

**COMMISSIONERS MEETING
SPECIAL SESSION
March 7, 2024
9:00 AM**

ATTENDANCE:

COMMISSIONERS:	David Berry, President Thomas Helmer, Vice President Rick Woodall
AUDITOR'S OFFICE	Kristina Berish
AUDIENCE:	10 Individuals

The Putnam County Board of Commissioners met on March 7, 2024, at 9:00 AM. The meeting was held at the Putnam County Highway Department. David Berry opened the meeting.

E911 CENTER - COMMUNICATION CONCERNS

Woodall wanted to have this meeting to get emergency responder departments and JES in one room to discuss the equipment installed in the last year and the issues the Commissioners have been hearing about it.

E911 Director Dave Costin said the remote console still needs to be set up, network issue. And the CAD interface. This means the panic button on the radios will need to be interfaced. He can do around 40 radios in two hours. He was not sure how long it would take him to do all the radios. EMS Assistant Director Anthony Taylor stated the radios have not worked correctly since December 17, 2023.

Woodall said some of the volunteer fire departments had reached out to the Commissioners saying they have been having issues with the tone level. They could not hear it. Costin said if an individual has a problem hearing it, they just need to say please speak up. The volume gets put up and down because some people speak louder than others or how they have their headset on.

Costin said the console is completed and there is a punch list they are still working on. Leroy Shipley with JES said they were also still working on the 2 remote dispatchers. If they have access to internet, they can have 2 dispatchers working remotely. Discussion of the process needing to be done to get the remote capability up and running. He will have 7 positions once he is done 5 hard and 2 soft.

Costin said he was waiting on two companies for parts. It is an upgrade from how they have always done part of the dispatch. Instead of having to move something manually on the system, it will be done automatically. It will be more efficient. Do not have a date of completion. Taylor wanted to know when they were given the quote last summer, did they know it would not interface and must be created before it would work since this is new technology. Costin replied they did. The company will not receive the money for this part of the project until it is up and running. Commissioner Berry asked if this jeopardizes the operation of the system. Costin said it did not since this is an optional feature.

Chief Deputy Tom Sutherlin with the county Sheriff's department said the snow issue the county recently experienced showed some serious communication issues. During the snow the deputies could hear car to car, but the dispatchers could not hear them. This is a very big problem. What if there was a school shooting etc. The radios must work, they must be able to correspond with the 911 dispatchers.

Sheriff Baugh backed up Sutherlin's concerns. They would like to leave the meeting today with assurance the radio issue would not happen again. Huge problem with dispatch not hearing, so not responding to the deputies. The snow event showed some flaws that need to be rectified.

Shipley felt the issue was due to the county having only 5 simultaneous communications located in Putnamville and 4 in the Town of Bainbridge. This is not a lot of lines, and it is just not the county emergency responders coming through those. It would also include the State and possibly surrounding counties. If more than 9 are trying to key in at once, then that will cause traffic to not be able to get through to the dispatchers.

Taylor said he had been in contact with IPSC and was told it had been nothing on their end to cause a communication problem that it must be the dispatch center. Shipley said that was not true. They had monitored the system and saw nothing that would have caused the lack of communication. Sheriff Baugh asked then why a problem was there. Shipley said there is a hierarchy, State for example is higher than the county so their calls would come through first. The system is super complicated. A signal is sent out and it is not just the Sheriff's Department coming in but all other departments at different levels. When it comes in, there is only a few seconds for the dispatcher to key in. And they must be keyed in to hear it. Baugh said IPSC had told them 10 seconds. Shipley said that is not true more like 2-3 seconds. They were to have a meeting this week with IPSC to discuss it. This is all a shared system and not just for Putnam County.

Ed Wilson with the Greencastle Police Department said it was an eye opener when they had the snowstorm. The main issue they had was the officers not being able to get through to dispatchers. It is not unacceptable. This is a huge safety issue. There must be a way that all departments can get through. Shipley said there are only so many lines for Putnam County and surrounding counties to go through. There was too much traffic, part of it should have been pulled off that day to eliminate part of the problem. Right now, only 5 groups can talk in the county at once. Shipley said this was not just a Putnam County problem. Other counties experienced the same thing that day.

Costin said in the old system they had this same problem during the June storm. The State system has a capacity of 5 simultaneous conversations. And until the State does an upgrade, the problem is going to be there. They are looking to double their capacity.

Woodall said he wanted everyone leaving today to have the same information and all be on the same page. He would like to have a meeting with IPSC.

Dispatcher Debra Simmons stated when calls come in, they key up, they answer them as quickly as possible. But in the situation of the storm incident there was nothing they could do. All the dispatchers are frustrated but it is beyond their control. Even if the county could double the capacity of calls coming in, there would still be a time when there will be issues with the number of calls that come in. That day there were 900 calls. Taylor said no one is saying it was the dispatchers' fault emergency services calls were not being answered. They are trying to figure out why the dispatchers could not hear the emergency departments that day.

Woodall asked what the county could do to plan for another large event, so this did not happen again. How can the county be proactive. We need a plan in place. Costin passed out a plan to use if there was a problem in the future. Costin said they have been working on the new console system. However, this will not fix the capacity problem.

Woodall asked what we can do to fix the capacity issue. Not rely on the State. Costin said there have been other counties put in their own trunk system. It is a large expense, over 1M. Costin said the challenge there is everyone has handhelds that may need to be replaced. Woodall said it is the board's job to make sure it all works for the emergency personnel and the constituents of the county. This must be fixed, and we need to work together to accomplish it.

Costin planned to present the back up plan to the 911 Board, they don't have a meeting until May, but they can call a special meeting. Woodall asked if this is a confident back up plan. And did the 911 Advisory Board have to approve or recommend it. Woodall made the motion to approve the plan presented today by Costin. Helmer seconded. Berry asked Costin about the plan. Did he not say earlier this was a draft. Not a final product. Costin said they could approve the plan today and if any changes needed to be made in the future, make an amendment.

EMS Director Kelly Russ said there has been a lot of discussion going on and we can keep talking but it comes down to it, what we have currently is not working. Taylor said they were not trying to play a "blame game", simply trying to get to the root of the problem. IPSC told them emphatically it was not them. He thanked Costin for drawing up and presenting a back-up plan.

Taylor said the server upgrade keeps getting pushed back. And CAD cannot be used like it should be until the server is upgraded. It crashes on a regular basis. A company should be able to tell you the specs they need to get it completed. And during this snowstorm the communication department could not do their job, communicate. Costin and JES made decisions that affected their department. When the console center was presented to be replaced, departments were told they would not have to change anything on their end. But that was not true. JES has given their department several different reasons as to why the equipment is not working. They need a clear-cut answer, they need something that will work for all the emergency departments. EMS had to order and have installed new equipment because JES said they had to upgrade.

Shipleigh said the new equipment had been installed and changed it to what EMS had told them they wanted. It has been changed more than once because they told them they wanted the voice and not the tone. Russ said that was not true. They never said they only wanted voice or the tone. Their department has been explicit about how they wanted the equipment set up. EMS is having a lot of problems with the system, and they are not getting valid answers as to why from the company. Shipley said if they told them exactly what they want, they will get it done. Russ replied she wants it exactly like they had it, tone and voice. Which is what they have said from the beginning.

Rob Frank with Greencastle Fire Department said he had been unaware of the snow issue until they went to the 911 committee meeting. Their issue was the paging. Received a lot of static and hard to hear. Sometimes not getting a tone or audio. He has discussed this with Costin. It had always worked before the upgrade. Emergency buttons not working. Costin had told him they would be coming to visit and try to work through the issues. They roll to VHF when they have issues, that is their backup plan.

Berry said if they approve this draft presented today this is the best plan they have at this time to help prevent another incident that happened during the snowstorm. If this backup plan will help, Berry made the motion unanimous.

Woodall said they realize we won't be 100% but we need to strive to be the best we can, and we need to work towards that. We need a back-up plan for disasters. EMS and JES will meet to resolve issues. Buttons on the radios need to be continued working on it until it is resolved. We need to figure out who can get these radios fixed quickly. Get a quote from a company to get it done.

Woodall received a list of radios from Costin. He had been asked to revisit the list at a meeting by Councilman Phil Gick. He is waiting to hear back from four agencies to get a complete list to the board.

ADJOURN

Berry made a motion to adjourn. Woodall seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

David Berry, President

Thomas Helmer, Vice President

Rick Woodall

**Attest: Auditor's Office
Kristina Berish**