

**MEMORANDUM**

February 26, 2014

TO: Public Safety Committee  
Government Operations and Fiscal Policy Committee

FROM: Essie McGuire, Senior Legislative Analyst *Essie McGuire*  
Susan Farag, Legislative Analyst *SF*

SUBJECT: **Briefing – Emergency Communications Center (ECC) Transition, including Universal Call Taker (UCT)**

Today the Public Safety and the Government Operations and Fiscal Policy Committees will receive a briefing on the planned transition of the operations of the Emergency Communications Center (ECC). The following individuals will participate in today's briefing, and will likely be joined by other public safety representatives:

- Assistant Chief Luther Reynolds, Montgomery County Police Department (MCPD)
- Division Chief Scott Goldstein, Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service (MCFRS)
- Michael Ferrara, Executive Director of Enterprise Programs

At this juncture, the Executive Branch has, through its work with a consultant, determined that the best outcome for ECC operations is to eventually consolidate within the MCPD. This will be a significant and extensive undertaking, and will require planning and coordination of many departments and system elements to be successful. There are still many questions and issues to be resolved about how to achieve that outcome. **The purpose of today's discussion is for the Committees to understand the recommended course of action and what next steps have been identified to date. The Committees will continue to follow and monitor this transition through the FY15 budget process as well as regular updates going forward.**

**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.

The Public Safety Committee began discussing changes to ECC operations with Executive branch staff as part of the FY13 budget. At that time, the intent was to move to a Universal Call Taker (UCT) model, which would combine and cross-train all call-takers so that all calls can be processed without the need for a second transfer step.

A number of issues arose with the implementation of this model, including difficulties in developing call taking protocols and software vendor issues. The contract with the software vendor was mutually terminated, and Executive branch staff began to re-evaluate how to move forward. In September of 2013, the Public Safety Committee discussed with Executive branch staff the need to pause and reassess how to best address several inter-related components that affect ECC operations. Briefly, these include:

- **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.
- **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.

### **Gartner Report**

As the Public Safety Committee discussed last September, 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.

Executive branch staff provided the presentation on circles 1-12 to brief the Committees on the status of the efforts to address ECC operations. As noted above, the Executive branch has determined that the best outcome for the ECC is to consolidate all ECC operations (MCPD and MCFRS call taking, MCPD and MCFRS dispatch) into MCPD. Executive staff will discuss this recommendation with the Committee, as well as the process of reaching this conclusion and the pros and cons of this course of action.

Circles 10-12 detail the immediate, mid-range, and long-range steps that have been identified as necessary to begin implementing this transition. Council staff notes the following:

- **Scope of work:** This will be a massive undertaking, due both to the complexity of the issues involved and to the critical importance of maintaining service continuity through all transition processes. While it may provide helpful guidance and context to work within a framework of consolidation, MCPD and MCFRS must still sequence and integrate all the system issues listed above (call taking protocols, PSSM, staffing, and civilianization).
- **FY15 Budget:** The specific impact on the FY15 operating budget is still unclear, but in Council staff's view it is likely to require some additional resources initially. Circles 10-11 show the short and mid term steps that need to be taken, which include hiring individuals to coordinate the transition planning and implementation as well as hiring sufficient staff to cover current shortages and future training needs.
- **Facility:** The County has extended the lease on the current facility that houses the ECC through 2021. DGS has stated its intent that the ECC will remain in the current leased facility through this transition of ECC operations and PSSM implementation. This is important because it would be premature to make permanent facility decisions until many of the operational details of the consolidation are determined.

The purpose of today's overview is for the Committees to understand the direction and current project status as the Executive branch begins planning this transition process. The Public Safety Committee will first return to this issue in its FY15 operating budget discussions. The Committee will also want to receive regular (possibly quarterly) process and status updates throughout the implementation of this critical operational transition.

# **COUNCIL UPDATE**

## **Montgomery County Emergency Communication Center Consolidation**



# Why Gartner was Engaged

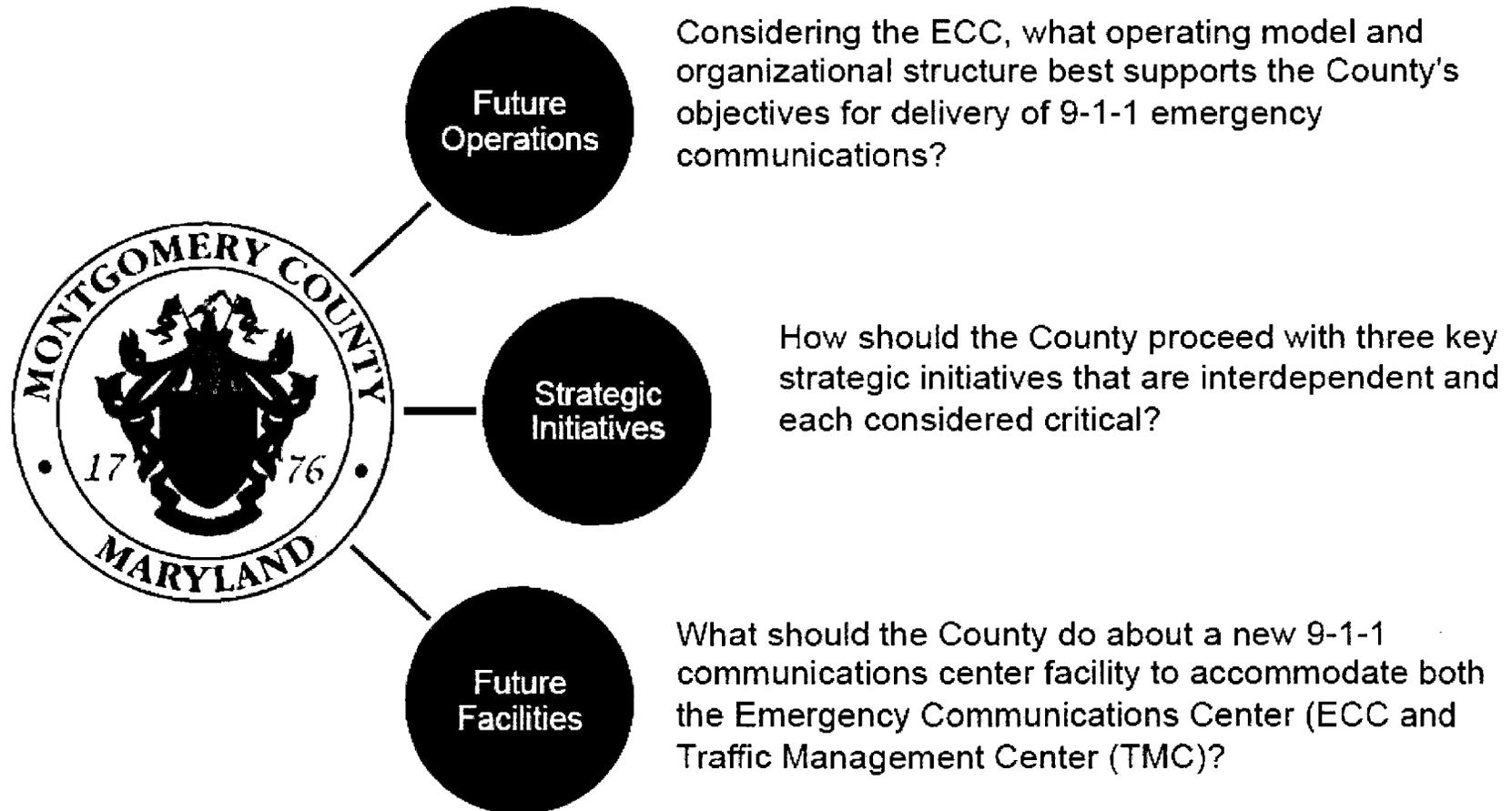
- PUBLIC SAFETY SYSTEMS MODERNIZATION (PSSM)
  - UNIVERSAL CALL TAKER (UCT)
  - FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE (FRS) DISPATCH CIVILIANIZATION
  - FACILITY CONSIDERATIONS
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- County staff determined that this complex initiative would benefit from the services of an independent third party consulting firm with a specialty public safety practice .



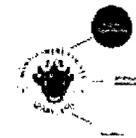
# ECC Operational Strategy Support Executive Summary

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Gartner was asked to assess the following:



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# Future Operations Executive Summary

## Recommendation

Gartner recommends that the County consolidate 9-1-1 communications and dispatch operations for MCP and MCFRS into a newly created, civilian organization\* over the next 2 – 4 years. This operating model outscored the other five considered by nearly 22% against the County’s priorities and criteria and meets all of the County’s stated objectives in the shortest period of time. *(page 23)*

Benefits	Risks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provides single point of accountability for delivery of all 9-1-1 emergency communications</li> <li>▪ Improves service delivery quality by creating single set of standards and streamlined call processing workflow</li> <li>▪ Eliminates organizational redundancy by consolidating management and supervision, training and QA functions, and IT support services</li> <li>▪ Accomplishes both MCFRS dispatch civilianization &amp; unified call taking in shortest period of time</li> <li>▪ Improves career opportunity and employee retention</li> <li>▪ Aligned with industry trends of peer organizations that have implemented similar operational models</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Specific goals and measures for success have not been defined by stakeholders, making the 'mission' unclear</li> <li>▪ Biggest organizational impact and change</li> <li>▪ Requires strong leadership support and guidance</li> <li>▪ Requires considerable up front investment of time and resource to direct organizational change</li> <li>▪ Requires clear service delivery performance management – good governance</li> <li>▪ Requires an operational shift for both MCP and MCFRS to service delivery / recipient model – no direct control over operations – that might be perceived as a risk to quality of service delivery</li> </ul>

*\*Note that this consolidated model refers only the Police and Fire ECCs and does not include the TMC.*





## Recommendation

Gartner recommends the County adopt a **staggered** approach to the sequencing of the three key initiatives that maintains the current PSSM schedule and leverages the current operations to begin transition activities while a new organization is created but slows the implementation of UCT. This transition strategy outscored the other two considerations by 5.75% against the County's priorities and criteria and meets the County's stated objectives with the greatest balance of risk and time. *(page 49)*

Benefits	Risks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Maintains PSSM schedule, scope and cost projections</li> <li>▪ Completes MCFRS civilianization efforts earlier than other alternatives</li> <li>▪ Allows for incremental transition to new organization leveraging existing organization</li> <li>▪ Lowers the amount of risk (complexity and change) placed upon ECC resources; provides ECC the ability to maintain current levels of service and performance while preparing for UCT</li> <li>▪ Incorporates a Transition Team to manage the portfolio of work streams</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Clear objectives, definition of success and business case do not exist for unified call taker or civilianization of MCFRS dispatch operations. Without this it will be very difficult to implement changes and sustain support.</li> <li>▪ Ability to hire staff to both replace fire uniform personnel and address current deficits will be a challenge</li> <li>▪ UCT and dispatch improvements may take much longer to implement than anticipated (begin as early as Q3 2017 or as late as Q3 2018).</li> </ul>

*Note that this set of recommendations only concerns PSCC and PSSM. This does not impact the TMC at all.*

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## Recommendation

Gartner recommends that the County first consider the PSHQ for the location of the new consolidated dispatch center facility, and begin a detailed Facility Feasibility study of the three highest scored facility options: PSHQ, current PSCC and new construction. The PSHQ facility alternative outscored the other three options by 72% against the County's priorities and criteria, and meets all of the County's stated objectives in the shortest period of time (pages 94-99).

Benefits	Risks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Meets the County's facility ownership investment strategy, and aligns with the CAO's expressed interest in relocating PSCC to PSHQ</li> <li>▪ A build-out of the facility can accommodate projected capacity needs for both ECC and TMC, and provides ample swing space</li> <li>▪ Has comparatively more security features (e.g., away from main roadways), and can support add-on security features (e.g., gated security, fencing)</li> <li>▪ Makes use of existing shared facilities (e.g., locker rooms, cafeteria) thereby saving on costs</li> <li>▪ Despite challenges to running cabling to the 4<sup>th</sup> floor, other technical criteria (e.g., floor to ceiling height for raised supervision platforms) present comparative advantages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The facility being located in a flood zone (i.e., generators on ground-level) is a risk that requires additional analysis through detailed feasibility study to quantify actual risk to PSCC operations</li> <li>▪ Proximity to MCP and MCFRS headquarters is concern, but from a peer perspective, there is no precedent for this to deter consideration of PSHQ</li> <li>▪ Current PSHQ 4<sup>th</sup> floor occupants will need to be relocated to accommodate ECC and TMC</li> <li>▪ Political challenges of using a shared facility that is also used by the public</li> </ul>



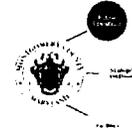


# What We Learned

- The report provides a starting point, not a “roadmap”
- We still face considerable risk by running multiple large projects at the same time
- Gartner option 6 (separate agency), while valid, does not completely capture the strong collaborative environment in Montgomery County. In addition, option 6 is costly and the most risky of the options considered.
- With the study, the conversations have morphed from UCT discussions to full communications center consolidation discussions
- Critical Success Indicator for 9-1-1 Communication Center is to be Customer Service Focused



# CAO DECISION TO MOVE FORWARD WITH GARTNER OPTION 4 FUTURE STATE OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENT



## 4) MCP ECC Assumes All Communication Services Future State Operational Assessment

### ■ Description

- In this alternative, the MCP department assumes responsibility for both call taking and MCFRS dispatching under their current operations, including all related support services (e.g. training, recording and logging, QA, etc.). Organization moves to a “service provider / customer” orientation, supported with service level agreements, performance / compliance metrics, etc.

### ■ Assumptions

- Clear service level agreements / expectations are in place, and a strong governance model and service-delivery performance management function is established and functional
- Dispatchers and call takers will be cross-trained

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Accomplishes both initiatives (Civilianization &amp; UCT)</li> <li>▪ Single accountability for implementation of both initiatives</li> <li>▪ Leverage existing pool of trained MCP dispatchers for MCFRS dispatch</li> <li>▪ Leverage current supervision, minimizes redundancy in supervision</li> <li>▪ Easier to implement with PSSM, less resource dependencies</li> <li>▪ MCP dispatch is already operating in full ‘civilian’ model</li> <li>▪ Can be implemented incrementally with existing staff, and could begin almost immediately by first moving staff to the MCP and supervision of call takers to the MCP - without changing any responsibility. Then cross train as staffing permits (e.g. MCP call takers to take EMD and MCFRS calls and MCP dispatchers on FD radio)</li> <li>▪ Cross-training results in efficiencies and cost savings as processes are streamlined, and a single set of certification / standards are followed</li> <li>▪ Greater flexibility resulting from cross-trained staff ameliorates scheduling challenges</li> <li>▪ Removing MCFRS staff reduces costs, including overtime pay and benefits paid</li> <li>▪ Reduces cultural issues supported by mixed uniform / non-uniform environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Requires MCP &amp; FD to adopt ‘service delivery’ model and increased focus on performance management function</li> <li>▪ Lack of MCFRS and medical dispatch experience at MCP</li> <li>▪ Potential cultural differences between MCP and MCFRS</li> <li>▪ Potential for MCFRS operations to be ‘secondary’ to MCP needs</li> <li>▪ Long-standing engagement of MCFRS staff in delivery PSCC services may have negative public impression implications</li> <li>▪ Risk of MCFRS and MCP ECC personnel attrition which would need to be factored into the transition costs.</li> </ul>

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## NEAR RANGE PREPARATION

- Hiring of a Transition Leader
- Hiring of a Change Manager
- Begin work on developing a modular introduction to MCFRS Operations for Police ECC incumbents and new hires
- Begin work on developing modular introduction to Police Operations for MCFRS ECC civilian incumbents
- Introduction of law enforcement and fire call taking protocols and an update of current emergency medical protocol system
- Identification & remediation of possible operational inefficiencies
- Develop FY15 budget impacts
- Develop Governance
- Develop Organizational Model

## MID RANGE PREPARATION

- Over-hiring to meet current and future operational vacancies and to facilitate training
- Develop staffing plan to cover the transition and future end state
- Determine sequencing
  - New CAD Implementation as part of PSSM
  - New Radio Infrastructure Implementation as part of PSSM
  - 9-1-1 Communication Center Consolidation – All Civilian
    - Call taking
    - Dispatching
    - Supervision
    - Administration/Support
  - 9-1-1 Communication Center presence of MCPD and MCFRS Sworn Liaison Functions
- PSCC/AECC facilities modifications budget impacts
  - reconfigurations

(E)

# LONG RANGE PREPARATION

- Facility decisions for both Primary and Secondary 9-1-1 Communication Centers
- FY17-22 CIP impacts