

Southeastern Arizona Communications (SEACOM)  
Joint Powers Authority (JPA)  
Minutes of the Special Meeting of August 18, 2022

Chair Mark Dannels called the meeting to order at 9:04 a.m. at SEACOM, 1728 Paseo San Luis, Sierra Vista, AZ, 85635.

**Members Present:**

Mark Dannels, Cochise County Sheriff's Office (CCSO) Charles Potucek, City of Sierra Vista (CSV); Mark Savage, Fry Fire District (FFD); Suzanne Harvey, Huachuca City (HC)(Remote); OPS Committee Chair Tom Alinen, Cochise County Sheriff's Office (CCSO)

**Also Present:**

Carol Capas, Cochise County Sheriff's Office (CCSO); Josh Meeker, Sierra Vista Fire and Medical Services (SVF&MS); Steve Pauken, City of Bisbee; Jim Adams, Tombstone Marshall's Office (TMO); Brad Dever, SVF&MS; Brian Jones, SVF&MS; Pablo Duarte, CCIT; Victoria Yarbrough, CSV; Tammi Jo Wilkins; CCOES; Daniel Duchon, Cochise County Finance; Lawrence Boutte, Sierra Vista Police Department (SVPD); Joe Casey, CCIT; Rich Karwaczka, Cochise County Administrator; Jon Buonaccorsi, Palominas Fire District (PFD); Michael Cline, SEACOM Director; Jennifer Dillaha, City of Sierra Vista; Barbara Fleming, City of Sierra Vista; Susan Papatrefon, SEACOM

**Call to the Public** –No member of the public requested to address the Board.

**Items 1: Approval of the Minutes for the May 12, 2022 (Action Item):**

Mr. Savage moved the Minutes for the JPA Board Meeting of May 12, 2022 be approved as written. Mr. Potucek seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous vote of all Members in attendance.

**Item 2: SEACOM Director Report:**

Mr. Cline reported the personnel challenges continue, but added it is not just local, it is a national problem. They have to go looking for people. The workforce is different then ever before, and it's not unique to dispatchers. They continue to look at and refine the hiring process as well as examine the work – life balance of the staff they have. The Fort Huachuca dispatch center is fully staffed, primarily with SEACOM trained employees. These employees have left to go to a center where they make less money, but the workload is significantly less, the shifts are set, there is much less stress. It creates a better work – life balance.

Discussion was held about the member agencies filling seats on an interim basis. Mr. Cline stated, we need all the help we can get and if our members have people we can use them.

The City of Bisbee is planning to go FT with SEACOM on January 1, 2023 (currently PT). An agreement will be brought to the JPA by the end of the year. Staff met with the City Manager

and Chief in Willcox, they are ready, will likely start PT working to FT. Mr. Cline met with Chief Volker in Benson. He is new so not pressing him to join SEACOM yet. Mr. Cline advised, for any agencies that are added, they have to be cognizant of the effect on the call load. ProQA statistics are down as they relate to compliance. The system requires specific questions be asked in specific order. Mr. Cline stated he observed processes where certain questions are not asked, often because as the call progresses, the dispatcher is able to know things without asking the question. He also stated it is a reflection of the call load and stress the dispatchers are under.

AZTracs – Testing is underway, running through the processes to QC the system before going live.

Mr. Cline requested they be allowed to suspend the ProQA for Law Enforcement (EPD). The contract with ProQA allows for this when staffing issues arise. This would open up consoles for non ProQA certified staff to dispatch these calls freeing up the certified dispatchers to focus on medical and fire (EMD). Ms. Papatrefon can develop ProQA like templates for persons handling those calls, will have a significant effect as the calls will be handled much quicker.

Staff is also proposing a PSA campaign to educate the public on proper use of the 911 system. In conjunction, they are looking at setting up a telephone tree – call manager system. It is the goal to redirect non-emergency calls.

Mr. Cline reported they are investigating the idea of implementing assigned, rather than rotating, shifts and adding a shift differential add pay. Mr. Savage asked if this would be permanent, Mr. Cline indicated they are still researching. Another pay related issue is holiday pay. All employees are City employees and City policy is PTE are not paid holiday pay. Removes some of the incentive for people to come in to help if it's straight time. Mr. Potucek stated the JPA is different than the City organization, things can be done without clearing with the City or County. Mr. Savage stated that he gets the shift schedule idea but raised concerns about the differing work loads between day and night shifts. Mr. Cline indicated that with the natural decrease in night calls, those dispatchers would be assigned administrative tasks that can't get done during the high traffic times. Mr. Karwaczka asked if people needed to be ProQA certified to do admin work, Mr. Cline stated they do not. He then asked if they could hire specifically for admin. The rate of pay would be less than that of a dispatcher and they could take the burden off the dispatchers. Mr. Cline indicated they have one record clerk at this time, he could look at hiring a second records clerk. Mr. Karwaczka asked how quickly the EPD could be shut down. Mr. Cline indicated that can happen any time. Mr. Cline is also recommending considering an add pay for trainers.

Mr. Cline met with the Douglas PSAP to discuss collaboration between them and SEACOM. State 911 will set up an 8<sup>th</sup> console at SEACOM and an additional seat will be set up in Douglas. This seat can be configured and connected such that it is a SEACOM seat. Mr. Karwaczka asked if this type of set up could be spread to other agencies. Ms. Papatrefon indicated the small agencies are going to lose their seats, they could answer admin calls but not 911. Mr. Duarte added that admin calls are one process, even attempting a remote 911 seat would be problematic. Mr. Pauken stated the Bisbee PSAP will still be intact when they come to SEACOM, could be used.

Applicant Process: Mr. Cline stated there continues to be issues during the hiring process. In the packet a document breaks down the points in the hiring process where there seems to be the most problem. When an applicant submits an application, they are advised they must

submit a typing certificate, or the application will not be forwarded. Based on the numbers provided by HR, a significant number of candidates never get past this step. Unfortunately, it is unknown the reason (Did not pass, Did not Take etc.). In 2021 over ½ (63 of 124) of the applicants did not move past the typing test step. While candidates dropped out at several points in the process, the typing test appears to be the biggest issue. Of the 124 net applications received in 2021, only three applicants were ultimately hired by SEACOM.

Extended discussion was held about the application process and if there were any way to circumvent some of the choke points. Mr. Cline and Ms. Papatrefon stated they have identified a software solution that may assist. Rather than having a typing requirement and a live written test, this product is a timed, proctored test that is targeted to the position of a dispatcher. The ability to complete this test successfully requires the necessary typing skills without a separate test. Staff is recommending this be implemented as soon as possible..

Other choke points identified involve outside vendors, specifically the vendors that perform the Psych evaluations. Often they are scheduling weeks or months out. Staff is working with the City Procurement Division to create a scope to have providers bid to be on-call providers. It is hoped a local office could be identified so that appointments can be scheduled as needed, virtually any time or day of the week.. Mr. Karwaczka asked Ms. Fleming if she was going to build a list of providers. She indicated that was the goal. Part of the issue is that much of the industry is going to telemed and many providers do not do in person evals anymore. Statewide, the providers are stretched to the limit. Mr. Dannels asked Ms. Fleming to check with the provider the CCSO uses. Arizona Police Psychology only charges them \$350 vs. the \$1,600 her research is showing, and they turn them around in a week. She indicated she would include them in the process. Mr. Potucek added, it's best to have several on-call firms so these candidates can be processed timely. Mr. Dannels stated this has been an issue for a long time. Employees are frustrated, he is tired of throwing money at it because that is not working. The recruitment / retention problem needs to be solved, there is a significant issue if you have over 100 applicants and you only hire 3. Discussion regarding the process and issues continued. Ultimately there is no easy answer. One new complication is the legalization of recreational marijuana. This is an issue with the background and post requirements. Mr. Dannels indicated marijuana is a 2-year time, other substances 7 years. Some are waivable depending on judgment of the reviewers. Mr. Savage inquired if there was an inconsistency between the member agencies. Should a standard be established?

The goal of staff is to reduce the hire process from 2 months to 30 days if possible. They are looking at the timing of the steps, and the new system for testing that eliminates the typing test will be a good start. Mr. Karwaczka commented that we can't change the culture of the applicants. The system needs to be improved for the individuals that do apply to succeed. Mr. Dannels agreed stating it's a team effort, just need to get butts in the seats.

Mr. Dannels stated that a contingency plan is necessary if SEACOM goes down. Border issues are really putting pressure on all agencies. He requested Mr. Cline provide additional updates to the Board Members, rather than waiting until the meetings.

Mr. Potucek added, staff will be surveying other PSAPs, see what works, any information can help. All the Board Members agreed, solutions are needed, now. Mr. Adams commented, if we can hire individuals for admin the process may be faster. That would also provide candidates that could be developed into dispatchers in the future. Mr. Potucek agreed, and added he is not worried about the personnel budget.

Due to the length of the meeting, Mr. Dannels asked for final comments and information:

Ms. Papatrefon will be sending the member agencies a dispatch shift schedule if they have people who can fill in.

Mr. Alinen reported they are evaluating and looking at cost for statewide radio communications. He will have more information at the next meeting.

Mr. Cline will bring the Willcox agreement to the Board for consideration next month.

Ms. Fleming asked all those present to be recruiters. If you see or know anyone, encourage them to apply.

Mr. Meeker reported the Station Alerting project is well underway. They are doing it in 2 phases, the first being Fire West, the second Fire East. Phase 1 is due to go live on 11/7/22, Phase 2 sometime in February or March 2023.

Mr. Dannels closed the meeting by stating they all have to do a better job, work together.

There being no further business before the Board, Chair Mark Dannels adjourned the meeting at 11:05 a.m.

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Mark Dannels, SEACOM JPA Chairman