

REGIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Friday, February 17, 2006
12:00 p.m.
Morrison County Government Center
Garden Level, Meeting Room 3

PRESENT: Tom Hannon, Micah Myers, and Debbie Backes (Recorder) City of St. Cloud; George McClure and Jay Sikkink, Stearns County; Bill Swing and Greg Howell, Wright County; Pat Bettenberg, Benton County; Mike Disher, Morrison County; Gary Peterson, Sherburne County; Dan McCoy, Granite Electronics; Jeff Jelinski, MCSO; Frank Karnauskas, Karns Services; Tim Heroff and Dave Thomson, Rochester Police.

Call to order at 12:25 p.m.

INTRODUCTIONS:

Introductions were conducted, Mike introduced Jeff and his background and involvement in the group. Tom stated the Regional Advisory Committee (RAC) was set up to continue planning for interoperability in communications, set up the Regional Radio Board, and will act as a care taker until a formal board is set up.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Bill Swing moved, second George McClure to approve minutes as posted, motion carried.

ARMER UPDATE:

Ron Whitehead was not able to attend today and will be in attendance next meeting.

Tom distributed documentation regarding zone controllers, memos to State Radio Board on data system, financial statement, etc.

STANDARDS, PROTOCOLS & PROCEDURES DISCUSSION:

Last month it was discussed that there is an on-going process in the Metro area and for the State Board regarding setting up standards, protocols and procedures. Previous discussion indicated a desire by the RAC to begin the process of developing and adopting standards and protocols. Jay Sikkink distributed copies of policies, standards, guidelines and procedures adopted by other boards. He explained the policies and protocols, the process other boards have in place for approvals and adoptions and the coordination and cooperation developed to integrate these policies and protocols into a statewide system. Jay suggested the RAC should start addressing some of these issues on a regional level. He did not recommend any particular order or priority.

He stated the ATACS (All TACS), PTACS (Public Safety Talk Groups), STACS (State Talk Groups) and all different areas will have PTACS and ATACS, etc. and we need to differentiate between them and make it less confusing. Therefore the standard which will be addressed next week at the Technical Advisory Group will be going with a numbering system versus a "area" lettering system such as southern, central, etc., it would be area 1, 2, 3, etc.

He stated the Interoperability Group is deciding how different entities come onto the system such as Civil Air Control, Hospitals, Colleges, Reformatory, etc. without overloading the system. They also will be defining how the system will be utilized in the event of a major disaster. He stated everyone is welcome to attend the meetings, and it will be held next Wednesday at Stearns County Administration center.

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STANDARDS, PROTOCOLS & PROCEDURES DISCUSSION: (CONTINUED)

Jay asked the group what they would like to do to start working on the forms. Tom stated we need to start working on and adopt some of the administrative procedures on an interim basis. He suggested we appoint a committee to review a few of the administrative policies and bring them back to this group for approval in March. Bill stated he agreed with this. Micah Myers will work with Jay Sikkink in putting together one or two protocols and procedures that are administrative in nature for the group to review next month.

Tim Heroff of Rochester Police Department stated they are in transition right now in Olmsted County and within a week or so the Rochester Fire Department will be on-line. Over the course of about a month, First Responders and fire departments will be trained. Tim stated this is a huge project and they are hearing a lot of positive comments that the coverage and audio quality are fantastic. He stated the City of St. Cloud has provided a lot of good information on programming and was pleased as this was a huge partnering project. Tim encouraged the group to continue sharing information between entities.

Mike asked if Rochester has plans for planning and implementing the system in the southeast region. Tom explained Olmsted County has an on-going working relationship with the City of Rochester for services and have a different set-up than Central MN.

Tom handed out some copies of various radio system plans for informational purposes. Mike asked what Jeff Nelson can do to help him in leading this project when Morrison County starts. Tom stated Morrison County will have a different situation than Rochester and the City of St. Cloud. Jay stated there is no one agency that can be successful without the help of the other agencies involved. He also strongly recommended that each agency work with its' departments to define needs and available resources for interoperable communications planning.

DISCUSSION OF REGIONAL RADIO BOARD CREATION:

Tom stressed this is one of this group's prime charges. He distributed a draft outline of decision issues for the group to discuss. The committee needs to discuss and recommend proposals for adoption by the parent agencies regarding issues affecting creation and operation of a Regional Radio Board. The issues discussed include:

Representation:

- Each convening county is required by statute to include a county commissioner; each city an elected official.

- Each Regional Radio Board may decide what other representation they determine appropriate for inclusion in the board.

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Standing Committees:

The RAC needs to recommend whether certain standing committees are required and guaranteed by inclusion in the Regional Radio Board agreement. Examples of required committees could include system owners or agencies that build subsystems, operations and technical committees, user agencies, steering and policy committee, etc. Discussion followed on requiring the chair of each required committee to be a Board member and to require all committee reports and recommendations to first be heard by the policy and steering committee before consideration by the board. No recommendation was determined on these issues.

Organizational Issues:

The committee discussed organizational structure for the Regional Radio Board. Options explored included (1) providing the authority for the board to hire staff to administer the system and (2) a structure where one of the parties to the agreement provides administrative services and all parties share the expenses equally.

Tom asked Rochester where they are in the process of setting up their board, etc. Tim stated they have not had time to address this yet. Tim and Dave suggested to Wright County that they use their partners and other departments as the time commitment to the project is huge. Mike asked if they would be better off to hire someone to manage their project since they don't have anyone in-house that has time to manage this. Tim stated he didn't think Morrison County would have a problem with their staff as the State will be building the backbone as was not the case for Rochester and they had to manage that piece also.

George stated since there are already templates in place we are not starting from a blank slate. He cited as examples the State Radio Board and MESB. Tim stated he felt it was a very good approach to use either a staff person or hire someone to coordinate the efforts.

Discussion followed on potential organizational structures and cost sharing plans. No decision was reached on organizational recommendations.

Discussion followed on what would require an agency to add a sub-system to the state ARMER infrastructure. Tom stated the State's design criteria to build for portable on the belt to a 95% coverage standard. If an agency requires a greater coverage standard or has a quantity of radios requiring additional capacity they will be required to add channels, sites or both.

Dave told Jeff and Mike that the State is their partner in southeast Minnesota as they have the plan for the system. Dave suggested Morrison County partner with them from the beginning. He expressed the opinion that the state is an excellent partner for these projects. Tom asked the group to pick one of the items on the list he distributed to discuss at the next meeting. It was the consensus of the group that they will discuss Representation at the next meeting.

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GENERAL DISCUSSION:

General Interoperable issues:

Jay stated Anoka County is looking at changing their zoning/building ordinance to include installation of BDA's on new construction buildings that have public safety radio coverage issues. He informed the group this is significant safety issue for schools and that it is important to add BDA's for safety. The issue of requiring BDA's and defining minimum coverage levels is currently before the Interop sub-committee of the St Cloud/Stearns planning committee.

Jay explained the VA purchased, installed and licensed their own UHF radio to provide an interoperability patch to 800 MHz talk groups for central Minnesota.

Dave stated the FCC mandates that in January 2007 entities will not be able to purchase wide-band equipment and they all need to be gone by 2013; therefore they need to start planning for this and the limitation they need to work with. Discussion of re-farming issues followed.

Discussion followed regarding a portable communications and command vehicle like Rochester has and the possibility of writing a grant on a regional level to purchase one. Rochester will bring their vehicle to the next meeting in St. Cloud. Jay stated Stearns County is looking at a regional mobile command center.

Standing Committees:

Bill explained Wright County's possible future growth and the County's consideration on new buildings going up and communication issues. Micah stated this is where the building codes come into affect.

Updates from Partners on Current Projects:

Bill asked about adding data to their system and the cost to the entity themselves. Tom stated once the radio board is created – they can apply for grants to build this. Gary stated in Sherburne County, they built their own data system at their own cost. Dave stated the state is making their towers available for local entities to add their equipment onto it if they need it but the cost of the equipment is on their own. General discussion followed on mobile data requirements.

UPCOMING MEETINGS, SET DATE AND LOCATION:

Next meeting will be Friday, March 17, 2006, at the City of St. Cloud.

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GRANT PLANNING FUNDS, PLAN DEVELOPMENT ISSUES, PLANNING ISSUES

Jay provided an update on planning funds remaining in the region. He stated there was a 2004 and 2005 grant and funds need to be spent by March of 2007.

Tom stated the money is intended for region-wide planning only. He felt it is up to the group to determine how to spend it and proceed with plan. Tom stated Gary has a quote for Sherburne County, Bill has some issues on proposed system planning for Wright County and we need to consider how we integrate these into the regional needs and develop that plan coordinated with the ARMER deployment.

Gary stated Jeff Nelson with PSC Alliance is the consultant Sherburne County utilizes. He also is working with Wright County. Jeff provided a plan proposal to Sherburne County to address their issues on coverage, logging, etc. Sherburne County knows they have some dead spots on the northeast side, Monticello will not have sufficient coverage and the power plant is located in that area. Gary stated the proposal is \$36,000 and feels it is a very reasonable quote and will provide coverage maps, etc. Bill stated Wright County needs to formalize the same thing that Sherburne County did and feels a common consultant is beneficial financially. Tom stated what Sherburne County does in the northeast will have an effect on Benton County.

Mike asked if there is an estimated distance the towers will cover and Dave stated the State has this available, Jay suggested Mike contact them. Mike asked if they could put equipment on some of the current towers to benefit Morrison County and Jay indicated the state is very open to that and actually encourage that if it would increase efficiency, although the expense would be at the entities expense. Gary stated if you have a simulcast system, then you need to put the equipment on all towers. Tom and Dave explained the difference between simulcast and multicast technology. Tom stated the intent of the state is to allow entities to put equipment on towers if it is beneficial even though the tower doesn't lie within their county. Jay indicated the state has been terrific partners in building the system.

Mike asked Tom to explain his thoughts on working with two different consultants. He explained the process the City and Stearns County went through with consultants. It was the consensus of the group that working with one consultant regionally would be the best plan but multiple consultants could be considered if there were compelling reasons.

Bill and Gary will talk to Jeff regarding providing a quote for the both counties. Bill felt he would like to meet with Jeff in a meeting with the different entities to develop a plan. Meeting is set for March 2nd in the afternoon if it works, they will confirm with Tom to finalize. Bill will call Jeff to confirm if he wants to provide a quote, if Jeff doesn't then we will put out an RFP.

Mike stated on behalf of Morrison County, he would like to thank this group for their knowledge and assistance.

ADJOURNMENT:

Meeting was adjourned at 3:30 p.m.