



**TRUCKEE MEADOWS FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT
STAFF REPORT**

Board Meeting Date: June 1, 2021

DATE: May 14, 2021

TO: Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District Board of Fire Commissioners

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THROUGH: Charles A. Moore, Fire Chief
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SUBJECT: Recommendation to accept a proposal from REMSA to provide dispatching services to Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District, in an annual amount, excluding initial up-front costs for software licensing and equipment, of approximately \$690,530, with annual increases of less than 2% that could rise to a total cost of \$710,473 per year if extended through a 5-year contract and direction to staff to negotiate an agreement for services that will commence no later than January 1, 2022. The agreement will be presented to Board for approval at a later date. (All Commission Districts) **FOR POSSIBLE ACTION**

SUMMARY

This item is a recommendation to accept a proposal from REMSA to provide dispatching services to Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District (TMFPD) and direction to staff to negotiate an agreement for services that will commence no later than January 1, 2022.

PREVIOUS ACTION

On April 6, 2021, Staff presented alternatives for dispatch services. Staff was directed to explore the use of REMSA as a less costly and more efficient dispatch service than the current dispatch service provided.

BACKGROUND

Statutory Authority: NRS 474.460 allows the District to contract and be contracted with as part of its mission of fire prevention and emergency medical services.

In 2012, TMFPD entered into an agreement with Washoe County for dispatch services. The Washoe County Sheriff's Office (WCSO) currently manages the dispatch center (PSAP-Public Safety Answering Point), for all 911 calls in unincorporated Washoe County. TMFPD currently receives one full-time staffed dispatch console and channel as part of this arrangement. TMFPD was recently presented with a revised contract for continued dispatch services with Washoe Dispatch. In FY 20/21 TMFPD paid Washoe County \$875,000 for dispatch services. The revised contract would take effect on July 31, 2021 and would increase that fee to

\$1,312,492.95/year. This is an increase of \$437,492.95, or a 50% increase. WCSO has offered to continue dispatch services on a month-to-month basis after July 31, 2021, while TMFPD implements any transition to alternative dispatch services.

TMFPD staff was given direction by the Fire Board to explore alternatives that could enhance dispatch services and maintain or reduce costs. Staff evaluated the alternatives that were readily available to the District and conducted an internal analysis of the following options:

1. ***Maintain status quo dispatch services with WCSO-*** This alternative had the fewest operational impacts but also the highest cost at \$1,312,492 annually. Based on budgetary concerns and that this option does not resolve other challenges, including EMD and AVL, this option is not recommended at this time.
2. ***Contract for dispatch services with the City of Reno-*** This alternative had the next fewest operational impacts compared to maintaining the status quo. Staff had discussions with Reno Fire Department Staff, and the City made an offer through its Fire Chief to provide dispatching services to TMFPD. The City of Reno uses the same CAD software, radio system, and station alerting systems as TMFPD, so minimal changes are required. However, staff identified this alternative would not resolve the inefficiency of responding in the absence of patient acuity determinants through emergency medical dispatch (EMD), under current processes. TMFPD responders would continue to operate without AVL or other CAD enhancements until the new regional CAD is implemented approximately 2 years from now (and potentially longer if there are any project delays or setbacks). Washoe County and the City of Reno recently commissioned a dispatch consolidation study in 2016. The study recommended dispatch consolidation, but after several years of consideration, the entities decided not to proceed with that endeavor at that time. The primary concern expressed by Board members was the uncertainty of control, cost, and procedures unless the regional dispatch center was an independent entity. Those same issues would be of concern under this alternative.

The proposal provided to TMFPD by RFD indicated costs would be \$718,263.48 for the first year. The majority of those costs are related to the salary and benefits of additional full-time dispatchers. The proposal utilizes entry level wages, so it is assumed that subsequent annual rates would rise with the personnel costs of those positions. Current annual step rates are approximately 5%, and cost of living adjustments are unknown but could be an additional annual increase. Although preliminary costs are a small savings to the District, it is unknown what the long-term costs would be. This option does stabilize costs in the short-term but does not resolve many of the current challenges facing the region.

3. ***Contract for dispatch services with the City of Sparks-*** This alternative had limited analysis due to similarities with the research done for dispatch services with the City of Reno. Sparks utilizes the same CAD and other systems. However, the City of Sparks has limited capacity to process an additional 12,000 calls for service, including staffing and physical space. This alternative is not recommended at this time.

4. ***Contract for services with REMSA-*** This alternative is a significant departure from the current dispatching arrangements that TMFPD has with WCSO. It also presented many inter-related benefits, as outlined below. Although there will be a more significant upfront cost, the ongoing costs will provide for significant savings (that will heavily outweigh the upfront one-time costs) over other alternatives. Additionally, there are several challenges that are resolved with this alternative. For those reasons, staff is recommending that the District proceed with a contract for services under this alternative.
5. ***Establish TMFPD's own independent dispatch center-*** This alternative would give TMFPD full control over its dispatch service needs, however, it would be the costliest and least efficient. TMFPD would need to secure a new dispatch center location (or lease space within existing centers), hire a minimum of 12 full-time employees, and purchase all of the necessary equipment. Furthermore, this option would not address other challenges including EMD and other inter-operability issues. For those reasons, no further analysis was done with this alternative and it is not recommended at this time.

Alternative 4, contracting for dispatch services with REMSA, was thoroughly analyzed for several months with a working group put together by both agencies. REMSA has provided a proposal, which is included as Appendix A. The identified benefits and challenges with this arrangement are listed below:

- Excluding initial up-front costs for software licensing and equipment, the annual cost for REMSA to provide dispatch services would be approximately \$690,530, with a 2% annual increase that may rise to a total cost of \$710,473 if extended through a 5-year contract. Compared to the cost of maintaining dispatch services with WCSO, this is an annual savings of approximately \$620,000, with potentially increased savings in future years due to unknown inflationary costs with WCSO. Over the life of a 5-year contract, this could equate to savings in excess of \$3,300,590.
- Emergency Medical Dispatch (EMD) processes have been an ongoing challenge between REMSA and the regional fire agencies. Historically, REMSA has predominantly conducted EMD for EMS incidents within the valley. This has created challenges for the fire departments to get real-time data related to patient status and incident priorities. These pieces of information are critical to determining an appropriate response level with other safety factors. Under this alternative, TMFPD would be dispatched within the same CAD and by the same REMSA dispatchers who are conducting EMD. This will resolve this information deficit for TMFPD while also enabling REMSA to retain that information as well. This will potentially enable TMFPD to better allocate resources so there is not a duplication of resources being sent to low-acuity incidents (Priority 3 medicals), or other calls where multiple resources are not needed. In conjunction with AVL (Automatic Vehicle Location) capabilities, TMFPD could create hybrid response patterns that allow fire engines to remain available and not respond to low acuity incidents, unless REMSA ambulances are more than an established time/distance from the incident (i.e., 10 minutes) so that patients can be assured care in a reasonable amount of time.
- REMSA dispatch currently uses Automated Vehicle Location (AVL) data to dispatch

resources based on proximity to incidents. The current CAD system used by Washoe dispatch, Reno, and Sparks uses an antiquated system that does not account for actual unit locations when they are moving throughout the County. While this may change when the regional CAD is eventually upgraded, those changes are at least 2 years away. With REMSA dispatch, the District will immediately benefit from a system that recognizes the closest fire apparatuses and ambulances to an incident and will ensure that the most efficient and fastest response is provided to all incident types.

- TMFPD is currently providing primary ambulance transport services in Washoe Valley & Sun Valley, in coordination with REMSA. Both entities are exploring long-term agreements to continue and expand these services and relationship. With both agencies providing integrated ambulance responses, there are tremendous advantages to having both entities dispatched by a singular dispatch center. Under this joint ambulance operations model, the ability for REMSA dispatch to have real time data of TMFPD ambulance locations and availability allows REMSA to position its ambulances to better serve the remainder of the community or reposition into TMFPD's areas when TMFPD is unavailable. This reciprocal assistance would not be fully capable without a combined dispatch center.
- TMFPD currently contracts with a third-party vendor for ambulance billing and collections. The District is considering an alternative contract for services with REMSA to provide billing services. Having dispatch services provided by REMSA in this scenario, will allow for centralized data collection and streamlined billing processes.
- One of the challenges presented by utilizing REMSA dispatch is the fact that REMSA is on a differing CAD platform than the other regional agencies. As mentioned above, there will likely be a new CAD system available to the region in the coming years. REMSA & TMFPD have both expressed their intent to migrate to that platform at the same time as the other agencies when they make that transition. In the interim, there are several potential solutions to address the challenges associated with the differing platforms. REMSA & RFD have been working on a CAD-to-CAD connection for several years, which could allow for instantaneous transfer of information. If this connection can be utilized, it may also enable a similar connection with Washoe & Sparks.
- Although REMSA and TMFPD currently operate disparate radio systems, there are existing methods of "patching" two disparate channels together. This will allow REMSA & TMFPD responding resources to talk to each other and a common dispatcher at the same time and throughout the duration of an incident. Given that approximately 85% of TMFPD's incidents involve a co-response from REMSA, it is logical to ensure that those resources are sharing communications. This was one of the recommendations of the 9/11 commission and common within ICS (Incident Command System) standards. TMFPD responds jointly with REMSA to more incidents than all other jurisdictions combined. REMSA does have long-term plans to migrate to the upcoming P25 800MHz radio system so that radio systems will eventually be fully integrated.

Based on this analysis there are many ancillary benefits of combining dispatch services with REMSA, aside from the significant cost-savings. Preliminary deployment plans have been discussed between the two agencies, and a target start date between October 1, 2021 and January

1, 2022 has been designated. This will allow the transition to occur primarily outside of TMFPD's "wildfire season" when call volumes are typically lower. This will also allow REMSA staff to become accustomed to TMFPD practices and policies throughout the Winter and Spring months. Prior to any changeover from Washoe Dispatch to REMSA, infrastructure will be installed and thoroughly tested. CAD programming will occur to ensure that all response patterns and needs are met. TMFPD also intends on assigning a full-time Officer to act as a liaison between REMSA and TMFPD to ensure transition needs are fulfilled. REMSA intends on commencing training its current staff in Fire ProQA processes and have already requested TMFPD dispatch tapes that their staff can train with to maintain consistency in communications following any transition. A full transition and implementation plan and schedule will be developed upon approval and direction from the Board.

FISCAL IMPACT

If approved, there will be initial one-time costs that are necessary to obtain and install the required infrastructure for REMSA to dispatch TMFPD. It is estimated that these costs could be approximately \$298,326 (including \$65,172 in contingencies) in radio equipment and \$290,020 in software licensing and CAD integrations/equipment. TMFPD will purchase any necessary equipment and retain ownership. TMFPD also intends on submitting any eligible purchases for reimbursement from County E911 funds.

The total fiscal year 2021/22 dispatch and start-up costs would be estimated between \$1,326,909 to \$1,494,096 depending on the date the agreement is implemented (between October 1, 2021 to January 1, 2021). The District has budgeted \$1,375,000 for dispatch costs for fiscal year 2021/22. The first-year total costs could be up to \$120,000 (high estimate) over the current dispatch budget if reimbursements from the County E911 fund is not received. There is the potential that all start-up costs may be covered by the County E911 fund which would reduce the total and then the first-year cost would be under budget by up to \$627,000. The District did include \$400,000 in contingency in the fiscal year 21/22 budget that may be used to cover first year start-up costs over budget if necessary.

Future fiscal years will see a significant difference. The FY22/23 estimated dispatch costs under the REMSA agreement are \$690,530. The FY22/23 estimated dispatch costs under the Washoe County month to month agreement, assuming no increases, is \$1,312,500, an estimated savings of over \$600,000 annually.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Board accept a proposal from REMSA to provide dispatching services to Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District, in an annual amount, excluding initial up-front costs for software licensing and equipment, of approximately \$690,530 in the first year, with a 2% annual increase that could rise to a total cost of \$710,473 per year if extended through a 5-year contract and direction to staff to negotiate an agreement for services that will commence no later than January 1, 2022. The agreement will be presented to Board for approval at a later date.

POSSIBLE MOTION

Should the Board agree with staff's recommendation a possible motion could be:

"I move recommended that the Board to accept a proposal from REMSA to provide dispatching services to Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District, in an annual amount, excluding initial up-front costs for software licensing and equipment, of approximately \$690,530, with annual increases of less than 2% that could rise to a total cost of \$710,473 per year if extended through a 5-year contract and direction to staff to negotiate an agreement for services that will commence no later than January 1, 2022. The agreement will be presented to Board for approval at a later date."