

REGIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Friday, January 12, 2007 10:00 AM
Meeker County Courthouse
Litchfield, MN

PRESENT: The following RAC members and alternates were present: Tom Hannon, Micah Myers, City of St. Cloud; Jay Sikkink, Stearns County; Pat Bettenberg and Troy Heck, Benton County; Bill Swing and Greg Howell, Wright County; John Olson, Sherburne County; Jeff Jelinski, Morrison County; Stacey Bonnema, Kandiyohi County; Bob Cuchna and Peter Mikkelson, Todd County; Jeff Norlin, Meeker County; Debbie Backes, St. Cloud, Recording Secretary. **The following guests were present:** Tom Justin and Richard Wilson, City of St. Cloud; Mike Kahl and Andy Faith, Granite Electronics; Todd Pieper, Geo-Comm; Kyle Paavola and Jamie Nixon, District 742, Kenneth Brown, Sherburne County; Curt Gullickson, City of Sauk Rapids; David Sissen, West Central Communication; Phil Thinesun, Wright County; Tim Lee, Assistant Director MnDOT OEC; Mike Fink, Motorola.

Meeting called to order at 10:00 a.m.

INTRODUCTIONS:

Introductions were conducted. Todd County has appointed Sheriff Peter Mikkelson as the new RAC member with Bob Cuchna as the Alternate. Tom thanked Meeker County for their great hospitality and they welcomed the group here at any time.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Stacy Bonnema moved, second Jeff Jelinski to approve minutes of November 17, 2006, motion carried.

COMMUNICATIONS:

Tom stated he received a letter appointing Sheriff Peter Mikkelson to represent Todd County on the RAC. Bob Cuchna was re-appointed as alternate for Todd County.

ARMER UPDATE:

Ron Whitehead was unable to make it due to a Legislative meeting and Tom Cherney had to meet with Homeland Security staff, therefore there will be no report today. The chair made available copies of the proposed ARMER plan changes currently under consideration, including modifications to the microwave and plan buildout for anyone who did not receive them last month.

REPORTS:

Interop Sub-Committee:

The chair reminded the RAC that at last month's meeting the St. Cloud Area Interop sub-committee was transferred to the RAC and Jay Sikkink was appointed to chair the sub-committee. Jay Sikkink provided the report of the Interoperability sub-committee. He stated they did not meet in December due to the Holidays. Their goals for this year include beginning the process of drafting by-laws for the User Committee provided in the Radio Board Agreement so that some of the structure is in place when the partners start appointing committee members. He stated the group intends to utilize the RAC to provide outreach to incorporate users from each agency, suggesting that each RAC member provide one contact to serve on the Interop sub-committee. He also provided an update on Stearns County's plan for purchasing radios and providing user training.

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REPORTS: (CONTINUED)

Interop Sub-Committee: (Continued)

The January meeting of the sub-committee will be at the Stearns County Administration Building in room 499 at 9:30 a.m. on January 24th and the following month the group will meet in Albany on the fourth Wednesday in February at 7:00 PM at the Fire Station.

Tim Lee, ARMER Phase 3 Update:

Tim Lee, Assistant Director of MnDOT OEC, reported on the current status of the Phase 3 buildout. MnDOT is working on purchasing properties for tower sites, still have unmet site needs in Stearns and Meeker counties. Most of the Motorola equipment has already been purchased and delivered. MnDOT and Motorola staff are already working on installing sites. The zone controllers have arrived. They shipped as 7.1 systems and the Motorola agreement requires that they provide a link from 7.3 systems in Phase 3 to 6.10 systems in the Metro area. This should take place in October complete with all the software upgrades. Until then St. Cloud/Stearns and Rochester/Olmsted will continue to connect to the zone controllers in the Twin Cities.

Tom Hannon asked when equipment will be functioning in the areas such as Meeker, Todd, etc. and Tim Lee replied as soon as they are installed, configured, and in operation for testing. He expects this to be by May or June. MnDOT is still trying to get a tower in Meeker County, which is a critical link for the East to West microwave connectivity. They are getting close on having a lot of the towers in place.

Tim Lee stated that the proposed changes to the original State plan include putting in a site in Buffalo, and changing Enfield and Zimmerman as simulcast sites with the Buffalo site. He further stated they are looking at purchasing land in Opole or St. Stephen and this new site may need to be added to the St. Cloud simulcast system to provide sufficient frequencies. This change may spur the need to increase that system by one or two additional channels.

STANDARDS, PROTOCOLS, AND PROCEDURES UPDATE:

Micah Myers stated Standard 4.10 which was adopted by the RAC as an interim standard a couple months ago will need to be revised following action by the SRB OTC. That committee met and significantly modified the background check requirements. The Statewide Radio Board is expected to adopt the new standard at the January meeting. Following that it should be brought back to the RAC for further evaluation. He stated they should send out another list as to what has been adopted by the RAC to date. Micah reminded the RAC members that this group was only addressing standards issues on an interim basis pending creation of the Radio Board and only addressing issues necessary to the continued development of regional efforts.

APPOINTMENT OF RAC REPRESENTATIVE TO STATEWIDE OTC:

Tom Hannon introduced Chief Curt Gullickson of Sauk Rapids, MN. Chief Gullickson has been representing the St Cloud Metro Area on the SRB OTC. At the last meeting the RAC had requested Chief Gullickson to serve on the SRB OTC representing the broader regional area on an interim basis pending creation of the Radio Board. Chief Gullickson agreed to represent the RAC on an interim basis and expressed his opinion that the Radio Board, once created, should appoint someone with more of a technical background.

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APPOINTMENT OF RAC REPRESENTATIVE TO STATEWIDE OTC: (CONTINUED)

The Chief presented an update on the OTC. He discussed the OTC action recommending the SRB adopt the proposed Standard 4.10 including vendor background checks. There was considerable discussion of this issue. The biggest issue with 4.10 is the background checks and this standard will have to be revised at some point to determine what a background check consists of and the requirements. Curt stated one suggestion at the meeting was to provide statutory authority to allow us to do criminal background checks on individuals (similar to liquor laws and firearms).

Bob Cuchna moved, second Micah Myers, to appoint Curt Gullickson to represent the CM-RAC to the SRB OTC and authorize the chair to notify the SRB of this appointment. Motion carried.

REGIONAL RADIO BOARD CREATION:

The “draft” label has been removed from the Joint Powers Agreement and the current copy reflects all changes and modifications to date. Copies of the agreement, budget flow charts, and organizational descriptive charts were distributed

Todd County has not had an opportunity to review the agreement yet. Todd will get it to their County Attorney and complete the review process. Todd County representatives indicated they were comfortable with the other parties proceeding with the approval process.

Bill Swing moved, second by John Olson to submit the Joint Powers Agreement creating a Central Minnesota Regional Radio Board for approval by the governing bodies of the parties. Motion carried.

The chair indicated he is still awaiting an official response to the RAC’s request to utilize a portion of the 2007 planning grant money for initial administrative startup costs for the Regional Radio Board.

General discussion followed on RAC members participating in the approval process for the Radio Board agreement. The chair indicated he was available upon request to assist local representatives and alternates explain the agreement. All background information, including charts, the agreement, summary documents, and the RAC Power Point presentation from the Albany meeting (updated) will be made available on the website at www.cmnradio.org

UPDATES FROM PARTNERS ON CURRENT PROJECTS:

Wright and Sherburne Planning Project Update:

Bill Swing informed the group that last month Jeff Nelson of PSC Alliance had open heart surgery, is doing well, and is back full-time now. Sherburne and Wright’s plans are still not finalized but are assured they are just about done. He stated all the research is complete, meetings held, etc., and they are waiting for the plan draft. Sherburne County is in the same situation. Tom Hannon asked if PSC Alliance is up to date on invoicing. Bill Swing responded that he thought October of last year was the last one. Wright is fronting the cost for both Wright and Sherburne and submitting invoices for grant reimbursement. Jay Sikkink added that the grant is over as of March 31st. An extension can not be applied for until two months prior to the deadline and if the extension is not approved, we will need to make sure all the bills are in prior to that time.

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UPDATES FROM PARTNERS ON CURRENT PROJECTS: (CONTINUED)

Wright and Sherburne Planning Project Update: (Continued)

Bill Swing reported that the new tower planned as part of the Wright County LEC project can't be in front of the building due to height restrictions by the FAA ruling of 120 feet. Tim Lee stated Wright County will still need some type of structure to hook to the tower and connect to the broader system. Bill Swing informed the group that there are still discussions going on with funding, bonding, etc., and Jeff Nelson is involved in this.

Sherburne stated they are waiting for the PSC Alliance plan and the County Board is ready to approve once the plan is in place and has great support of the system at this time.

Kandiyohi, Meeker, and Todd Planning Project Update:

Bob Cuchna reported completion of surveys and radio inventory working with Todd Pieper and Mike Mazzitello of Geo-Comm. Todd Pieper stated they are doing data collection, reviewing the data, and will be conducting follow-up phone calls and are hoping to have site visits completed in two weeks.

So far everyone indicated they are comfortable with the progress of the regional planning efforts.

District 742 Planning Efforts:

Jamie Nixon reported that they expect to be meeting with Geo-Comm next week for a contract and moving forward with their plan. Tom Justin asked Todd Pieper what the overlaps, etc. between the St. Cloud School District and other educational agencies to take advantage of similarities. Todd Pieper and Jamie Nixon provided discussion relative to including schools, both public and non-public in the RAC regional planning effort.

GENERAL DISCUSSION AND NEW BUSINESS:

Modification to current regional planning efforts:

Tom Hannon stated at last meeting we discussed including hospitals and school districts into the regional Interop planning effort currently underway by contract with Geo-Comm. The concept discussed at the last meeting would add schools and hospitals to the regional planning effort by modifying the scope of the current agreement utilizing existing (pre-2007) grant funding.

Todd Pieper presented two proposals (one for schools and one for hospitals). The Geo-Comm proposal would include regional hospitals into the plan at a cost of \$5,300 and school districts for a cost of \$10,250, for an additional total of \$15,550. Jay Sikkink reported that there is approximately \$26,660 currently remaining in previous grant funding for planning efforts that must be spent by March 2007.

Group discussion followed on the proposal. It was the group consensus that the list of included hospitals was not sufficient. Geo-Comm was requested to add the following hospitals and re-submit: St. Gabriels, Little Falls; Alina Hospital, Buffalo; Fairview Hospital, Princeton; Staples Hospital; and VA Medical Center, St. Cloud. This results in a total list of 13 hospitals/agencies. The Geo-Comm proposed amendment to the plan agreement includes a full assessment of the current interop capabilities including the services/agencies the schools and hospitals currently have interoperability with. The report would create a matrix of agencies and who they currently communicate with.

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GENERAL DISCUSSION AND NEW BUSINESS: (CONTINUED)
Modification to current regional planning efforts: (Continued)

Both additions to the regional plan would include identification and recommendations for short, mid, and long-term needs to improve and implement interoperable communications.

Mike Kahl of Granite Electronics informed the RAC that two years ago the St. Cloud Hospital asked Granite Electronics to do a study for the 17 area hospitals and the future with 800 MHz. This did not include Willmar and Meeker County. He stated Granite inventoried the equipment and did a survey. Geo-Comm will contact Bill Becker at the St Cloud Hospital to get a copy. Mike Kahl further stated a good share of the hospitals on the list already have 800 MHz capability on site.

Jamie Nixon, District 742, stated the school proposal from Geo-Comm looks good. He informed the RAC that a requirement of the grant for the St. Cloud School District included the 19 non-public schools in the district. He felt this group should include this requirement in the Geo-Comm proposal for other school districts. The RAC had previously discussed requesting each surveyed school district to include the non-public schools in their area when responding. Tom Justin suggested that Geo-Comm could get a complete list of school districts from the State Department of Education website. It was the consensus of the group to include non-public school districts in the Geo-Comm plan requirements. Todd Pieper stated he would add them to the survey portion and didn't think it would be a problem.

The chair requested all RAC members to be prepared to designate the school district in their area that would be surveyed in depth at the next meeting. Todd County asked if they could designate a district shared with another county. For example Staples/Motley. The consensus was each agency should select the one that best represents their communications issues. Where a single district could represent two or more counties should be beneficial to the over all plan as this is the reality each agency deals with on a daily basis.

It was determined that Geo-Comm would revise the proposals to reflect the issue discussed. Any RAC member with additional concerns in the interim should communicate them to the chair who would coordinate with Geo-Comm. Geo-Comm will contact the St. Cloud Hospital to obtain copies of previous inventories, plans, studies, and capabilities.

Items of Interest:

The chair indicated there was discussion over lunch regarding the 700 MHz data frequencies. The group discussed the issue. John Olson from Sherburne stated they have applied for licensing and hoped it would work in conjunction with re-banding. He stated it will not be possible. Tim Lee stated the voice channels are still licensable and is not sure where the FCC is heading regarding data channels in 700 MHz. Discussion followed on the Cyrene proposal. Tim Lee indicated the State thought they should comment on the report. Andy Faith indicated he thought there was a private company that had proposed to build a nationwide data system and sell excess capacity to the public safety sector. It was the consensus that this issue will be critical to future development.

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GENERAL DISCUSSION AND NEW BUSINESS:
CentraCare/St. Cloud Hospital Planning Efforts:

The chair informed the RAC that Granite Electronics had contacted the City of St. Cloud and raised an issue concerning approval and authorization of planning efforts. Granite Electronics has been retained by CentraCare to assist in developing new technologies at their facilities in St. Cloud, including CentraCare Plaza and St. Cloud Hospital. Their efforts include developing plans for installing bi-directional amplifiers to improve coverage, patching equipment to provide interoperability to existing systems, and migration of key components (security) to 800 MHz. They envision creating several talk groups for the use of CentraCare only. As a result of their efforts they want to know what body has jurisdiction to approve the final plan they develop.

The RAC discussed multiple issues and impacts. John Olson asked how far CentraCare operates. Is it their plan to just limit it to the St. Cloud metro area, the eight county region, or will the impact be broader. Micah Myers asked about the CentraCare time line. Mike Kahl responded that he doesn't have the complete scope yet and their time line requires completion by July for this year's budgeting cycle.

Consensus developed that CentraCare should create the plan and submit it to the RAC. If it affects a sub-system operator (St. Cloud, Stearns, etc.) then the RAC will forward to them for review and recommendation first. If the plan has broader implications, then the RAC will study for the regional impact and involve MnDOT and the SRB for broader statewide issues and implications.

Tim Lee stated that is what he sees in the Metro area, he stated the MESB has a standard for joining the system. There is an agreement between MnDOT and the Metro Board defining ownership of the backbone, lays out anything that affects the capacity cost, etc. they need to send it to MNDOT and they have 30 days to get back to them, etc. He stated he thought this may be similar as they build out across the state but we need to talk to Ron Whitehead.

Mike Kahl asked that since CentraCare will need to purchase bi-directional amplifiers, is that something that needs to come to the board. Andy Faith stated the bi-directional amplifiers are put out on a broad-band so the user would not know whose system they are using. It could even be on the state's system. The response was that it would need to be brought to whoever's system it is on i.e. St. Cloud or County system. It is the responsibility of the system operator to coordinate with all entities sharing capacity on that system.

The RAC determined that the standard for adding users to systems and sub-systems needs to be addressed immediately. The standard should address a requirement for anyone desiring access to seek planning approval from affected agencies prior to commencing planning efforts. The group referred development of the interim standard to the standards sub-committee and requested that Jay Sikkink and Micah Myers address this issue quickly.

Mike Kahl asked if there was any idea on the projected cost to support subscriber units on the system especially as CentraCare is not a governmental agency. Tom Hannon stated that St. Cloud does not yet have a pricing structure in place. They are working with Stearns County and MnDOT to finalize those issues.

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UPCOMING MEETING, SET DATE, AND LOCATION:

Next meeting will be Friday, February 9th at 10:00 a.m. in Wright County in Buffalo with a tentative March 9th in Morrison County in Little Falls.

Bill Swing moved, Bob Cuchna second, motion carried to adjourn meeting at 1:25 p.m.