



SHAKER HEIGHTS

Memorandum

To: Members of Council

From: William M. Ondrey Gruber
Director of Law

cc: Mayor David E. Weiss
Jeri E. Chaikin, CAO
John Potts, Director of Finance
Jeffrey DeMuth, Chief of Police
Patrick Sweeney, Chief of Fire

Date: July 16, 2021

Re: Presentation on the Recommendation that the City Approve the Dissolution of the HHCC Joint Dispatch Center, and Join the Chagrin Valley Dispatch Council (CVD)

Summary

This presentation is for the purpose of explaining the Administration's recommendation that the City approve the dissolution of the Heights Hillcrest Communications Center (HHCC), and enter into an agreement with the Chagrin Valley Dispatch Council (CVD), a regional Council of Governments, to join CVD's joint Police, Fire and Emergency Medical Services communications system for the dispatch of Police, Fire and EMS services.

History of the Heights Hillcrest Communications Center (HHCC)

In 2011 there were 48 Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) for the 59 jurisdictions in Cuyahoga County. PSAPs answer calls and dispatch first responders to a caller's location, or transfer calls to the appropriate PSAP based in caller location. This is the largest number of PSAPs in the state of Ohio and one of the highest in the US. Of 88 counties in Ohio, only four (4) have more than 10 PSAPs.

In 2012, Cuyahoga County hired a consultant to conduct an assessment of the PSAPs. The study concluded that the County should work toward reducing the number of PSAPs through continued support of consolidation and the promotion of regionalism. The County began recommending the consolidation of PSAPs. In 2013 there were 42 PSAPs, and it was expected the number would be at 38 by early 2015.

Meanwhile, the State developed a plan to mandate PSAP consolidation statewide. The County recognized that financial support was needed to encourage and facilitate consolidation. In 2013 the County issued a 9-1-1 Consolidation Plan and established a 9-1-1 Consolidation Shared Services Fund to support physical and technical infrastructure, professional services, equipment and upgrades needed to support consolidations.

In 2013, South Euclid hired the Center for Public Management of the Maxine Goodwin Levin College of Urban Affairs at Cleveland State University to conduct a "Feasibility Study of Consolidating Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) in South Euclid, Beachwood, Euclid, Shaker Heights, and University Heights". The Center's report was issued on September 23, 2013. The Study found that it was legally, technologically, and financially feasible to consolidate PSAPs in the five cities.

On March 17, 2016, Cleveland Heights, Shaker Heights, South Euclid and University Heights entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to apply jointly to the County for funding to support the creation of a joint dispatch center. The cities received \$1 million to assist in the formation of a joint dispatch center.

On June 28, 2016, the four cities entered into an Agreement to form a Regional Council of Governments (COG), pursuant to Chapter 167 of the Ohio Revised Code, to be called the “Heights-Hillcrest Communications Center” (HHCC). Then on September 1, 2017, the four cities entered into an amended COG Agreement with the City of Richmond Heights to add the city to the HHCC as an Original Member, as defined in the HHCC COG Agreement.

HHCC was formed to establish and operate a Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP), a joint Police, Fire and Emergency Medical Services (“EMS”) communications system for the dispatch of Police, Fire and EMS services in and for the five cities.

On December 1, 2016, HHCC entered into an Agreement with the Chagrin Valley Dispatch Council (CVD), for CVD to provide the services of a Project Manager to perform the duties of the planning, construction and outfitting of the dispatch center, and to perform the ongoing services as Dispatch Center Manager for day to day operations services, including IT management and financial services, and that services agreement expires on November 30, 2021.

October 17, 2017, HHCC began operations at MetroHealth Medical Center at Severance Center in Cleveland Heights. On November 17, 2017, HHCC began providing dispatch services for the South Euclid and University Heights Police and Fire/EMS services, and for the Shaker Heights and Cleveland Heights Fire/EMS services. On December 15, 2017, HHCC began providing dispatch for the Cleveland Heights and Shaker Heights Police services. Finally, on February 18, 2018, HHCC began providing dispatch for Police and Fire services in Richmond Heights. On May 15, 2019, HHCC entered into a contract with Jewish Family Services, through JFC Security LLC, for security monitoring of various Jewish facilities.

HHCC is governed according to By-Laws and the COG Agreement. The operations are overseen by the Board of Trustees. Each Member community has one representative on the Board, who is the Mayor or City Manager, or their designated representative. The Board appoints a Fiscal Agent (currently Cleveland Heights). Each city contributes \$17,500 annually toward capital costs. Each city also contributes its share of operating costs calculated as each city’s pro rata share of the operating budget based on the percentage of billable calls for service received by HHCC for each city. The Board approves the annual budget. The employees voted down a union.

Proposed Merger of HHCC Members into CVD

The Chagrin Valley Dispatch Council (CVD) is a regional Council of Governments similar to HHCC, and that was formed for the same purpose as HHCC; that is, to establish and operate a Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP), as a joint Police, Fire and Emergency Medical Services (“EMS”) communications system for the dispatch of Police, Fire and EMS services. CVD serves 28 communities from two dispatch centers, in Bedford and Brecksville. Metroparks has joined CVD, and the Cuyahoga County Sherriff’s office is joining CVD.

See the CVD 2020 Annual Report attached for more information.

CVD, through its manager, Nick DiCicco, and his staff, provided the services to create the HHCC dispatch center located at the MetroHealth Medical Center at Severance Center in Cleveland Heights, which began operations in late 2017. CVD has been providing the ongoing services to manage and operate HHCC since the center’s opening. The CVD staff handles the hiring and training of employees, purchasing of equipment, services and supplies, overseeing the day to day operation of the HHCC, handling budgeting and financial services, providing IT services, and otherwise taking care of all operational requirements for HHCC.

The idea of HHCC merging its operations into the larger CVD has been discussed by the HHCC Board and the Police and Fire Chiefs of the 5 member cities for several years. To merge, HHCC's Board members would have to vote to cease to exist as a COG, and each HHCC member would separately join CVD through a standard form membership agreement provided by CVD.

Under a merger, the Cleveland Heights Center currently occupied by HHCC would continue to operate. CVD would then operate three dispatch centers, in Bedford, Brecksville, and Cleveland Heights. Each Center would have the following:

- A "Chiefs' Group" comprised of the Fire and Police Chiefs from the cities in that Center. This Group would make decisions about specific operational policies impacting just that Center.
- A "Users Group" comprised of police officers and fire fighters from the communities in that Center who are actual "users" of the dispatch services; i.e. Police Officers who are sergeants or below and Firefighters who are lieutenants or below, representing each city in that Center. The Users Group would make recommendations on specific operational policies of that Center to the Chiefs' Group.

The CVD Board of Trustees is comprised of the Mayors or City Managers, or their representatives, from each community. Each member community has one vote. The Council meets approximately one time per year, and other times if needed (e.g. to approve a new member). The Board approves: Bylaw changes (the Bylaws were most recently amended in September 2020); the annual budget (by agreement, the budget must be approved by January 31 each year) (CVD is on a calendar fiscal year); acceptance of new members; and the election of CVD officers (President, VP, Secretary).

The current officers of CVD are as follows:

- President - Mayor Holzheimer-Gail, Euclid
- Vice President - Mayor Edward Kraus, Solon
- Secretary - Mayor William Koons, South Russell
- Treasurer - Trustee John Finley, Chagrin Falls Township

The term of all officers is 1 year.

An Executive Committee is comprised of by the President, Vice President, Secretary and three non-officers, which CVD has informed HHCC will always include one representative of each of the three Dispatch Centers (Cleveland Heights, Bedford and Brecksville).

Typically, CVD requires that a new member pay a fee for capital costs, but in this instance there is no such fee for HHCC members, since HHCC already has an operating dispatch center, and all assets of the center will be assigned to CVD. There is a one month's operating expenses deposit required of each new member; this may be able to be paid out of existing HHCC reserves that would not be refunded, but would be paid over to CVD as the HHCC members' entry fee.

The annual fee paid by CVD members is based on the same formula as HHCC uses; that is, each community's proportional share of service calls.

CVD has stated that it intends to hire all HHCC dispatchers as employees of CVD. CVD has 3 contract employees and the rest are at will, with no union.

Benefits of a Merger of HHCC Into CVD

The following is a list of potential benefits to a merger in which HHCC members join CVD:

1. A merger would provide some cost savings for HHCC members, particularly for employee health care, due to the purchasing power and ability to negotiate of a larger COG, utility expense savings (IT network), and in contractual services.
2. CVD has an enterprise fund with revenue from CVD assistance to entities outside of CVD, and the fund benefits all of CVD for future, significant purchases. This fund would then also benefit HHCC members.
3. CVD currently qualifies for funding from the State of Ohio Wireless 9-1-1 fund, while HHCC does not.
4. Fire dispatching efficiencies would be enhanced with a larger dispatch operation.
5. CVD would have 109 employees after the merger, while HHCC has 30 employees. The larger entity would permit management to move employees around more readily for extended employee absences.
6. The Federal, State and County governments have a common policy and practice of encouraging communities to consolidate dispatch operations. By deciding to join CVD, HHCC's members would be determining their own fate, rather than waiting and potentially be forced to join another joint dispatch center.
7. CVD provides the benefit of a dedicated full time finance department, and IT Department.
8. A larger entity provides a greater possibility of attracting grant funding. For example, CVD received the following grants:
 - a. a \$784,000 AGF Grant (Purchased Zetron Fire Station Alerting hardware and software for all the member fire departments to page out the fire departments for calls. Also purchased MD's for al member fire departments, for calls in the apparatus.)
 - b. an \$850,000 UASI Grant (It was used to purchase and distribute portable radios to every member police and fire department.)
 - c. a \$330,000 County Shared Services Grant (This grant helped fund an additional dispatch position and associated equipment); and
 - d. a \$50,000 UASI Grant (This was used to add a Cellular 'tower' to the Communications truck, which can be deployed and establish a small cellular network for public safety.)

Recommendation

The Administration recommends that the City move forward with legislation for Council approval that would:

1. Authorize the City to vote as a member of the Heights Hillcrest Communications Center (HHCC) to:
 - a. dissolve the HHCC as a Council of Governments;
 - b. assign all of the assets of the HHCC to the Chagrin Valley Dispatch Council (CVD); and
 - c. to take such other actions as are necessary in order to terminate the operations of HHCC, and to permit the continued operations of the Cleveland Heights Dispatch Center within CVD without interruption.
2. Authorize the City to enter into an agreement to join the Chagrin Valley Dispatch Council (CVD), and to take such other actions and enter into such other agreements as are necessary to permit the continued operations of the Cleveland Heights Dispatch Center within CVD without interruption.