

**CHRISTIANSBURG TOWN COUNCIL
CHRISTIANSBURG, MONTGOMERY CO., VA.
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
DECEMBER 5, 2023 – 5:30 P.M.**

A SPECIAL MEETING OF THE CHRISTIANSBURG TOWN COUNCIL, MONTGOMERY COUNTY, CHRISTIANSBURG, VA. WAS HELD AT CHRISTIANSBURG TOWN HALL, 100 EAST MAIN STREET, CHRISTIANSBURG, VIRGINIA, ON DECEMBER 5, 2023 AT 5:30 P.M.

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor D. Michael Barber; Vice-Mayor Samuel M. Bishop; Johana Hicks; Tanya Hockett; Tim Wilson. COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT: Casey Jenkins; Henry Showalter

ADMINISTRATION PRESENT: Town Manager Randy Wingfield; Assistant Town Manager Andrew Warren; Clerk of Council Tracy Heinline; Finance Director Valerie Tweedie; Fire Chief Billy Hanks; Police Chief Chris Ramsey; Radio Technician Pete Haislip

WORK SESSION

I. Call To Order

Mayor Barber called the work session to order. Town Manager Randy Wingfield gave a brief background of the New River Valley Emergency Communication Regional Authority and introduced Executive Director Jason Milburn.

II. Presentation By New River Valley Emergency Communications Regional Authority Executive Director Jason Milburn

Executive Director Jason Milburn presented to Council a brief overview of the Authority and then presented information regarding a regional communications system proposal. Mr. Milburn explained that since 2016 Montgomery County, Town of Blacksburg, Town of Christiansburg, and Virginia Tech made up a consolidated 911 dispatch service that provides services to four police agencies and eleven fire and rescue agencies. He spoke about call volumes explaining that they included 911 emergency situations as well as non-emergency. Mr. Milburn explained that several outbound calls are placed as well, which are calls made on behalf of citizens as well as transfers for responders and citizens. When all these calls are taken, they are then transferred to calls for service among law enforcement, fire, and rescue. Mr. Milburn noted that dispatchers receive approximately 121,000 calls a year.

Mr. Milburn explained that APCO project-25 was a nationwide digital radio technical standard developed in 1989 to ensure public safety land mobile radio interoperability and functionality. He

added that there was no other digital radio standard supported by federal grant funding. He explained that currently every law enforcement, fire, and rescue agency in the Towns have their own radio system they manage stacked upon other radio systems with other agencies. This new system would combine all the radio systems into one large system that would work together. Communication difficulties. All had their own radio systems-stacked on top of each other. Mr. Milburn also explained that several consultant studies have been performed over the last ten plus years, but those studies/projects have been postponed due to financial or other reasons. All three studies recommended a P25 compliant trunked radio system to be shared by all stakeholders. Mr. Milburn explained that one of the primary goals for dispatch is to upgrade to digital technology due to issues of capacity, coverage, clarity, and lack of security. He added that radio signals were an issue as well and gave several examples of signals being lost during communications.

Mr. Milburn acknowledged the magnitude of the new project and explained that other jurisdictions would need to be involved with the financial aspect of the project. He explained that the P25 system would be the best fit countywide and gave examples of other universities, localities that currently use the system. He added the project would be sold as a system and the towers would be placed at eleven different sites to serve everyone. Mr. Wingfield explained that currently there are nine towers in the area so two will need to be added as well as new handheld and vehicle radios.

Mr. Milburn moved on to speak about the cost breakdown for the new dispatch system explaining that the full list price of the project would be looked at based on the consultants estimates. He explained that all four jurisdictions would share the dispatch center equipment, spare fixed equipment, and consulting fees at 25% each. He added that the assumption would be two new north sites would only benefit Montgomery County calls/agencies. Mr. Milburn provided the estimated costs for the new system and explained that the estimations were based on what the consultants had seen from other localities. He expressed that radio grants had been applied for but with unsuccessful outcomes. Mr. Milburn went on to show how the cost would be divided between the four localities showing the Town of Christiansburg spending roughly \$4,656,341, not including interest on a bond. He explained that the Authority is a government agency which meant they could hold a bond or other financing for a project and that a Memo of Agreement (MOA) would be needed from each locality. He added that a 20-year term had been discussed but wanted to rely on their financial advisor in the end.

In conclusion, Mr. Milburn explained the projected timeline for the P25 compliant trunked radio system would begin with proposals to governing bodies in December 2023, followed by a consensus to move forward with the project in the first quarter of 2024. He added that Requests for Proposals would follow along with debt issuance and optimistically a contract signing in December 2024. Mr. Milburn explained it would take approximately 30-36 months to build the system, expecting completion in August 2027.

III. COUNCIL DISCUSSION OF PRESENTATION

Councilwoman Hicks expressed concern for the financial side of the project and noted she would like to see Montgomery County invest more funds into this project, possibly funding for the Town of Blacksburg as well. Mr. Wingfield explained that the 911 Authority Board had discussed and debated over the cost for each locality and felt due to the radio usage and who would be on the

towers they felt it was split fairly. Councilwoman Hockett expressed that she thought the cost was reasonably split among the localities and was glad to see the cost of the radios split the way they should be. She added that when you join an authority you should expect to split costs equally. Mayor Barber agreed that Council should begin discussing the project immediately and did not want to focus on what locality should spend more for the service. He added that time was imperative, and the costs could increase if they waited.

Councilwoman Hockett questioned how grants would be allocated if approved in the future. Mr. Milburn explained that grants would be stretched across the other municipalities based on percentages or paid directly to the loan owed. Councilman Wilson expressed that this had been a need for some time and his wish was to place it on the Council agenda as soon as possible.

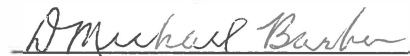
Fire and Rescue Chief Billy Hanks noted an updated system has been needed for some time and that first responders need to be taken care of in order to communicate effectively during emergencies. Police Chief Chris Ramsey added that the radio equipment was so dated that at some point the localities would not have the ability to upgrade. Radio Technician Pete Haislip expressed that he works with the majority of the radio equipment and works closely with the Public Works Department's safety equipment. He explained that Public Works system would fail soon due to expiration and that the public safety system would be following behind Public Works in approximately seven years. Mr. Haislip suggested Public Works be included in the project as well.

Mayor Barber asked for a consensus from the group to move forward with placing the project on the Council agenda and all agreed.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to bring before Council, Mayor Barber adjourned the meeting at 6:36 p.m.


Tracy Heintz, Clerk of Council


D. Michael Barber, Mayor