

April 8, 2019

RE: 911 Call Taking & Public Safety Dispatching Operations

Dear City Manager Greeson,

911 call taking and public safety dispatching is a complex and resource-intensive service. As a small operation, we have been challenged to keep up with the demands associated with providing a high level of service in this area. It requires extensive investment in personnel and technology. We have been impacted by high personnel turnover, which is common in this industry and we are limited based on the size of our operation in fully implementing best practices.

Consolidation of 911 call taking and public safety dispatching functions has become very common across the United States. We have extensively studied our current operation and the option of contracting with the Northwest Regional Emergency Communications Center (Northwest Center) operated by the City of Dublin, which already serves the cities of Dublin, Hilliard and Upper Arlington and the Townships of Norwich and Washington. The analysis that has been completed is detailed in the attached document titled Dispatch Consolidation Analysis.

Based on the extensive analysis that has been completed over numerous years going back to 2013, we recommend the City of Worthington join the Northwest Center for 911 call taking and public safety dispatching. Given the current low staffing levels in Worthington Communications Center and the need for additional investments in the near future, now is the time to implement this recommendation.

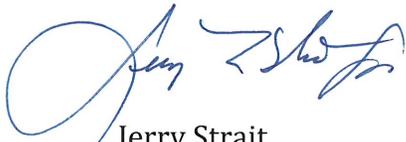
Joining the Northwest Center for these services offers many benefits, including:

- Quicker response times from police and fire/EMS for wireless callers due to fewer call transfers to get to the appropriate dispatching agency
- Ability to segregate call taking from call dispatching which means the Communications Technician can stay on the line with the caller giving pre-arrival instructions
- More highly trained staff with a more robust program dedicated to reviewing actual calls to learn what went well and what should be improved

- More exposure to and training on low frequency but high risk events such as structure fires
- Greater capacity to manage large-scale emergency events
- Quicker access to new technology
- Economies of scale – the costs will be shared with the other jurisdictions

We encourage you to fully review this recommendation, forward it to City Council and begin the necessary steps to execute this transition.

Sincerely,



Jerry Strait
Police Chief



John Bailot
Fire Chief



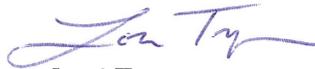
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911 CALL ANSWERING AND PUBLIC SAFETY DISPATCHING ANALYSIS

April 8, 2019

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INTRODUCTION

The idea of regional cooperation in the provision of government services has been a frequent topic of conversation in the past several years. The concept of multiple governmental organizations joining together to provide services has the potential, in the right circumstances, to allow for more efficiency and an expansion in capability in the provision of services, saving jurisdictions money and reducing the duplication of service provision. Consolidation of 911 call taking and public safety dispatching functions has become very common across the United States due to the high cost of training and keeping personnel and the substantial technology investment involved in today's communication centers.

The City of Worthington has undertaken an evaluation of this operation to consider the best strategy for providing 911 call taking and public safety dispatching services. Given the City's size, the City operates a small communications center. This industry experiences ever-increasing technological demands, intensive training requirements and the need for frequent financial investments. It is difficult for the City of Worthington to keep up with the needs and expectations for this service area.

A number of employees in the Center have retired or resigned for personal reasons in the last few years and it has been challenging to fill vacancies with qualified individuals who successfully complete the training period. Nationally, this industry experiences high turnover and centers in Central Ohio as well as elsewhere struggle to hire people who are truly suited to the job. It is a challenging one that requires extensive training and capability. It is even more challenging to fill positions while we are evaluating whether to continue to operate the Center. We are at a critical decision-making point and need to decide whether to continue to operate the Worthington Center, which will require a robust recruitment, hiring and training initiative as well as other investments, or to join the Northwest Regional Emergency Communications Center which provides these services for Dublin, Hilliard, Upper Arlington, Norwich Township and Washington Township.

The City of Worthington joined with the Cities of Dublin, Hilliard and Upper Arlington and the Townships of Washington and Norwich in a Consolidation Feasibility Study performed by L.R. Kimball. This study was funded by the State of Ohio through a Local Government Innovation Fund grant. The report of that study was released in September 2013. The study evaluated the feasibility of consolidation of the respective Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) into a single center. The study concluded that a consolidated center was feasible and it identified details to be addressed in order to implement a consolidated center. This report provides additional analysis specific to Worthington.

This analysis evaluates the City's current operation and any improvements and/or changes in operation that should occur if the City continues to operate its own communications center. A consolidation alternative is also evaluated to determine whether the City should look to join another entity for the provision of 911 call taking and public safety dispatching services.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An extensive analysis has been completed of the City's 911 call taking and public safety dispatching operation, the investments that must be made to incorporate best practices now and in the future, and the option of joining the Northwest Regional Emergency Communications Center which provides these services for Dublin, Hilliard, Upper Arlington, Norwich Township and Washington Township. **After a thorough review of the benefits and drawbacks of continued operation of the Worthington Communications Center or joining with the Northwest Center (also known as NRECC), it is recommended that the City of Worthington join the Northwest Center.**

The Northwest Center provides multiple benefits that are more fully evaluated in the alternatives analysis and recommendations sections in this report. Perhaps the most impactful benefit is the reduction, and in many cases elimination, of wireless call transfers to 911. The Northwest Center is a primary center which means it takes wireless 911 calls directly. This eliminates the current delay in the answering of the calls by a primary center and then transferring the calls to Worthington, which is a secondary center. This can save as much as 45 to 60 second per call and allows for quicker response times for police, fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) services.

Another important benefit is the ability to separate call answering from dispatching. One communications technician can stay on the line with the caller while another technician communicates with public safety personnel. The Northwest Center's personnel are highly trained and experienced and the center provides a very high level of service. Calls are handled professionally and respectfully. The Northwest Center will dispatch Worthington police and fire/EMS personnel, so the responders who arrive on the scene will be the same as they are today.

Given the larger scale and sophistication of the Northwest Center, this recommendation will result in greater access to new technology and more experience with low frequency emergency events. Funding for this high cost operation will be shared with the other jurisdictions served by the Northwest Center (Cities of Dublin, Hilliard and Upper Arlington and Townships of Norwich and Washington), which will result in greater ability to implement new technology and new approaches to communicating with the public and dispatching public safety personnel.

The Cities of Hilliard and Upper Arlington and the Townships of Norwich and Washington are already served by the Northwest Center. Each of these jurisdictions has successfully managed the transition which indicates such a service consolidation approach in a suburban environment can be successfully implemented.

Additional detail of the evaluation of the options is provided in the sections that follow.



EXISTING OPERATION

The City of Worthington currently operates its own 911 call taking and public safety dispatching Communications Center. It provides dispatching services for Worthington Police and Fire/EMS. The City of Worthington's Communications Center receives landline 911 calls directly; however wireless 911 calls are first routed through one of the primary communication centers (the Northwest Center, Franklin County Sheriff's Office, Columbus or Westerville) and then transferred to the Worthington Center.

The Worthington Center is a part of the Division of Police and is staffed by nine fulltime Communication Technicians and multiple part-timers. The Center is currently short-staffed with six of the nine fulltime positions filled. The Center has eight part-time positions filled. It is managed by the Operations Support Manager who reports directly to the Chief of Police. Due to the staffing shortage, the Operations Support Manager regularly works as a Communications Technician to help cover the staffing vacancies. She must handle her supervisory and administrative duties on top of filling in to cover responsibilities in the Center. The Center is operated 24 hours per day, seven days per week and there are typically two Communication Technicians on duty at any given time. The Technicians answer 911 calls and dispatch the calls. Even when at full staffing, the duties are not segregated between call taking and dispatching due to the small size of the operation.

All of the existing fulltime Communications Technicians are certified to perform emergency medical dispatching. Full implementation of emergency medical dispatching requires one Technician to remain on the line with the caller to obtain more information for the emergency responders and to give pre-arrival instructions following the emergency medical dispatching protocols. With two Technicians on duty, this is not feasible. Both Technicians need to be able to handle communication with callers as well as with public safety personnel (police and fire/EMS).

The Communication Technicians perform a variety of additional administrative duties, including greeting walk-in visitors and answering the general, non-emergency phone line for the Division of Police and for the Division of Fire & EMS when the administrative assistant is not at work. The Technicians also monitor prisoners, perform matron duties, collect bonds and fines associated with Mayor's Court when the Court office is closed, support the police officers, perform notary duties and miscellaneous other duties. The presence of the Center in the police building allows for administrative support at all times.

The City relies on substantial investments in technology to support the operation. The City utilizes a TriTech Vision system which provides software for computer-aided dispatching, records management, mapping and in-vehicle mobile data systems. The City's 911 controller, which serves as the technological backbone for routing 911 calls and associated data to the Center, is a remote operation off the City of Columbus' Intrado Viper primary controller. The City participates in the Central Ohio Interoperable Radio System (COIRS) for public safety radio functions, along with Delaware County and the Cities of Dublin, Hilliard and Upper Arlington. The City has been notified of the pending end of life and support for computer-aided dispatching,



records management, mapping and in-vehicle mobile data systems software which will require a significant investment in the near future. The City is also planning for the purchase and installation of a new fire station alerting system that notifies the firefighters and paramedics when they must respond.

The operating expenses for fiscal year 2018 associated with Worthington's Communications Center were estimated at \$1,357,748. Personnel costs made up 80.7% of the total operating expenses, with the remaining funds primarily supporting technology equipment. There are several anticipated capital costs associated with the Communications Center in the next five years, which include new computer-aided dispatching software, new emergency medical dispatching software and a new fire station alerting system.

Worthington's Communications Center handles calls for service for Police, Fire and EMS. In 2018 the center handled 3,367 EMS calls and 1,345 Fire calls, which includes 1,364 mutual aid calls for Fire or EMS, 25,612 calls for Police and 8,370 Police traffic stops. The calls to the Center in 2018 involved 3,525 calls to 911.

Newly hired Communications Technicians must complete an on-the-job training program prior to working independently. The training program typically lasts 12 weeks but may be shorter or longer depending on the needs of the individual being trained. The training involves classes on emergency medical dispatching (EMD). Utilization of EMD is a best practice and beginning in 2021, EMD training is mandatory for all fulltime and part-time dispatchers.

Summary of L.R. Kimball Report

L.R. Kimball completed a consolidation feasibility study in September 2013 evaluating the potential to consolidate Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) for the Cities of Dublin, Hilliard, Upper Arlington and Worthington and the Townships of Norwich and Washington. The study concluded "the most cost effective and logical direction of consolidation is to merge via contract and/or intergovernmental agreement all regional call taking and dispatching functions under the City of Dublin's PSAP". The report indicated the Dublin PSAP has the organizational base and systems that are most viable for expansion in support of a consolidated operation. These systems include CAD and records management systems, 911 telephone system and logging recorder.

The report notes that consolidation into the Dublin PSAP has the potential to reduce the total number of staff from 42 plus 5 part-time employees employed at the time of the study across the four PSAPs to 35-40 in a consolidated center. It noted total costs for all four PSAPs were approximately \$4.5 million. The analysis suggested total costs of a consolidated center would decrease, specifically for overall personnel costs.

The study identified the radio systems as one of the most complex issues to be addressed with consolidation as two cities (Dublin and Worthington) operate on the Central Ohio Interoperable Communications System (COIRS) and the other two cities (Upper Arlington and Hilliard) operate on the City of Columbus system. The two separate radio systems require either two



radio consoles or more likely, full console functionality for one of the systems and the use of control stations for the other radio system. (Note: Since the report was completed, the Cities of Hilliard and Upper Arlington have joined the Northwest Regional Emergency Communications Center operated by the City of Dublin for PSAP services and joined COIRS.) The City of Worthington and the City of Dublin operate on the same radio system, so the radio issues raised in the report will not directly affect Worthington if the Northwest Center provides services to Worthington.

L.R. Kimball recommended the City of Worthington and the City of Upper Arlington join with the City of Hilliard in contracting with the City of Dublin for PSAP services.

Alternative 1: Continue Existing Operation

The first alternative is to continue the operation of the Worthington Center, which is described earlier in this report. The financial cost of continued operation of the Worthington Center in 2020 is expected to be in the range of \$1,500,000. Total 2018 costs were \$1,358,000 which include the operational costs of the center as well as the cost for the public safety radio system. If the City of Worthington continues to operate its own center, there are several investments and changes that are recommended to make enhancements to our operation. Given the size of the Center, we would still struggle to fully incorporate best practices. Additional funds will need to be invested to implement the activities listed below to enhance the operation and service quality. One-time costs in the amount of \$339,000 are anticipated for software updates and enhancement and alerting in the fire station. Even with these investments, we would not be able to provide all of the capabilities and levels of support provided by the Northwest Center.

INVESTMENTS AND CHANGES NECESSARY FOR CONTINUED OPERATION OF THE WORTHINGTON CENTER

- **Formalized Backup Facility:** A formalized arrangement for a backup facility should be developed. There are informal options currently available, but no formalized arrangements and plans are in place.
- **Enhanced Training Program:** Enhancements should be made to the training program to insure all Communications Technicians are certified in Emergency Medical Dispatching (EMD) and to incorporate standards developed by the National Emergency Number Association (NENA) and the Association of Public Safety Communications Officials, International (APCO). NENA and APCO are professional organizations focused on policy, technology, operations and education issues and they publish standards associated to the operation of public safety dispatching centers. While training can be achieved, full implementation of EMD is not possible without an increase in staffing for the Center to allow a technician to stay on the line with the caller.



- **Improved Data Tracking System:** A system needs to be put in place to increase the amount of data available and evaluated regarding the operation, including call answering times and response times.
- **Initiatives to Address Staffing Shortage:** Hiring processes will need to be initiated to attempt to fill four fulltime positions. Testing, interviews and backgrounds normally require at least four months. Once hired, new Communications Technicians undergo a training period of at least three months. Current fulltime technicians serve as trainers and it will be difficult to train multiple individuals at the same time given the shortage of trainers. Staffing challenges in the Communications Center have been ongoing for many years and experience suggests new technicians may not be successful during their probationary training. In addition, two of the current technicians are eligible to retire. We can expect to have staffing shortages for the foreseeable future.

BENEFITS TO CONTINUED OPERATION OF THE WORTHINGTON CENTER

- **Ability to Control the Operation:** If Worthington is operating its own center, it has direct control and influence over the selection and performance of personnel, the way in which the Center operates and the investments that are made.
- **Police Building Administrative Support Available 24 Hours per Day:** The Communications Technicians provide assistance with administrative duties, which provides for administrative support 24 hours per day.

DRAWBACKS TO CONTINUED OPERATION OF THE WORTHINGTON CENTER

- **Wireless Call Transfers and Resulting Delay:** When a person places a call from a wireless phone, the call is answered by one of the four primary public safety answering points. Worthington is a secondary center, so the wireless call first goes to a primary center, the call taker queries the caller for enough information to determine the appropriate dispatching center and then transfers the call to Worthington when appropriate. The Worthington Communications Technician then queries the caller for information and dispatches the appropriate personnel. The transfer adds about 45 to 60 seconds to the emergency response process.
- **No Ability to Segregate Call Taking from Dispatching:** In larger centers, call taking and dispatching functions can be separated. This provides for a dedicated person to answer the 911 call and stay on the line with the caller, which allows for full implementation of emergency medical dispatching. The call information is relayed to a dispatcher who focuses on dispatching public safety personnel and interacting with the personnel as needed during the incident. Worthington maintains two Communication Technicians on duty. Given the limited number of personnel, both must be available to answer calls. This results in the same person answering the 911 call, taking the information and dispatching public safety personnel. The person on the 911 call must wait while the Communications Technician relays information to personnel. If the 911



caller is anxious and not willing to pause, the Technician may be delayed in the dispatching process. Due to the prevalence of mobile telephones, numerous callers often call regarding a single incident, which can quickly overload a smaller operation of two technicians.

- **Staffing Challenges:** Employee turnover nationally in the 911 dispatching field is very high. Most centers operate short staffed and are challenged with maintaining a sufficient number of fully trained employees. Short staffing has a greater impact on small centers like Worthington's because there are fewer individuals available to cover the extra shifts when vacancies occur. The extensive training required of new Communications Technicians results in a 12-week or longer training period after hire before the person can operate independently. New hires frequently fail to successfully complete the training.
- **Additional Communications Technician Positions Needed to Fully Implement Best Practices:** In order to fully implement EMD and other best practices, the Center would need to have at least one additional Communications Technician on duty. The additional staff positions needed to fulfill this addition are not included in the cost evaluation included in this report.
- **Funding of Operation:** In today's world, public safety dispatching operations are very sophisticated and rely on expensive technology systems and equipment. Small centers like Worthington's cannot obtain the economies of scale possible in larger operations and thus tend to struggle to keep up with the financial investment required to provide a quality operation.
- **Training Needs:** Extensive training is required of call takers and dispatchers in order to provide the high level of support needed by police, fire and EMS personnel. This involves months of training when someone is hired as well as ongoing training to keep skills sharp. Larger centers can operate their own training programs. Small centers must find access to training and must find a way, with limited staff, to cover the shifts of those individuals at the training.
- **Less Exposure to Low Frequency Events:** Low frequency events are by definition events that don't happen very often. An example is a working structure fire. Thankfully, the incidences of structure fires in our country today are few. While low in frequency, they are high in risk and are very dispatcher intensive. This means a dispatcher may not work a structure fire over a span of several years. The smaller the center, the less likely these types of events occur within the service area. A center that serves a broader area is more likely to gain experience in working the low frequency events.



Alternative 2: Join the Northwest Regional Emergency Communications Center (Northwest Center or NRECC)

The City of Dublin operates the Northwest Regional Emergency Communications Center. The Northwest Regional Emergency Communications Center (Northwest Center) was created on October 1, 2013 when the City of Dublin, Washington Township, City of Hilliard and Norwich Township entered into a collaboration for public safety dispatching. The City of Upper Arlington joined the Northwest Center for call taking and dispatching services in 2017. Dispatching for Upper Arlington Fire began in October 2017 with police dispatching starting in January 2018.

The Northwest Center serves as one of four regional 911 answering points for wireless calls in Franklin County. In addition to being the primary answering point for all wireline and VoIP calls in Dublin, Hilliard and Upper Arlington, the center also is the first point of answer for 911 calls and Text to 911 messages placed from wireless devices in much of northwest Franklin County. Wireless calls received into the Northwest Center that need to be dispatched by another center are questioned for location and type of emergency then transferred to the appropriate dispatch facility. This causes a delay of approximately 45 to 60 seconds and requires the caller to explain the details of the emergency twice.

The Northwest Center is one of seven communications centers in Ohio that possess Communications Center Accreditation through the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA). It is the only such accredited communications center in Central Ohio. The Northwest Center also holds APCO P33 certification for its training program. APCO Project 33 is a formal mechanism for public safety agencies to certify that their training programs meet APCO American National Standards for public safety communications operations.

Although the center functions on a "contract for service" basis, it operates much like a consolidated entity. An Executive Committee made up of the police chief and/or fire chief of each participating public safety agency meets regularly to advise on the overall mission, goals and operational direction of the center. Two policy subcommittees, one for law enforcement and one for fire/EMS, include representatives from each agency and meet regularly to advise on policy and procedure as well as resolve operational problems or concerns. The Northwest Center Director and the Northwest Center Operations Manager participate in all three committees to ensure the highest quality of service. These committees and their function are included in the contractual agreements between the parties.

Minimum staffing in the center is currently four telecommunicators on duty at all times. One technician is assigned as the Dublin Police dispatcher, one technician is assigned as the Hilliard Police dispatcher, one technician is assigned as the Upper Arlington Police dispatcher and one technician is assigned as the Northwest Fire dispatcher. During the peak activity time period (Monday through Friday, 6:45 a.m. to 10:45 p.m), minimum staffing increases to five to add a dedicated call taker to assist with call processing. The Northwest Center is currently hiring to fill



vacant positions. Once these positions are filled and the people are trained, they anticipate changing to six technicians Monday through Friday between 10:45 a.m. to 6:45 p.m. This will keep the radio dispatch positions out of the telephone answering mix as much as possible so they can focus on radio dispatching at all times.

Currently, each law enforcement agency has a dedicated radio dispatcher. This current configuration is based upon equitable distribution of work load. When additional law enforcement agencies are added, it is anticipated that the law enforcement dispatch configuration will be re-assessed and agencies grouped onto radio talk-groups based on workload. The design of this configuration will involve the input and direction of the executive committee as well as the law enforcement policy subcommittee.

Fire dispatching is accomplished using a unified dispatch concept. All calls for service are dispatched on a common voice alarm talk-group then assigned to a specific tactical talk-group. Workload statistics will determine how many telecommunicators are assigned to fire dispatching.

The Northwest Center requires that all telecommunicators complete a 22 to 30-week communications training (CTO) program before being assigned to work independently. This is a structured training program that utilizes standard evaluation guidelines, daily observation reports and a mix of classroom and on the job training. The training program is based on the APCO (Association of Public Safety Communications Officials, International) CTO model and is certified by APCO as meeting the Project 33 training standards. Trainees are not considered released until they demonstrate they can call take and dispatch all functions within the center. All employees are certified as Emergency Medical Dispatchers by the APCO Institute and receive their training during the classroom portion of the training program. The Northwest Center has eight APCO-certified Communications Training Officers that are also Advanced Fire Dispatch and Emergency Medical Dispatch certified instructors.

The Northwest Center utilizes a SunGard OSSI system which provides software for computer-aided dispatching, records management and in-vehicle mobile data systems. Integration with the City's records management and other public safety software systems will need to be implemented to allow for the transfer of data. Upper Arlington utilizes the same software systems in support of police and fire/EMS as Worthington and we can look to implement a similar interface to allow for data sharing from the dispatching system to the police, fire and EMS software systems.

If Worthington joins the Northwest Center, Worthington would become integrated into this system and be supported by this highly trained and professional center. If Worthington is no longer operating its own Communications Center, the hours for in-person administrative support at the police building would be scaled back since the presence of the Worthington Communications Center in the Police Building provides for this support twenty-four hours per day. Administrative support personnel would be hired to provide support for the police officers and the public which is currently provided by the Communications Technicians, and to provide evening and Saturday hours at the Police Building. The entrance to the building would be



modified to allow for the doors to be secured after hours. A vestibule area would be created to allow a person to get out of the elements and use a call box that connects to the dispatching center. If a person needs a police officer, the officer would be dispatched to the building, which is the same as currently occurs during evening and weekend hours when police officers are not routinely inside the building. The cost estimates include funding for two administrative support positions which would allow for administrative staffing on weekdays from 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. and on Saturdays from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Outside of those times, people could utilize the call boxes to request a police officer.

There are a number of calls currently handled by the Communications Center that are not related to the Divisions of Police and Fire/EMS. After hours calls for the Department of Service and Engineering such as sewer back-ups, street problems, traffic signal outages and snow/ice problems are received by the Center and the appropriate staff are dispatched. The Northwest Center has indicated it can receive those calls and dispatch the appropriate personnel as part of the service it provides.

Worthington Police utilize the State's Law Enforcement Automated Data System (LEADS) to enter and obtain information about warrants for arrest. The LEADS terminal must be staffed 24 hours-per-day and it is currently monitored by the Communications Center. If the Northwest Center is providing the call taking and dispatching duties and Worthington is no longer providing staff in the police building 24 hours-per-day, the Northwest Center has agreed to monitor the LEADS system for Worthington Police. Worthington will maintain a LEADS terminal to validate Worthington records, submit inquiries when needed during working hours, and to provide officer training.

Support for Worthington Mayor's Court that is currently provided by the Worthington Center outside of the Court's office hours will be provided by the Worthington administrative support personnel or by an automated kiosk or a police officer when in-person administrative support is not available in the police building. This support includes activities such as receipt of bond or fine payments, jail commitment or release paperwork, release of seized vehicles and updating warrant information in the LEADS system. The Northwest Center would handle entering and updating warrant information in the LEADS system.

The financial cost of this option is expected to be in the range of \$1,185,000 after the first year of transition. This includes expenditures of about \$800,000 for the Northwest Center to provide services and about \$220,000 for additional Police administrative support positions to provide support to the officers and public that is currently provided by the Communication Technicians. One-time costs in the amount of \$550,000 are anticipated for such items as software modification and installation, modifications to the entrance of the Police Building, a kiosk to process Mayor's Court payments after hours and a new fire station alerting system. In addition to these one-time costs, the City anticipates it would have personnel-related costs in the first half of 2020 for the ramp up period at the Northwest Center while also experiencing costs associated with the continued operation of the Worthington Center until such transfer takes place.



BENEFITS TO JOINING THE NORTHWEST CENTER

- **Quicker Dispatch/Response Time for Wireless Calls due to Fewer Call Transfers:** The Northwest Center serves as a primary answering point for wireless 911 calls. This means it receives the wireless calls directly and then transfers them as necessary to other dispatching centers. The Northwest Center can receive most of the Worthington wireless calls, which would not need to be transferred. This transfer results in an estimated delay time of 45 to 60 seconds and requires the caller to repeat information already provided to the first answering point.
- **Ability to Segregate Call Taking from Call Dispatching:** The Northwest Center operates with a greater number of staff on duty at any given time. This increases the ability to segregate call taking and dispatching functions. When these duties are segregated, a telecommunicator can stay on the phone with the 911 caller while a separate telecommunicator can dispatch public safety personnel.
- **Expanded Implementation of Emergency Medical Dispatching (EMD):** The ability to have a designated call taker allows for the call taker to stay on the line with the caller and focus on querying of the caller as well as instructions for the caller. The call taker can provide emergency medical dispatching without being interrupted to dispatch public safety personnel. EMD provides pre-arrival instruction to the caller on how to respond to the medical emergency.
- **Greater Capacity for Large Events:** Communication centers have times when activity is quieter and other times when there is a high level of activity. Some emergency situations can generate such a large amount of activity that the center can become overwhelmed. A larger center with more staff on duty is less likely to become overwhelmed due to events that are occurring. A center that serves a larger geographical area is also less likely to have an event that impacts the entire service area, thus can shift staff assigned to a quieter area to assist with the busy area.
- **Supervision on Each Shift:** The Northwest Center plans to operate with a supervisor on duty during each shift. This provides for a person available at all times to work through issues and procedural questions when they arise rather than waiting for the next time a supervisor is on duty.
- **Coordination with Other Jurisdictions:** The Northwest Center serves multiple jurisdictions, thus is aware of activities that are occurring in each of those communities and is in communication with public safety personnel across the jurisdictions. This allows for advance communication and improved coordination when incidents span the jurisdictional boundaries. Worthington does not frequently respond with Dublin, Hilliard, Norwich, Upper Arlington or Washington, but common dispatching by the Northwest Center would enhance the coordination when such an event occurs.



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- **Greater Ability to Obtain Grant Funding:** Grant programs often place a priority on programs or initiatives that involve multiple jurisdictions. Since the Northwest Center involves cooperation and impacts across jurisdictions, the ability to obtain grant funds would be enhanced.
 - **Possibility for Enhanced Operations:** Consolidated dispatching operations encourage the entities involved to interact more frequently and discuss the ways in which they operate. This is likely to result in standardization of operating procedures across agencies.
 - **Economies of Scale:** Given the expense of operating a public safety communications center, there are benefits to a larger operation, which is more likely to achieve economies of scale and the multiple jurisdictions involved would share the cost of technology and capital investments.
 - **Greater Access to New Technology:** As a larger operation, the Northwest Center has more resources available to acquire and support the technology systems associated with this type of operation. This is expected to result in accelerated implementation of new technology as well as more robust programs related to security updates, security systems and disaster recovery capability.
 - **Access to Training:** Larger centers are more apt and able to make advanced training available, thus enhancing the expertise of its employees. The Northwest Center employees are trained consistent with standards established by the Association of Public Safety Communication Officials (APCO), National Emergency Number Association (NENA), and the Commission for Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA).
 - **Highly Trained and Certified Communications Center:** The Northwest Center has one of the 71 nationally-approved APCO Agency Training Program certifications and is one of seven communications centers in Ohio that possess Communications Center Accreditation through the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA).
 - **More Frequent Exposure to Low Frequency Events:** The Northwest Center is a larger center that handles a greater number of calls. The broader service area and higher call volume results in more frequent exposure to low frequency events. Some emergency responses occur on a very infrequent basis; however it is important that they be handled appropriately. More frequent exposure to these low frequency events is beneficial to developing experience and the associated expertise with how to handle the events.
 - **High Level of Citizen Service:** The City of Worthington provides a high level of support and responsiveness to its citizens. This is a trait that is shared by the City of Dublin. The Northwest Center is accustomed to this high level of responsiveness and would provide the same service to Worthington residents.



- **More Worthington Focus on Public Safety Response:** Public safety communications centers are very resource intensive. From the frequent need to recruit, hire, train and manage personnel to support for the extensive technology utilized in the center, staff throughout the City organization dedicate significant resources toward managing the operation. These resources can be re-allocated toward supporting the public safety response by police and fire/EMS, as well as other parts of the City organization as necessary.
- **Non-Public Safety Support:** The Northwest Center will handle the non-public safety and non-emergency calls from Worthington residents and businesses that occur outside of normal office hours.
- **LEADS Monitoring:** The Northwest Center will monitor the LEADS system for Worthington Police, preventing the requirement for Worthington Police to have staffing in the building 24 hours per day.

CHANGES THAT WOULD RESULT FROM JOINING THE NORTHWEST CENTER

- **Change in Hours for In-Person Staffing at Police Building for Administrative Support:** If Worthington is no longer operating its own Communications Center, the availability of in-person administrative support in the police building would have more limited hours than the current 24 hours per day. Administrative support staff would be available 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. weekdays and 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Saturdays. Additional administrative support personnel would be hired to provide assistance during these hours. Call boxes would be installed to facilitate calls to the Northwest Center at any time of day or night, and a police officer would be dispatched to the building. A person that arrives at the building outside of the hours noted above would utilize a telephone in the front entry of the building to communicate with the Northwest Center, who would then dispatch police to the building as needed. The front entry of the police building would need to be remodeled to be able to lock doors.
- **Indirect Influence Over Operations:** Worthington would no longer have direct influence over staff and operations. The Northwest Center operates with an Executive Committee and two policy subcommittees which advise on the overall mission, goals, operational direction, and policy and procedures as well as resolve operational problems or concerns. This would enable Worthington to have influence over the operations of the Northwest Center, but not direct control.

TRANSITION STEPS FOR JOINING THE NORTHWEST CENTER

- **Ensure the Northwest Center has Knowledge of Worthington:** Information about Worthington will be provided as needed to the employees at the Northwest Center, so they are familiar with the Worthington community, major landmarks, and the operations



of the police and fire/EMS personnel. The Northwest Center already answers wireless 911 calls for Worthington, thus has experience with querying the caller to determine the location of the emergency in Worthington. The Northwest Center's Computer Aided Dispatching (CAD) software has included Worthington mapping for several years, thus they already have the ability to identify Worthington locations via the software. Additionally, Northwest Center employees will have the ability to ride along with police and fire/EMS crews to enhance their familiarity with Worthington. If additional steps are identified that would be beneficial for sharing Worthington information with the Northwest Center, they will be pursued.

- **Ensure Worthington Police and Fire Personnel have knowledge of the Northwest Center Operations:** Information about the existing operational guidelines followed by agencies dispatched by the Northwest Center would be shared with Worthington responders to ensure a seamless transition of services. This would include responder specific training sessions, responders participating in observation of the operations at the Northwest Center, as well as the creation of operational policies and procedures.
- **Support for Worthington Communications Technicians:** Worthington would no longer need to employ the people currently providing the call taking and dispatching functions in Worthington. Some of the individuals might be hired as new administrative support personnel. Some of the individuals might be hired by the Northwest Center or another dispatching center. The City of Worthington would work with each individual to determine his/her interests for the future and seek ways to assist them while in transition.
- **Re-Allocation of Administrative Duties:** Additional administrative support staff would need to be hired for the administrative duties currently handled by the Communications Technicians and to provide administrative support in the evenings and on Saturdays. Staff anticipates the need for two additional administrative support positions to provide coverage Monday through Friday from 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m., and on Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. It is anticipated that these positions would be filled with current Communications Technicians.

Recommendations

As noted in this report, there has been extensive evaluation of two options: (a) continued operation a City of Worthington 911 call taking and public safety dispatching communications center, or (b) join the Northwest Regional Emergency Communications Center (Northwest Center) operated by the City of Dublin. Based on this evaluation, it is recommended that the City of Worthington join the Northwest Center for call taking and public safety dispatch services. The cities of Hilliard and Upper Arlington and the Townships of Norwich and Washington have successfully completed similar transitions to a contract relationship with the Northwest Center. All entities are very pleased with the service level provided by the Northwest Center and have noted the relationship is a positive one.



While the positive experiences from the other jurisdictions help to validate this recommendation, the recommendation is driven by the evaluation of benefits and drawbacks detailed in this report.

Joining the Northwest Center allows us to enhance the services provided for the community. The Northwest Center has the following benefits, which are detailed in the Alternative 2 analysis section above. These benefits are extensive and impactful for the public.

- Quicker Dispatch/Response Time for Wireless Calls due to Fewer Call Transfers
- Ability to Segregate Call Taking from Call Dispatching
- Expanded Implementation of Emergency Medical Dispatching
- Greater Capacity for Large Emergency Events
- Supervision on Each Shift
- Coordination with Other Jurisdictions
- Greater Ability to Obtain Grant Funding
- Possibility for Enhanced Operations
- Economies of Scale
- Greater Access to New Technology
- Access to Training
- Highly Trained and Certified Communications Center
- More Frequent Exposure to Low Frequency Events
- High Level of Citizen Service
- More Worthington Focus on Public Safety Response
- Non-Public Safety Support
- LEADS Monitoring

The changes that would result from joining the Northwest Center noted in the analysis were considered in making this recommendation:



Change in Hours for In-Person Staffing in Police Building for Administrative Support: Under the recommendation, the Worthington Communications Center would no longer operate in the police building. The presence of the staff in the Center provides administrative support 24 hours per day. This report assumes the presence of administrative support personnel in the building during the hours of 7:00 a.m. – 11:00 p.m. Monday through Friday and 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. on Saturday. There is very minimal walk-in traffic outside of these hours. If someone needs to see a Worthington police officer outside of these hours, a phone will be available inside the entrance of the building to call to the Northwest Center and have an officer dispatched to the building. Even with the Worthington Center in operation currently, the police officers are typically out on patrol outside of normal weekday office hours, so an officer must be dispatched to return to the building to meet with a visitor.

Indirect Influence over the Operation: The City of Worthington has direct control over its own center. The City of Dublin would operate the Northwest Center and the center serves multiple jurisdictions. This results less direct control, however the Northwest Center operates at a very high service level, with much more extensive access to technology and training than Worthington can achieve today. Additionally, the Northwest Center operates with an Executive Committee and two policy subcommittees comprised of representatives of all the jurisdictions served by the Northwest Center. Worthington would participate in these committees and would have the ability to influence the Northwest Center operations.

Each of the changes noted above can be addressed as indicated. It is our belief that there are more drawbacks than benefits to continued operation of the Worthington Center. A significant drawback to the current operation is the delay involved in the transfer of wireless calls to 911. These calls are first answered by one of the primary centers in the region and transferred to Worthington. This can add 45 to 60 seconds before the call can be handled and responders dispatched. The Northwest Center is a primary center and takes wireless calls directly.

Another drawback to the Worthington Center is the inability to separate call taking from dispatching, which allows for one person to stay on the 911 call with the caller gathering information while another person is dispatching the first responders. The Worthington operation is too small to allow for this segregation of duties, requiring one person to juggle communications with both the caller and the responders.

Additionally, the City experiences challenges in fully resourcing this critical service. As a small center, it is difficult to keep up with the technology investments in this technology-heavy service area and the Worthington Center operates with a small number of employees. Turnover is high in this industry and training is extensive, not only upon initial hire but ongoing training to keep skills sharp. Every personnel vacancy is amplified in a small center and it is difficult to pull people away for their normal duty assignments to complete training.

The recommendation to move to the Northwest Center is in no way a reflection on the existing staff in the Worthington Communications Center. Worthington has many talented and dedicated employees that currently work and have previously worked in this Center. They strive every day to provide a high level of professional service to the community and in support of our police and



fire/EMS personnel. Given that this is the lowest fulltime staffing level the City has experienced in recent memory, this is the time to implement the recommendation and impact the fewest fulltime staff members. Two new administrative support positions are recommended, which are opportunities for affected staff members. Some staff members are discussing possible plans for retirement, thus may not be looking for long-term fulltime positions. Given the high turnover in this industry and the resulting heavy demand for public safety communications technicians, opportunities with other agencies are expected to be available. If the recommended transition to the Northwest Center occurs, the City of Worthington will work with each individual in the Worthington Center to develop resources both internally and externally for job placement opportunities, including contacting other jurisdictions regarding communication technician vacancies. All current fulltime Communication Technician will be eligible to apply for fulltime employment with the Northwest Center.



APPENDIX 1
CITY OF WORTHINGTON COMMUNICATION CENTER EXPENSE ANALYSIS

	Worthington Center		Northwest Center	
	2020 Projected	2021 Projected	2020 Projected	2021 Projected
Operating Costs				
Personnel Costs*	1,320,000	1,355,000	775,000	225,000
Contract Services	175,000	180,000	930,000	960,000
Technology Equipment	15,000	15,000	2,000	2,000
Total Operating Expenses	1,510,000	1,550,000	1,707,000	1,187,000
 Capital/One Time Expenses				
CAD Software	50,000			
EMD Software	28,000			
CAD to CAD Integration	40,000			
2019 Software Catch-up	72,000			
Station Alerting	150,000		100,000	
NRECC Workstation Additions			255,000	
MDT Software (\$1,275 per MDT)			24,000	
Central Square CAD Resource Monitor			6,000	
IP Connectivity			3,000	
Modifications to Police & Fire Buildings			110,000	
CAD Integration with Police Software (RMS)			25,000	
Mayor's Court Kiosk			30,000	
Total One-Time Expenses	340,000		553,000	
 Total Projected Costs for Transition (2020)	 1,850,000		 2,260,000	
 Total Costs Annual Costs, Starting in 2021		 1,550,000		 1,187,000

* Personnel costs in 2020 include the cost to continue to operate the Worthington Center for six months before switching to the Northwest Center