

MEMORANDUM

September 11, 2013

TO: Public Safety Committee

FROM: Susan J. Farag, Legislative Analyst *SJF*
Essie McGuire, Senior Legislative Analyst *EMcGuire*

SUBJECT: **Update:** Emergency Communications Center (ECC) transition to Universal Call-Taker

The Committee was last briefed in January 2013 on the status of the transition to a Universal Call Taker system. At that time, the Committee was informed that there were issues with the call taking software, making it unlikely the ECC would meet the June 30, 2013 implementation date. Executive staff subsequently attempted to resolve the issues with the vendor, but were unsuccessful. The Universal Call Taker plan is now temporarily on hold as the Executive branch explores various options. Today the Committee will receive an update on the status of Universal Call Taker in the ECC. The following are expected to brief the Committee:

Fire Chief Steve Lohr, Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service (MCFRS)
Assistant Chief John Kinsley, MCFRS
Battalion Chief Michael Baltrotsky, MCFRS
Assistant Chief Luther Reynolds, Montgomery County Police Department (MCPD)
Brian Melby, Director, Emergency Communications Center (ECC)
Bill Ferretti, Deputy Director, ECC
Neil Shorb, Budget Director, MCPD

BACKGROUND

The ECC answers all 911 calls dialed in Montgomery County, as well as non-emergency police service calls. The current operation is a bifurcated model with separate Police Department and Fire and Rescue Service call-takers and dispatchers (Police Department staff are civilian; MCFRS call-takers are civilian, but their dispatchers are uniformed firefighters). Initially, Police Department staff answer all incoming calls to determine if the caller needs police, fire, or medical assistance. If the caller needs police assistance, the call “stays” on the police side of the ECC operations. If the caller needs fire or medical (ambulance), the initial Police Department call-taker routes the caller to a Fire Department call-taker (opposite side of the same room), who

then further assesses the situation. These additional transfers often add to a backlog of calls and increase response times.

As part of the FY13 operating budget, the ECC was to move to a Universal Call Taker (UCT) model, combining and cross-training all call-takers so that all calls can be processed without the need for a second transfer step. The proposal shifted 10 existing call-taker positions from MCFRS (-\$537,697 from its FY13 budget) to the Police Department, added seven new call-taker positions, three Quality Assurance positions, and one supervisor. The new system was to be in place by June 30, 2013.

January 2013 status update: The Committee was briefed on the status of the Universal Call Taker program last January. At that time, the Police Department advised the Committee that transition had been delayed due to difficulties with call taking protocol software issues. The Department was exploring different options to resolve the software problems, but advised that it was highly unlikely the transition would be completed by June 30. All new call taker positions had been reviewed and designated within the Police Department as Universal Call Takers. Specialist and Supervisor/Manager positions still needed to be submitted to the Office of Human Resources for review. Training for the new functions had been put on hold pending the outcome of software issues.

September 2013 status update: The Executive branch was unable to come to an acceptable resolution with the software vendor, and the UCT project has been put on hold temporarily. Of the approved \$1.9 million for the project, the Executive branch indicates that about \$1.6 million was expended in FY13. The Police Department filled the three Quality Assurance positions and the one Supervisor position. Executive staff indicate that all seventeen of the call taker positions are assigned to MCFRS. Of these, nine are currently filled and the other eight are to be hired as part of a November training class.

CURRENT ISSUES

When the County and the vendor were unable to rectify the outstanding call taking protocol software issues, the contract was mutually terminated in April 2013. According to Executive staff, when staff evaluated how best to proceed with the UCT, it was apparent that several different issues were at play which could significantly impact UCT implementation. These are outlined briefly below.

Call Taking Protocol System: The ECC still must secure an appropriate call taking protocol software before implementing the UCT.

Public Safety System Modernization: PSSM implementation involves several public safety system upgrades, including a new Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD). The project is scheduled to be completed in 2016. A new CAD will likely mean the need for a new call taking protocol system. The PSSM project is also using significant ECC resources as staff are regularly detailed out to assist with the PSSM.

Planning for New ECC Location as Lease Expires in 2021: Executive staff advises the relocation process must begin no later than 2016. In addition, the alternate ECC site is planned for demolition.

Current Staffing Shortages: Shortages are driving a high demand for overtime and the increased need for training resources.

Civilianization in the Fire and Rescue Service: The Executive's FY14 Operating Budget submission stated an intent to civilianize the fire and rescue dispatch function of the ECC in FY15. To date, the Executive Branch has not communicated a detailed plan or further assumptions about this intended transition. The Committee has not fully discussed the possibility of increased civilianization in this function, and stated its intent to better understand the plan for civilianizing fire dispatch, including what level of uniformed presence or supervision would be required in the new model, before any final decisions were made.

Faced with several moving parts, the Executive branch retained a consultant (Gartner, Inc.) to evaluate how best to proceed with the UCT in particular, and with more long-term operational planning for the ECC in general. The study should be available in mid-October.

DISCUSSION ISSUES

- 1) The Committee may wish to ask whether there are any public safety implications resulting from the delay of UCT implementation. What steps have been taken to ensure quality control in the interim?
- 2) While the consultant study likely will provide much more detail about the relationship between call taking protocol software and a new CAD, the Committee may wish to ask Executive staff to briefly outline the advantages and disadvantages of waiting for the new CAD before securing a new call taking protocol.
- 3) The original funding for the UCT was included in the Police Department FY13 operating budget. However, Executive staff advises that most of the new positions (17 call taker positions) are located in MCFRS. The Committee may wish to ask how this is being handled from both funding and personnel perspectives.
- 3) The Committee may wish to ask more detail about the consultant study. It is being funded by the PSSM CIP budget, however, Executive staff did not provide a total cost for the study. When will the report be made available to the Committee?

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1. The FY13 approved budget included \$1.9 million in the Police Department budget to implement a new Universal Call Taking model. The proposal was to shift 10 existing call-taker positions from MCFRS (-\$537,697 from its FY13 budget) to the Police Department, add seven new call-taker positions, three Quality Assurance positions, and one supervisor. The new UCT model was to take approximately a year to implement, including all new software, training, and site remodeling elements. When the Committee was last updated in February 2013, executive staff informed the Committee that there was a delay in implementation due to the software vendor's inability to meet program specifications. At that time, Executive had sent out a Cure Letter to the vendor. Executive staff did not think the ECC would meet the June 30, 2013 target for UCT implementation.

It is Council staff's understanding that the UCT implementation is on hold due to the failure to secure adequate software packages, and that there are other issues currently at play, such as ECC staff detailed to work on the PSSM.

a. Please provide a brief update of the status of the UCT implementation and reasons for delay, including a timeline of events.

The plan for implementing UCT in FY13 was predicated on the successful implementation of a separate project, the implementation of a multi-discipline (Law, Fire, EMS) call protocol handling system. That project was underway and in mid-stream when the program decisions about UCT were made. A number of technical issues arose in the late summer and fall of 2012. The County and the vendor were unable to resolve these issues to the satisfaction of either party to the point where the system could be deemed operationally acceptable. The contract was then mutually terminated in April 2013.

b. Please include information on (1) which of the 21 new positions, if any, have been filled, and in what Department; and (2) whether any of the 10 Fire Department call taker positions have been transferred to the Police Department as intended.

Eleven (11) new positions were created with in the police department; one (1) Public Safety Communication Supervisor,

three (3) Program Specialist II Quality Assurance (QA) Positions and seven (7) new call taker positions. Additionally, ten (10) existing call taker positions were to be transferred from Fire Rescue to the Police Department.

The Supervisor position and the three (3) QA positions were filled within the police department. With the QA positions, Police ECC implemented an in-house QA program in place of the program that was planned to be part of the protocol system.

All seventeen of the call taker positions are assigned to Fire Rescue, with nine (9) currently filled and the other eight (8) planned to be hired for a November training class. The number of filled positions has fluctuated slightly due to attrition.

2. Please provide an overview of the various issues that are currently having an impact on UCT implementation and how Executive staff are addressing them. Please include an overview of the various efforts affecting the ECC that will need to be coordinated.

UCT implementation is being impacted by a number of other issues and programs many of which represent personnel resource requirements:

1. PSSM program implementation
2. Implementation of a call taking protocol system
3. Plan to civilianize Fire Rescue dispatch operations
4. Current staffing shortages are driving overtime - high demand for overtime and increased need for training resources.
5. The planning process for the replacement of both the PSCC and the AECC.

The County has retained a consultant to evaluate how best to move forward with implementing the above programs/projects given the availability of staffing resources. The results of that study should be available this fall.

3. Please provide information on the consultant study that has been requested, including the scope of work that has been requested. What is the cost of the study? Which department

budget is funding it? When will the consultant's work be completed and the recommendations available?

Attached is the Emergency Communication Center (ECC) Operational Strategy Support (OSS) project initiation overview that was prepared and presented by Gartner in June 2013.

The PSSM Program CIP funding was utilized to pay for this initiative. The PSSM Program's size, scope, and criticality are some of the numerous business objectives being analysis in the initiative. Michael Knuppel, in addition to this PSSM Program role, is the program manager for this effort.

Two important notes - 1) the Gartner final report is planned for mid-October to executive management. Executive management will require time to discuss the final report before making the final decision 2) work is continuing on the current PSSM Program schedule, which was shared at the last PS/GO council session on July 18 2013.

4. Please provide an accounting of the \$1.9 million budgeted for the UCT in FY13.

Actual Expenditures

- Personnel Costs -- \$1,238,044
- Operational Expenses -- \$383,605

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ECC Operational Strategy Support

□ The Montgomery County Emergency Communications Center (ECC) is a co-located Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) supporting Montgomery County Department of Police (MCPD) and Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Services (MCFRS). MCPD performs primary PSAP and Law Enforcement (LE) dispatch functions and MCFRS performs secondary PSAP and Fire/Rescue dispatch functions. Police ECC is staffed by civilians and Fire ECC has a mix of sworn firefighter/civilian staff.

□ Montgomery County is in the process of upgrading several critical Public Safety systems as part of its PSSM Program including the County's Public Safety Radio System, CAD, Station Alerting, and LE RMS. The project is well under way with two system solicitations in process. This program is scheduled to complete in 2016.

❑ In May 2012 the County developed plans to implement Universal Call Taking (UCT) as part of its consolidation strategy intending that all calls would be taken by the police department using call taking protocol software. Though this implementation did not occur the County intends to move forward with UCT and leverage call taking protocol software for police, fire and medical call processing.

❑ In addition to plans for UCT and PSSM, the following decisions and conditions are driving Montgomery County's future PSAP strategy:

❑ Plan to civilianize MCFRS Dispatch Operations – replace MCFRS sworn firefighters with civilian dispatchers.

❑ Current staffing shortages are driving overtime – high demand for overtime and increased need for training resources; limited qualified staff candidates.

Public Safety Communication Center (PSCC) lease expires in 2021 – to support a 2021 relocation, the replacement process must begin no later than 2016.

❑ Alternate Emergency Communication Center (AECC) is planned for demolition – a new AECC would need to be built.

□ The County has engaged Gartner to develop a future state ECC Operational Strategy related to planned operational and technical changes. The objectives are to focus on the implications on in-progress IT projects, operational plans and the future state ECC.

□ Gartner's scope includes a high level assessment of UCT process and implementation options including use of protocol software based on the MCFRS ECC civilianization plan. The analysis includes assessment of relevant operational options for benefits and risks and to assess associated timelines, staffing and implementation options. The County wishes to develop a roadmap for the implementation of key Public Safety Communications projects related to UCT planning.

□ In addition, given the many variables associated with the future state of the Montgomery County ECC, the County has asked Gartner to assess options and provide a recommended course of action for future ECC operations and an associated recommended organizational structure related to future primary and backup ECC facilities. This includes analysis of benefits and risks and be based on the assumption of an adopted UCT model.

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ECC Operational Strategy

Support Gartner's scope will be delivered over a period of 14 weeks and support two work streams:

Work Stream 1 – Strategic Initiative Alternatives and Prioritization

Work Stream 2 – Future State Facilities and Operational Alternatives

The two work streams will be delivered in parallel, leveraging common activities where possible, and is based on the following five-task approach:

- Task 1: Initiation and Project Management
- Task 2: Discovery
- Task 3: Analysis of Strategic Initiative Alternatives and Prioritization
- Task 4: Analysis of Future State Facilities and Operational Alternatives
- Task 5: Report and Recommendations