



Charleston County News Release

Release Number: 2831
Date: October 17, 2007

Council Approves Next Phase of 911 Consolidated Dispatch

An Intergovernmental Agreement will put management and cost responsibilities in place.

On Tuesday, Oct. 16, Charleston County Council voted to move forward with building and maintaining a Consolidated 911 Emergency Dispatch Center in Charleston County.

As the next phase in a long-term project to save time and lives during an emergency, the County will coordinate with eight other jurisdictions within Charleston County to sign an intergovernmental agreement. The agreement will put short-term and long-term management and cost responsibilities in place for the participating jurisdictions.

Currently, there are 10 different 911 emergency dispatch operations within the County under nine jurisdictions (Charleston County Government encompasses EMS and the Sheriff's Office), and each one is answered and operated by its respective governing agency. A Consolidated Dispatch Center would eliminate the need for 911 calls to be transferred to other centers within Charleston County, which takes up valuable time. There is a strong desire to eliminate these built-in delays, and provide more efficient and effective County-wide emergency response.

"Consolidated dispatch is a great step in the right direction as it relates to reducing the response time of our emergency responders," said Tim Scott, Charleston County Council Chairman. "In addition, it will be the first step to functional consolidation of other core responsibilities within the tri-county area."

Charleston County Council's vote permits the County to pay the total operational cost for the third fully-operational year and beyond, once the Consolidated Dispatch Center is built.

"County Council's decision to fund the consolidated dispatch center, along with the incredible work the members of the committee did, is nothing less than exemplary leadership," said Charleston County Councilman Joe McKeown, who has been active in the effort to move toward a consolidated dispatch system. "This move clearly indicates a willingness of different jurisdictions to work cooperatively to keep our citizens safe, as well as our police officers, fire fighters and emergency personnel."

The move toward a Consolidated Dispatch Center is being done through the assistance of a cooperative, multi-jurisdictional Consolidated Dispatch Committee, which consists of law enforcement, fire and EMS leaders within Charleston County.

"This is a success story," said Chief Jon Zumalt, North Charleston's Public Safety Director, who chairs the Consolidated Dispatch Committee. "The winners will be the people who live and work in Charleston County. This, the largest consolidated project in Charleston County history, shows that government can and will collaborate to improve safety services for its citizens."

County Council initially placed \$15 million in the County's Capital Improvement Plan in June of 2007 following the April completion of the Consolidated Dispatch Feasibility Study. This study, which was presented to local officials and emergency response leaders, showed that consolidating emergency public safety communications in Charleston County is indeed feasible and will benefit the community.

A draft Intergovernmental Agreement has been developed by the Consolidated Dispatch Committee, and will be revised based on County Council's decision to move forward. Once it is revised, the agreement will be taken to the nine dispatching jurisdictions in November.

The nine jurisdictions that will be asked to sign the intergovernmental agreement are:

- Charleston County Government (encompasses EMS and the Sheriff's Office)
- City of North Charleston
- City of Charleston
- Town of Mt. Pleasant
- City of Isle of Palms
- City of Folly Beach
- St. Johns Fire District
- James Island Public Service District (PSD) Fire District
- St. Andrews PSD Fire District

Intergovernmental agreement costs and details

- Financial responsibilities:
 - o Charleston County will pay for the estimated \$17 million in start-up costs of the Consolidated Dispatch Center, which includes the construction of a new facility.
 - o Prior to the switch to the Consolidated Dispatch Center, each jurisdiction will pay for its current dispatch staff's training hours, including overtime.
 - o During the first year of Consolidated Dispatch Center operations, each jurisdiction will pay Charleston County the full amount that the jurisdiction would incur if the jurisdiction maintained its own center. These amounts vary greatly by jurisdiction.
 - o During the second year of Consolidated Dispatch Center operations, each jurisdiction will pay Charleston County one-half of the amount that the jurisdiction would incur if the jurisdiction maintained its own center.
 - o During the third year of Consolidated Dispatch Center operations and beyond, Charleston County will pay the full operational cost, estimated at \$10.5 million per year.
- Cost differences/savings:
 - o Projected difference between what Charleston County currently pays for dispatch operations and what Charleston County will pay for consolidated operations is \$6 million per year (during the third full year of operations and beyond).
 - o Projected total operating savings among all dispatching jurisdictions is \$900,000 per year.
- Agreement details:
 - o The Consolidated Dispatch Center will be a Charleston County department that will have operational protocols and procedures overseen by a Consolidated Dispatch Board. The board will have a similar makeup to the existing Consolidated Dispatch Committee.
 - o User groups will be established, which will provide opportunity for input from all agencies that are dispatched by the Consolidated Dispatch Center.

Staffing projections for the Consolidated Dispatch Center indicate that there would not be a reduction in the number of telecommunicators (911 phone operators) currently working in the 10 centers, so no job losses are anticipated. There is a distinct goal to hire the individuals already working at the existing dispatch centers.

Greatly enhanced interoperability and coordination among responding agencies is anticipated to result from the Consolidated 911 Emergency Dispatch Center. Expectations also include fewer errors through standardized call handling and dispatch protocols, better training and certification opportunities for dispatchers, better facilities for dispatchers, and increased retention of

dispatchers. Also significant is the goal to attain national accreditation for the Consolidated Dispatch Center.

The members of the Consolidated Dispatch Committee are:

- Chairman: Chief Jon Zumalt, North Charleston Public Safety Division
- Charleston County Administrator's Office: Lori Lambert, Project Officer
- Charleston County EMS: Don Lundy, Director
- Charleston County Sheriff's Office: Sheriff Al Cannon
- City of Charleston Police Department: Major Herb Whetsell
- James Island Public Service District Fire Department: Chief Chris Seabolt
- Mt. Pleasant Police Department: Chief Harry Sewell
- Sean Kittrell, federal advisor (former Project SeaHawk Director)
- St. Johns Fire District: Chief Karl Ristow

Visit the Charleston County Web site at www.charlestoncounty.org for news, services and up-to-date information relating to Charleston County Government.