well as unincorporated Johnson County. Contracts with entities outside of Johnson County will also be considered.
- The ***University of Iowa*** will not be a full voting member of the organization, but will be an associate member under contract.
- The ***governance entity*** preferred for the joint emergency communication center is a stand-alone organization established by 28(E) agreement. This model is preferred to a model where one entity (likely either Johnson County or the City of Iowa City) would operate the center and contract services back to the other entities.
- The ***stand-alone organizational model*** will include a ***policy board*** made up of elected officials and executive level representatives; a ***user advisory committee*** made up of persons such as the sheriff, police chiefs, fire chiefs and the ambulance director; and an ***executive director*** who will manage the staff of the proposed joint emergency communication center.
- ***Policy board representation*** will be as follows. Iowa City: two representatives; Johnson County: two representatives; Coralville: one representative; North Liberty: one representative; Johnson County Emergency Management Committee: one representative.
- All policy board representatives will be ***elected officials or executive level staff persons***.
- There will be no ***term limits*** for board members, but the ***chairperson will rotate annually***.
- There will be ***no official alternate policies***; any policy board representative may have another elected official or executive level staff person serve as alternate.
- A ***one-person/one-vote*** policy will be followed on the policy board.
- The board will ***meet as needed***, estimated at two to three times a year.
- ***The user advisory committee will have the following representation:*** the Johnson County Sheriff, the Iowa City Chief of Police, the Coralville Chief of Police, the North Liberty Chief of Police, the University Heights Chief of Police, the Iowa City Fire Chief, the Coralville Fire Chief, the Johnson County Ambulance Director, and one representative from the Johnson County Fire Department Mutual Aid Association.

- **Liquidation of assets:** In the event the joint emergency communication center organization is terminated, distribution of assets will be determined by calculating the previous two year funding commitment by each member entity, and terminating assets accordingly on a pro rata basis.
- **Articles of Agreement:** The policy board will develop the Articles of Agreement for the Joint Emergency Communication Center. Amending the Articles of Agreement for the Joint Emergency Communication Center will require notice to be given at a policy board meeting, and a super majority vote at the following policy board meeting. These board meetings may be either regularly scheduled meetings or special meetings as determined by the policy board.

What Are We Going To Build? _____

- The principal function of the proposed center will be to provide law enforcement and fire rescue/EMS dispatching for all of Johnson County.
- A secondary function of the proposed center will be to provide a clearinghouse for arrest warrants.
- The joint emergency communication center should be designed to function as an emergency operations center (EOC).
- Johnson County Emergency Management/Civil Defense should operate from the joint emergency communication center.
- The proposed center should be designed with space for expansion, and initially this space should be used for law enforcement evidence storage.
- The ability to communicate with the Iowa State Highway Patrol should be designed into the facility.
- Communication should be enabled between the joint emergency communication center and local hospital emergency rooms.
- A suitable site should be able to accommodate a building of approximately 20,000 square feet. This may be provided in a three-story structure with a footprint of 7,000 square feet or a two-story structure with a footprint of 10,000 square feet. One of these levels may be a subterranean level.

How Will It Be Operated?

- The center shall operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 52 weeks a year.
- The center shall have an Executive Director which shall be a 40 hour a week position. In the director's absence, the director will appoint an acting director from existing staff.
 - The Executive Director will have authority on all personnel matters.
 - The Executive Director should be hired prior to building plans being developed.
 - The hiring search for the Executive Director should use the expertise of the human relations divisions of Johnson County and the City of Iowa City.
 - The appeal of any disciplinary action taken by the Executive Director will be to the policy board.
 - It will require five votes (super majority) for the policy board to overrule the Executive Director on an administrative or personnel issue. Board action on policy issues will require four votes (simple majority).
 - One of the Executive Director's specific duties will be to have the annual operating and capital budget approved by the policy board by the end of January each year.
- There will be 24/7 supervisory personnel present.
- There shall be one set of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the facility. The expectation for SOPs shall be provided to the Executive Director who shall develop the SOPs.
- Accreditation is not necessary, but accreditation standards called out in CALEA (Commission on Accreditation on Law Enforcement Agencies) and CFAI (Commission on Fire Accreditation International) should be used as a guide in developing SOPs.
- The facility will have dedicated law enforcement and fire/EMS dispatchers. Individuals should be cross trained for both.
- Dispatchers will answer routine calls and enter arrest warrants during down time.
- "Clear Text" radio language will be used in the new system. There should be predetermined assignment for responding to calls.
- There shall be ITS personnel on the staff of the joint emergency communication center.
- Administrative staff should not be call takers, except in emergency.
- Employees of the existing emergency communication centers at the Johnson County Sheriff's Office and the Iowa City Police Department will be offered employment at the new joint emergency communication center.

- Employees will continue participation in the Iowa Public Employee Retirement System (IPERS).
- Employee tenure will transfer from the City or County to the new organization.
- The center should use the best aspects of the pay plan and benefits from Johnson County and Iowa City.
- Employees transferring to a lower position will be assured existing salaries will be red circled until the new pay plan catches up to them.
- Ancillary functions such as human relations, legal assistance and accounting should be handled for the proposed joint emergency communication center under contract by either Johnson County or Iowa City.

Where Should The Proposed Center Be Located?

The Subcommittee went through a site selection process for the proposed facility. Subcommittee members suggested a total of 13 sites which were evaluated. All potential sites were considered; specific suitability of each site was not scrutinized in detail.

There was also no discussion of the “lost opportunity” cost of using a site, i.e., if the site is used for the joint emergency communication center then it is not available for another use. Sites were evaluated only for the proposed joint emergency communication center facility, not tower locations. Tower locations will be determined subsequently by the consultant that designs the radio system.

The following criteria were used in the evaluation:

1. There should be public ownership of the site.
2. The site should be centrally located.
3. The site should be located near the jail.
4. The size of the site should accommodate a building of approximately 20,000 sq. ft.
5. There should be drive-through capability, although this could be accomplished through a pneumatic tube system such as at a drive-in bank, to accommodate arrest warrant pick-up.
6. The site needs to be secure.
7. The site needs to be fortified and not adjacent to hazards such as the flood plain or hazardous chemicals.
8. The site needs to accommodate adequate parking.
9. The site needs to be accessible to the fiber optic network.

Each criteria was identified by the subcommittee as lesser, moderate, or high importance.

The following sites were suggested by subcommittee members and evaluated:

- Old bus station at College/Gilbert intersection
- Federal lot/Courthouse area
- Johnson County Secondary Roads
- Iowa City Water Treatment Plant
- North Iowa City Sewage Treatment Plant
- South Iowa City Sewage Treatment Plant
- Current Johnson County Jail site
- Old National Guard Armory site located south of County Administration Building
- Johnson County Public Health building on Gilbert Court
- Old Iowa City Public Works site (Iowa City Transit)
- Aviation Commerce Park
- Vacant space in the Qwest Building on Burlington Street
- Johnson County Ambulance site

Each site was evaluated against each of the criteria and the following scores resulted:

Rank	Score	Site
1	65	Old National Guard Armory site south of County Admin. Building
1	65	Old bus station at College/Gilbert intersection
3	64	Iowa City Water Treatment Plant
4	62	Vacant space in the Qwest Building on Burlington Street
5	61	Federal lot/Courthouse area
6	56	North Iowa City Sewage Treatment Plant
7	53	Aviation Commerce Park
7	53	Johnson County Public Health building on Gilbert Court
9	52	South Iowa City Sewage Treatment Plant
9	52	Johnson County Secondary Roads
11	51	Old Iowa City Public Works site (Iowa City Transit)
11	51	Johnson County Ambulance site
13	48	Current Johnson County Jail site

The top five sites taken from the evaluation process are all considered excellent potential sites. A vote was taken of subcommittee members on the top five sites resulting in the following rankings:

Votes	Site
4	Old National Guard Armory site south of County Admin. Building
4	Old bus station at College/Gilbert intersection
4	Iowa City Water Treatment Plant
1	Vacant space in the Qwest Building on Burlington Street
0	Federal lot/Courthouse area

How Will We Pay To Construct And Operate The System?

Five financing options were evaluated:

1. ***E911 line charge.*** Currently \$.45 per month; generates \$500,000 annually. Going to \$1 per month would generate approximately another \$500,000 annually. This applies to phone land lines only.
2. ***Emergency management levy.*** According to state law it is levied by the Board of Supervisors on all residents in the county. Existing state law indicates that the emergency management levy may not be used to fund joint emergency communication centers because they are considered routine law enforcement and not emergency management.
3. ***General obligation bonds*** issued by the county or one of the cities.
4. ***Current cash reserves*** available through the county or one of the cities.
5. ***Annual budget appropriations.***
 - The E911 surcharge can be used for capital equipment and facilities associated with the joint emergency communication center. The surcharge is currently set at \$.45 per month. By action of the Johnson County E-911 Board it can be increased to \$1 per month. By referendum it can be increased to \$2.50 per month for up to 24 months. If not used for the joint emergency communication center it is recommended to keep \$.45 in place to build up an equipment reserve fund.
 - Legislation should be pursued to change the State Code to allow joint emergency communication centers to use the emergency management levy for capital and operating expenses. State legislators are currently discussing how to proceed.
 - Any financing mechanism involving a city selling bonds in an amount greater than \$700,000, or a county selling bonds in an amount greater than \$800,000, will require a referendum. However, equipment-related expense is not subject to referendum.
 - Bonded indebtedness can be repaid by conventional means by the participating entities or by increasing the E911 surcharge. It is preferred to change state law to allow the local emergency management levy to be used to repay bonded indebtedness for the joint emergency communication center.
 - Participating entities should assess available current cash reserves to determine if the size of the required bonded indebtedness should be lowered to where a referendum would not be required.
 - The ability to lease space in an existing building for the proposed joint emergency communication center should receive consideration as a lease would negate the need to sell bonds for construction of the proposed facility.
 - Contracts such as UI Air Care can be used to defray operating expenses.

- There will be a two year financial commitment required of all entities participating in the joint emergency communication center. This will apply to both member entities and contracting entities.
- It will require a two year notice to terminate participation in the organization, both for member entities and contracting entities.
- Advocate that the legislature make a change in cell phone surcharges to provide funding to counties similar to the E911 surcharge.

Financing Recommendations

According to the GeoComm study, the estimated capital expense for the proposed joint emergency communication center is \$6.9 million. This includes \$2.5 million for 1000 new radios; \$3.5 million for towers and equipment (could be reduced with shared tower arrangements); and administrative expenses. There is an additional \$1.4 million estimated expense to construct a building. Total estimated expense: \$8.3 million.

There are a variety of financing options available for funding the proposed joint emergency communications center. Participating entities will have an opportunity to select financing options that are most suitable to their particular financial circumstances and the interests of their citizens. Financing of the existing City and County communication centers includes current cash, general fund appropriations, supplemental benefit levies, E-911 line surcharge, and contracted services. Iowa City also uses a limited amount of capital general obligation debt.

The participating entities may need to consider the use of bonded indebtedness to finance equipment and related needs for the center. Indebtedness for equipment is not subject to referendum. A new building may also require the use of bonded indebtedness. Indebtedness for a building may require a referendum. The Cities are limited to \$700,000 in bonded indebtedness and the County is similarly limited to \$800,000, beyond which a referendum is required.

The City of Iowa City intends to prepare an outline of financial options and present it under separate cover.

Should We Consider Other Possible Users Of The System?

- All law enforcement and fire rescue/EMS entities in Johnson County will be eligible to receive radio communication and dispatching services, as well as equipment.
- Non-law enforcement or fire rescue/EMS entities such as public transit or public works departments will have the radio frequency made available to them but shall not receive dispatching services from the joint emergency communication center.
- The proposed Johnson County system should be compatible with other counties to the degree possible. Tower sharing should be encouraged to the degree possible.
- Other small counties may be incorporated into the Johnson County system if this can be suitably negotiated. Large counties will not likely be incorporated into the Johnson County system, but mutual backup arrangements should be negotiated with another appropriately sized county.

Recommendations

- The JCCOG Urbanized Area Policy Board should accept the report of the JCCOG Joint Emergency Communication Center Subcommittee.
- The Cities of Coralville, Iowa City, and North Liberty; and Johnson County should be directed to include in their FY08 budgets funding for the hiring of a consultant to design the buildings, towers, radio system and other infrastructure required for the proposed joint emergency communication center.
- Coralville, Iowa City, North Liberty; and Johnson County should proceed during the remainder of FY07 to assemble an RFP for the hiring of a design consultant and attempt to have the consultant under contract by July 1, 2007.
- Coralville, Iowa City, North Liberty; and Johnson County should proceed with creating the 28(E) organization that will establish the Johnson County Joint Emergency Communication Center.
- Once established, the 28(E) entity should proceed with hiring an Executive Director for the organization so that the person can assist with the design of the system.
- The appropriate persons from the participating entities should be convened immediately to work through selection of the preferred site from the top five sites that have been identified.

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