

911 SERVICES EVALUATION COMMITTEE MEETING

6:00 p.m.

October 15, 2019

Committee Chair Dan Henderson brought the meeting to order with the following committee members present: Charles Anderson, City Manager, Jack Wilson, Alan Cranston, Jose Santos, Issac Ross, Amanda Lloyd, Anita Bell, Officer Cole Scott and Terry Carson. Joan Neal, Penny Short and David Tull were all absent.

Vice-Mayor Henderson presented Agenda Item #1, discussion by committee members of previous information provided at the last meeting. He asked for any questions or comments from the last meeting on items discussed or on any information provided. The minutes from the last meeting were distributed to the committee. There were no questions or comments from the committee.

Vice-Mayor Henderson then asked for a motion to enter into an executive session for the purpose of touring the Seaford 911 Center and the SusCOM/EOC facility. Chief Wilson made a motion to enter into an executive session; Mrs. Carson seconded the motion. The motion so passed with all present voting in favor. The meeting went into executive session at 6:02 p.m.

The regular meeting was brought back into session at 9:11 p.m. It should be noted, that Ms. Bell was no longer present due to having to work. Vice-Mayor Henderson asked the committee if they had any questions or comments for what was seen and heard during the executive session.

Pastor Ross stated that he was grateful for the trip and it provided a lot of insight to him of how the operations work. Vice-Mayor Henderson added that he is amazed of the capabilities of the staff of Seaford Center and the work that they do with the few resources they are provided. They work long shifts with no breaks like the other center.

Chief Wilson stated that he appreciates the work of each of the dispatchers and it is humbling to see the differences of staff with the two centers.

Mr. Cranston stated that the County has an advanced facility and the highest level of technology, staffing and resources in this area which the Seaford Center does not have. Seaford Center provides a high level of personal touch to the community. Vice-Mayor Henderson stated that it is not a question of dedication; the question that needs to be answered is how do we afford and pay for the service and keep all of the other services in the City.

Officer Scott stated that tonight another resignation was received from a dispatcher and there are three more that have job offers. He feels that in two weeks, the Seaford Center will have to fold down to EOC due to manpower. If the Seaford Center is no longer in place, he feels that will significantly increase the work by the police officers. The department's police officers staffing is already stretched thin and the morale is at a low in the department. Vice-Mayor Henderson pointed out that the department has lost officers to other agencies that go through SusCOM. Officer Scott stated that they are receiving higher pay and better conditions. Vice-Mayor Henderson added that Anita's ideas were spot on of how to promote the dispatchers, however, it is an affordability issue. If the idea is supported and moved forward, we would need to find a way to increase revenues or take away other services that the City provides.

Mrs. Carson feels that the police would be the most affected by this restructure; she asked if there could be a hybrid option instead of an all or nothing situation. This would allow support to the police so that they can do their job more efficiently. Mr. Cranston pointed out that Chief Craft presented the call center option in the first meeting that he feels is the hybrid option. Chief Wilson pointed out that this would push fire and EMS over to EOC. City Manager Anderson stated that what the Chief of Police presented would mean that all dispatching functions would be transferred over to Georgetown and we would maintain a call center. In his presentation, he laid out the job functions that would be completed by those employees including monitoring the cameras and doing NCIC validations along with other tasks. There has been some costing on this option and it would reduce the cost by about half. It was discussed how the City of Milford currently does police dispatch only. City Manager Anderson shared that would not be a cost savings to the City since you would still be required to have two people per shift along with the certifications.

If the call center is created, it would reduce the cost in the City's budget and allow the public to have that personal touch. It would also provide assistance to the officers and monitor the security cameras. There is also a Records Clerk that can be put into the rotation.

City Manager Anderson shared that he views that there are three ways to go with the decision: to keep the center as is, close the center down or create a call center. Each of these options have pros and cons to the decision. When looking at what Sussex County and the State is doing at their facility in Georgetown, public safety lies over there. They provide top notch service with the best equipment and infrastructure that they have in place.

Mr. Cranston asked what kind of an input would we have if the services were transferred over to Georgetown? City Manager Anderson stated that there is a 911 board and there is also the Chief's Council. If there an issue, we would be able to address to them. Mr. Cranston stated that he would just like to know that our voice would be heard. Vice-Mayor Henderson stated that as the largest City in the County, we will have a voice.

Mrs. Carson asked for Officer's Scott's opinion on this matter. He expressed concerns of being short staffed in the officer positions; at times there are only two people on a shift. Mr. Cranston shared that while he was on a ride along last week, it was shown that if an officer is on a call and tied up, the other officer has no back up available. Vice-Henderson stated that it is understood that the police department is short on officers and help is on the way, however, it does not fit the current problem. Mrs. Carson asked if the hybrid model was used to create a call center to provide extra help if that would be adequate? Officer Scott stated that his concern is that the time it would take to get this in place if the center is folded down. He added that dispatchers offer a lot of help to the officers. He added that he is not for the center closing; however, he is aware that change is coming. He urged the committee to make a decision soon.

Vice-Mayor Henderson stated that he is in agreement to save cost and provide the personal services to the community, the hybrid system is a good compromise. This allows for a cost savings and still maintains the customer service.

Pastor Ross stated that morale is a huge thing in any organization to him. He feels that the officers and the utility departments need the extra help. His thoughts are looking at preservation and is this self-destructing itself? There are people that have already left; another that recently resigned and more that have job offers. Maybe what should be concentrated on is a hybrid option and how can we save this to not lose all of it. Also, what needs to be considered is what is important to the members of the City?

Vice-Mayor Henderson stated that what he continues to hear is about the personal touch. He does not feel that public safety is going to be sacrificed by transferring the calls to Georgetown. The remaining factor is customer service and officer support. The residents will need to adjust to the change if one is put in place. It was discussed how the residents are used to a quick response from the police officers when a call is placed. Due to the manpower at SusCOM, calls can sometimes stack and then are prioritized. City Manager Anderson pointed out that due to the current short staffing of the officers, calls may be getting stacked here in Seaford and the dispatchers are having to prioritize them now.

Chief Wilson stated that his membership care about the community and are not in favor of transiting their dispatching over to EOC. They are not going to receive the services that our center provides. The fire department and EMS services in City are busy and will only get busier.

Pastor Ross asked how long it would take to get a hybrid system in place and will our employees be willing to stay? City Manager Anderson stated that time is of the essence; the longer that we keep these people in limbo, the more they start looking for other jobs. Pastor Ross agrees that a decision needs to be made because the longer we wait the more people will go out the door.

Chief Wilson stated that if he went back to his membership and told them that they are now operating under EOC, that is easy for him to do. If the center folds down, there is so much that he would need to do to be prepared. Vice-Mayor Henderson reminded the group that no decision is made here, the City Council makes the final decision. If a recommendation is made tonight, that is not the final decision for the center.

Officer Scott stated that he feels the group is leaning toward the hybrid system; he feels that it is better to put something in place now. He added that in two more weeks he believes that it will be folded down and all services will be transferred to Georgetown if action is not taken. City Manager Anderson added that there are some services that require certifications to do such as NCIC, if all of those people leave, we would have to start training again.

City Manager Anderson shared with the group that the fastest way to make this happen is to put together a recommendation, have staff revise the agenda and repost tonight prior to leaving and take it to City Council at their next meeting on October 22nd. If the committee desires to come back for more information, the committee meeting can be held on October 29th and then taken to the Council meeting on November 12th. Pastor Ross stated that from what Officer Scott is expressing, he feels that the center will be folded down by November 12th. He added that by moving it forward, we may be able to save some of the vital people. Mr. Cranston stated that he does not feel comfortable basing his decision on if an employee is going to quit and feels like this decision may be rushed. City Manager Anderson asked Mr. Cranston what additional information he would like to be provided and brought back to the committee for discussion? Mr. Cranston stated that he is not in a position tonight to make a decision; he needs to sit back and think about it because he has more questions. It was agreed that it is a process of deliberation that needs to occur for him. Pastor Ross stated that he feels that he is not rushing a decision; he feels that if something is not done then things will happen. Chief Wilson stated that he feels that the hybrid system may be the way to go to provide the support for the police officers. He is going to have to warn his membership to get prepared to transition to EOC. City Manager Anderson stated that if the hybrid system is put in place, it may be able to keep this together and retain those employees. It was discussed that if this option was given to the employees it would have something to keep them here.

A discussion was held about the potential of having another meeting prior to the City Council meeting on October 22nd. City Manager Anderson pointed out that due to FOIA laws, an agenda must be prepared and posted seven days prior to the meeting.

City Manager Anderson stated that the committee has discussed three options for the Seaford Center. This can be articulated to the elected body for their consideration. Mrs. Carson stated that they are elected to represent the community. She added that she does not live in the City so she feels that she should not be making the final decision. She felt that her job on this committee was to look at the options and the pros and cons. Mr. Cranston pointed out that one of the three options consists of ways to come up with the money to fund it. Mr. Santos stated that there is \$100,000 put in the budget to demo 200 N Front Street; that property was recently sold so that does not need to happen. City Manager Anderson pointed out that there is a demolition order placed on that building so the plan is still to move forward with that order. He added that is a one-time cost that is included in this budget but will not be included in future budgets.

Pastor Ross agreed that the residents elected the City Council to represent us. City Manager Anderson stated that the three options that are being recommended can work according to the Fire Chief and Chief of Police. If it is decided to keep the center, City Council needs to find the funding and that means cutting a service or raising a rate. The budget is reviewed each year by the elected officials; to ask this committee to look at the budget and come up with the funding is not fair. Mrs. Carson stated that there are going to be consequences to any of the decisions. However, she feels that at the end of the day, the people that were elected need to make that decision. She added that with the recommendation, all of the pros and cons should be addressed. Any of the three options can happen and it has been relayed that they will work for our community and residents. Vice-Mayor Henderson pointed out that the City Council has already considered closing or keeping the center. They have not considered the third option of putting a call center in place.

Vice-Mayor Henderson agreed that time is of the essence for this committee. If it is desired to put a recommendation together tonight; it needs to be thought through. Mr. Cranston asked if the recommendation should put all of the three options out there for City Council's decision. Vice-Mayor Henderson stated that he feels that the committee should relay all of the facts and then lay out the three options. City Manager Anderson added that it needs to be detailed what the committee has done during their meetings. Vice-Mayor Henderson reminded the committee that the cost of running a 911 center will never decrease. As long as we are able to maintain the community-based service the call center is a way to do that.

Mrs. Carson expressed her concern about making the decision and stated that she would like to recommend the three options discussed to City Council for their decision. Mr. Cranston stated that he agreed that it is the City Council's responsibility to make the decision. He added that we can provide them with the three options that have been discussed.

Pastor Ross stated that he is willing to make a recommendation tonight. He feels that this would increase the moral of the City and if it keeps going on; otherwise, the center is going to fold. This decision is going to affect the police department the most. We need to focus on keeping the employees here and help support the police officers.

Vice-Mayor Henderson advised the group that he will not be present at the meeting on October 22nd due to being out of town on business.

City Manager Anderson stated that he can lay out the pros and cons of each of the options. He then can prepare a draft recommendation from the committee and distribute for any comments prior to it being published. It can be placed on the October 22nd City Council meeting for their consideration. Otherwise, the committee is able to meet again on October 29th and take to the City Council on November 12th. Officer Scott advised the group that the department is stretched thin now; time is of the essence.

Mrs. Carson made a motion to add the third option of a call center for Council deliberation to incorporate a call center to support police, utilities and the public and fold down police fire & EMS dispatch. Pastor Ross seconded the motion; motion so passed with all present voting in favor.

City Manager asked the committee if they desired to have staff draft a recommendation and distribute for any comments. Vice-Mayor Henderson noted that the voting has been completed; this material that is being sent out should be reviewed for grammar and content. Mrs. Carson asked for each option to be laid out so that it does not look like the committee made a decision. City Manager Anderson stated that he will lay out what the committee has done and then lay out the three options for Council consideration.

With no other business or questions, Vice-Mayor Henderson asked for a motion to adjourn. City Manager Anderson so moved; Chief Wilson seconded the motion; motion so passed with all present voting in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 10:21 p.m.

Tracy Torbert, City Clerk