

Emergency Communication – 911 Dispatch Delivery Model Review

Management Response

May 16, 2022



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PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of this document is to present the management response to the MNP's Emergency Communication – 911 Dispatch Delivery Model Review Final Report. This management response will address the report overall and provide specific comments related to each delivery model option explored, and MNP's recommendation.

Background

The City is committed to the ongoing review of programs and services to ensure that the community needs are met, to maintain and optimize program and service efficiency, and sustainability of service delivery (Council Policy C-CAO-15 Program and Service Review).

In 2020, the Operational and Fiscal Review identified an opportunity for the City to explore different operating models for 911 dispatch. As per this opportunity, the review's focus was to be on quantitative and qualitative pain points that may be addressed through a change in the operating model, technology investment required related to Next Generation 911 (NG911), and current risks associated with maintaining two dispatch centres.

In addition, mandatory replacement of current Enhanced 911 infrastructure and systems across Canada is required by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission. This emphasized the need to assess the City's current emergency communication delivery model to ensure that proper investments in technology are made in tandem with the most appropriate 911 dispatch delivery model at the City of St. Albert.

Existing 911 systems are mandated to be decommissioned on March 4, 2025, and Public Safety Answering Points (PSAP) must transition to Next Generation 911 (NG911) to continue taking 911 calls. The recommendations from this review were to inform technology and other investments for transition to NG911 for the City of St. Albert.

Administration contracted MNP to conduct analysis related to the 911 Dispatch Delivery Model Review identified in the Operational and Fiscal Review. The objective of the review was to assess the service delivery options and recommend an option that the City should pursue/implement that will be informed by a detailed analysis. The expected outcome of the review was a recommendation for the 911 dispatch delivery model with a detailed analysis of potential options, related impacts for each option including people, processes, technology, location, customer impact, finances, and potential partners for delivery.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

Overall Response

Administration is supportive of the options explored and much of the analysis that was completed. All options are viable options to explore to ensure efficient, effective and sustainable delivery of services and, technology investments required to transition the City to NG911. Administration is supportive of the analysis completed related to risks, impact on service delivery, people, technology and financial impacts.

It is important to note that tasks and related costs to ensure that the City's spatial (GIS) data and processes meet the NG911 requirements for completeness, accuracy and currency are required regardless of the operating model that is selected. As well, the City must replace its current Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system because the current platform is no longer supported by the current vendor and is not NG911 compliant. Since these costs are comparable across all options, they are not included in any of the recommendations.

Lastly, the report considers the delivery of services focusing on current services and service levels. More work is required to better understand the future demand for additional services and related impacts on the Emergency Communication Dispatch. As the City continues to grow, 911 call volumes will increase and potentially the security and monitoring needs of our internal customers such as Public Operations, Engineering Services and Recreation and Parks. In five years, each of these service areas may increase demand for our dispatch center. This potential increase in demand for services provided by the dispatch center should be considered.

MNP Recommended Model Response

Contract Secondary PSAP and Fire Dispatch to an External Service Provider – Primary PSAP services and police dispatch would remain in the St. Albert police communications centre.

Administration views this recommendation as a viable possibility should direction be provided to proceed with this option. When considering service delivery, services would be maintained albeit from another provider. From a people perspective, the City is committed to finding another placement for impacted employees before considering any layoffs, should a decision be made to proceed with this option.

Proceeding with this option may also put the City in a situation where it must work within the confines of the provider’s technical platforms, leading to technology changes and/or upgrades that are not known at this time.

Choosing this option would require time to conduct extensive research to find a suitable replacement for our center, potentially taking up to a year to complete. Included in this research would be service delivery, financial impacts and implementation considerations. As a result, any benefits identified in the report would not be realized until at least 2024. A comprehensive implementation change management and communication plan will be developed to facilitate successful implementation of this option once direction is received.

Administration also recommends that, should this option be exercised, a follow-up review is completed in five years. This review would provide an opportunity to ensure that contracted dispatch services are meeting the needs of the city and to evaluate if another option would be more appropriate.

Management Response for All Recommendations

The following section provides a summary of each delivery model explored and related management response.

1. Status Quo

In the status quo alternative, the City of St. Albert would not make changes to the existing service model. The police dispatch and fire dispatch centres would continue to operate separately, and the 911 PSAP would continue to operate from the police dispatch centre. Both police and fire dispatch centers would require modernization to be compliant with the forthcoming NG911 system.

Management Response:

The overall status quo summary provided is an accurate description of the current state. The model has been in place in St. Albert since 911 was implemented in 1995. There are continuous improvement and future service improvement opportunities that continue to make the status quo a viable option, should Council elect to not direct the recommended change.

Service perspective

Fire Services would be able to monitor and direct resources with a common operating picture, which potentially improves the responses to special areas which may require local knowledge.

People perspective

N/A - this is status quo

Technology perspective

The status quo requires the implementation of NG911 technology in both Policing and Fire dispatch centers (PSAPs).

Fire Services will have to procure a replacement Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system, as the current system will not be NG911 compliant. As well, the City must consider the costs of NG911 integration and of making Fire Services dispatch a secondary PSAP.

Financial perspective

Costs associated with this recommendation do not include the costs and resources required to prepare or maintain the spatial data and processes required by NG911. Based on preliminary information, these costs are estimated at \$125,000 for year 1 and \$100,000 ongoing for each subsequent year. Costs will be confirmed upon completion of the spatial data assessment scheduled for later in 2022.

As well, costs do not include those needed to replace the City's Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD). Based on preliminary information, this cost is estimated at \$550,000 for year 1 with the ongoing operating costs still to be determined. Costs will be confirmed as part of the system selection and procurement process.

2. Amalgamation

An amalgamation of the two dispatch centres would maintain service within St. Albert and reduce redundant operating costs between the two separate centres. The primary PSAP, police dispatch and fire dispatch, would be located at the RCMP detachment (Maloney Place).

It is expected that the amalgamation to the Maloney Place detachment communications centre will require an expansion of the current physical space. However, cost estimates for the expansion were unavailable at the time of this report.

Management Response:

The overall summary of the Amalgamation option that MNP has provided is accurate. The current space available at the main RCMP detachment is unable to accommodate an amalgamated dispatch model. Further capital investment would be required to ensure there are enough dispatch seats available to provide both services in one location.

Service Perspective

The City would be able to maintain or potentially enhance services with amalgamation.

People perspective

This model would require enhanced reliability clearances of all employees. Presently IAFF dispatchers for Fire Services do not have enhanced reliability clearances.

The City always considers impacts on employees when reviewing potential service model changes. Administration has communicated to IAFF Union and possibly impacted members that this review took place.

Technology perspective

Fire Services would require a replacement Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system and implementation of new NG911 technology. The integration of separate CAD systems for police and fire with one NG911 system would add technical complexity.

Financial perspective

Costs associated with this recommendation do not include the costs and resources required to prepare or maintain the spatial data and processes required by NG911. Based on preliminary information, these costs are estimated at \$125,000 for year 1 and \$100,000 ongoing for each subsequent year. Costs will be confirmed upon completion of the spatial data assessment that is scheduled for later in 2022.

As well, costs do not include those needed to replace the City's Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system. Based on preliminary information, this cost is estimated at \$550,000 for year 1 with the ongoing operating costs still to be determined. Costs will be confirmed as part of the system selection and procurement process.

Cost estimates for expansion of the current space to the Maloney Place detachment communications centre were unavailable at the time of this report.

3. Contract

Most municipalities in Alberta contract elements of their call-taking and dispatching services to other municipalities or service providers that provide the services at an annual rate. There are several alternatives that could be undertaken in a model where services are contracted to external PSAP and dispatch centre.

- a) Contract Primary PSAP and Fire Dispatch to an External Service Provider. Secondary PSAP and police dispatch (Municipal Enforcement dispatch) would continue to be operated in the St. Albert police communication centre.
- b) Contract Secondary PSAP and Fire Dispatch to an External Service Provider. Primary PSAP services and police dispatch would remain in St. Albert police communication centre.

- c) Contract Secondary PSAP and Police Dispatch to an External Service Provider. Police dispatching would be contracted out. Fire dispatch would remain in St. Albert and the primary PSAP would be moved to there.
- d) Contract Police and Fire Dispatch and Secondary PSAP. The primary PSAP would remain in St. Albert, as well as non-emergency call taking and municipal enforcement dispatch.
- e) Contract Primary and Secondary PSAPs, Fire Dispatch and Police Dispatch. Primary PSAP and fire dispatch would be contracted out together to a provider such as Strathcona County or Parkland County, and police dispatch and the secondary PSAP would be contracted out to a provider such as the RCMP NAOCC.

Management Response:

The overall summary of options that MNP has provided related to contracting out dispatch services is accurate. It is important to note that if any contracted model is selected, further detailed review and confirmation of costs, impacts and timelines will be necessary. Administration does believe, however, that assumptions and estimates used by MNP are within reason and logic.

Service perspective

The perceived impact might be that without an in-house dispatch service there would be a decline in service. However, when speaking with another municipality of a similar size who has outsourced their dispatch for several years, it is Administration's understanding that this shift has improved the "call to dispatch" times.

People perspective

The City always considers impacts on employees when reviewing potential service model changes. Administration communicated to IAFF Union and possibly impacted members that this review took place and that the final decision will be made on May 16, 2022.

The City also communicated that if personnel impacts occur, we would seek to redeploy employees wherever possible, before considering layoffs. Further discussions with IAFF and impacted employees would be necessary, once a preferred model was selected.

Technology perspective

Integration of an unknown CAD system with existing systems, such as "Active911", might not be achievable. The City may be in a situation where it must either work within the provider's technology platforms or find another acceptable integration.

Financial perspective

If the City moves forward with contracting out secondary Public Safety Answering Point services and fire dispatch to an external service provider, St. Albert will lose approximately \$174,000 in Provincial 911 levy funding.

Costs associated with this recommendation do not include the costs and resources required to prepare or maintain the spatial data and processes required by NG911. Based on preliminary information, these costs are estimated at \$125,000 for year 1 and \$100,000 ongoing for each subsequent year. Costs will be confirmed upon completion of the spatial data assessment that is scheduled for later in 2022.

As well, costs do not include those needed to replace the City's Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system. Based on preliminary information, this cost is estimated at \$550,000 for year one with the ongoing operating costs still to be determined. Costs will be confirmed as part of the system selection and procurement process.

4. Sell Emergency Communication Services to Others

The final option is continuing to operate all the current services, likely in an amalgamated model, but investing into additional capacity to be able to offer PSAP and dispatching services to other municipalities.

Management Response:

The overall summary and market research MNP provided identified that the market is saturated and that the ability to compete and provide services, would be limited. Management is open to continuing to explore this option, regardless of direction, to validate the environmental scan for this option.

People perspective

The City always considers impacts on employees when reviewing potential service model changes. Administration communicated to IAFF Union and possibly impacted members that this review took place and that the final decision will be made on May 16, 2022.

Should this option be chosen, people would be trained to perform services for other municipalities. This could result in additional resource requirements in future years.

Technology perspective

Requires capital and operating budget for technology to expand and develop offerings for other municipalities. Other dispatch centers in the province have already moved forward with advancing their technology to integrate with NG911 and provide a capability for other services.

Financial perspective

Costs associated with this recommendation do not include the costs and resources required to prepare or maintain the spatial data and processes required by NG911. Based on preliminary information, these costs are estimated at \$125,000 for year one and \$100,000 ongoing for each subsequent year. Costs will be confirmed upon completion of the spatial data assessment that is scheduled for later in 2022.

As well, costs do not include those needed to replace the City's Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system. Based on preliminary, this cost is estimated at \$550,000 for year 1 with the ongoing operating costs still to be determined. Costs will be confirmed as part of the system selection and procurement process.