911 Emergency Communications Consolidation: Options

Background

In July, 2004, Hennepin County offered to provide public safety answering point (PSAP) services at no charge to the City. After preliminary consideration, the City Council directed staff to study the offer in more detail and assess the viability of effectively consolidating emergency response communications. Study guidance from the Council stipulated the following:

- No diminution of citizens' and employees' safety
- Lowered cost to City and County taxpayers
- Commitment to continued employment of current MECC staff
- Definition of a governance framework that inspires confidence in provision of effective PSAP services

Method:

Working with County staff to identify needs, challenges, possibilities and critical success factors, our conclusion is that there is a business case for consolidating PSAP services, under certain conditions. Study methods included the following

- Formation of a Steering Committee (Joint City-County) clarified expectations and chartered a work group of City and County staff representing police, fire, emergency communications, equipment, technology and human resources.
- The City-County work team documented service needs of MECC customers (protocols, process documentation, description of service levels and measurable results)
- County emergency communications staff reviewed service needs and assessed ability to provide required service levels
- The City-County work group identified and discussed logistical challenges, including facilities needs, technological integrations, personnel issues and governance
- Analysis of consolidation feasibility indicates conceptual potential strong enough to convene labor sub-group of Steering Committee to focus specifically on personnel issues
- The City-County work group developed options and a report outline for Council consideration
- Scenarios and associated costs were assembled and analyzed
- A report was prepared for the City Council – this report is attached to this Summary of Options for Council consideration and action

Options for Council Deliberations:

The City-County work group has identified the following options. After brief descriptions of each option, the benefits and risks of each are identified for your consideration

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Option 1: Accept the Hennepin County offer as-is (not recommended)

The Hennepin County Sheriff's Office (HCSO) would provide emergency call answering and dispatch services to the City of Minneapolis at no charge. This requires adoption of existing HCSO protocols and service levels. Service provision would begin in early 2006, allowing time to address logistical issues including migration of personnel, protocol redevelopment, training, and technology migration.

Major Pros:	Major Cons:
• Operational and capital cost savings for the City of Minneapolis • Short term savings for City and County residents – reduction in duplicate payment for 911 emergency response services • Long term savings for City and County residents – economies of scale from a single 911 emergency communications infrastructure and operation • No need to replace CAD and Phone ($5.8 million) • Limit technology investments to $1.6 million (CAD and Phone Upgrades tide us through implementation of County CAD in 2006	• HCSO offers different service model which leaves service gaps for Minneapolis Police and Fire • Acceptance that the City has no operational control – requires extra diligence in defining acceptable service levels and monitoring performance/provision of expected services • Potential risk to City Public Safety professionals as a result of more limited emergency response services from County • Potential risk to City residents as result of more limited emergency response services from County • Complex labor issues - uncertainty about the fate of current MECC employees, different bargaining units, probable loss of benefits, including income, job security and seniority rights
Costs for City of Minneapolis: • $1.6 million for upgrading CAD and Phone tools until an effective consolidation of services is possible in 2006 • Forfeit $300,000 in service provision fees and 911 Franchise from the State	
Savings for City of Minneapolis: • MECC operational costs of approximately $6.9 million annually	

Option 2: Accept the Hennepin County offer conditionally.
The HCSO would commit to service delivery that meets the business requirements of, and provides the service outcomes for, the Minneapolis Police and Fire Departments at no cost or at negotiated fees for services. This option would be feasible starting in 2006, allowing time to study and adequately plan for the transition of emergency operator and dispatch services to HCSO.

Major Pros:	Major Cons:
• Savings for City of Minneapolis starting in FY06 – County provides all needed services and some or all City 911 operational costs are shifted to County • Reduce needs to capital investments from $5.8 million to $1.6 million • Short term savings for City and County property tax paying residents – reduction in duplicate payment for 911 emergency response services • Long term savings for City and County residents – economies of scale from one infrastructure and operation • Ability to negotiate and design protocols that work for everyone • More effective protocols for all County residents, including those in the City of Minneapolis	• Acceptance that the City will have no or little operational control – requires extra diligence in defining acceptable service levels and monitoring performance/provision of expected services • Potential risk to City Public Safety professionals as a result of possibly altering current protocols and transitioning services • Potential risk to City residents as result of possibly altering current protocols and transitioning services • Complex labor issues - uncertainty about the fate of current MECC employees, different bargaining units, probable loss of benefits, including income, job security and seniority rights

• Potential for better public safety outcomes for all County and City residents • Reduced risk for public safety professionals in the County and City of Minneapolis	
Costs for City of Minneapolis: • $1.6 million for upgrading CAD and Phone tools until an effective consolidation of services is possible in 2006 • Forfeit $300,000 in service provision fees and 911 Franchise from the State	
Savings for City of Minneapolis: • All or part of current annual MECC operating costs ($3 million to $6.9 million annually)	

Option 3: Reject the Hennepin County offer.
Seek, perhaps with the County, a consolidation that is not based on the premise that the Sheriff would take command and control of daily operations. This option is beyond the scope of the City-County's work group efforts but is mentioned for completeness. The City Council could advise the County that the City is interested in looking at dispatch consolidation across all cities in the County and propose that the City and County create a partnership to lead a planning initiative for this broader consolidation, inviting all of the PSAP communities in the county to participate. Such an initiative would take a long-range, systemic look at the provision of emergency call processing and dispatch services, assuring that the best practices of all entities would be taken into consideration. This process would increase the likelihood that a "world class" public safety dispatching operation would be crafted that reduces overall cost to the taxpayers while preserving and enhancing levels of service.

Major Pros:	Major Cons:
• Current safety levels for public maintained – protocols we know and accept • Current safety levels for City of Minneapolis Police and Fire maintained – protocols demonstrated to contribute to saving life and limb • No disruption for MECC personnel or operations • Day-to-day operational control of service delivery • Control of tools used in service delivery (CAD, Phone, integration with other systems, etc.)	• Capital investments of $5.8 million needed in next two years for Phone and CAD replacement • No opportunity to save and redirect over $6.9 million annually in MECC operational dollars • Decreased incentive to look for better (more effective and efficient) ways of providing 911 emergency dispatch services
Costs for City of Minneapolis: • $5.8 million to replace CAD and phone systems ($4.2 million in-hand grant monies that could be reprogrammed for other emergency management needs) • $6.9 million annually for operational costs	
Savings for City of Minneapolis: • None	

Other Considerations:

- **Governance issues** – The Work Group had many concerns about service quality and other risks associated with obtaining emergency communication services from HCSO. It will be necessary to craft a binding agreement that identifies and mitigates risks, specifies service level expectations, outlines how disputes will be resolved and identifies accountabilities for costs.

- **Personnel issues** – Current MECC employees are largely represented by AFSCME. County 911 emergency communications staff is predominantly represented by the Teamsters. Several months will need to be dedicated to a range of personnel issues, including determination of HCSO's new staffing model, levels of effort, migration of MECC employees, etc.
- **Technology issues** – The County is currently implementing a new CAD. The City of Minneapolis has solicited proposals for a new CAD. Costs for replacing the City of Minneapolis' CAD are estimated at $4.2 million. Phone replacement will require an additional $1.6 million. Upgrading these technologies will be considerably cheaper. Funding for replacement of these technologies is currently available as a result of a Homeland Defense grant. The future availability of capital for replacing these technologies is questionable.
- **Facilities** – there is currently no facility capable of managing the anticipated volume of 911 calls for the City and the County. HCSO envisions building a facility for the express purpose of supporting consolidated call services. A new facility will take several years to plan and build. Current estimates are that a new County facility might be completed in 2008. The City believes this is aggressive. At a minimum, 911 communications operations would have to remain in-house until early 2006. In early 2006, the County could conceivably take over virtual 911 operations, leaving existing resources in their current locations.
- **Results of other studies & lessons learned** – Many jurisdictions, in looking for ways to economize, have considered sharing 911 emergency communications services. Any savings typically result from sharing infrastructure. Successful consolidation efforts are conducted in a manner imbued with a spirit of partnership. Without this spirit of partnership, a critical drive to solve problems is absent. This poses risk for effective 911 service provision and the police and fire services dependent on effective 911 operations.