

MARIN EMERGENCY RADIO AUTHORITY
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MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 1, 2007
TO: MERA Board of Directors
FROM: Michael Garvey, Interim Executive Officer, *MPG*
SUBJECT: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OPERATION OF MERA

In the few months, I have served as your Interim Director MERA has begun a dramatic transition in its mission. As we have discussed, the completion of the Motorola contract will mark the organization's evolution beyond the construction stage into the maintenance stage. While a few problems remain, most notably the "dead" spots and what to do about them, the majority of MERA's operations in the future will be dedicated to maintaining the program and keeping current with technological advances.

This evolution is consistent with the experience of most JPAs, which tend to start focused on short-term objectives and using personnel on the scene. No matter the achievements, at some point every successful JPA faces a need to transition into a more objective, professional operation. MERA has successfully reached that point.

Recommended Organization

The model I suggest calls for a small administrative core organization, starting with a single Executive Director, and a series of contracts by which the operational responsibilities will be met. These support contracts would include:

- administrative support, including clerical support, an office, phone and facilities for meetings
- financial services, including the creation of amortization funds for equipment replacement
- equipment maintenance
- training
- review of, and advice about emerging technology

The position of Executive Director is needed to assure dedicated, professional support for the MERA Board and for the Executive Committee on policy matters and to assure effective implementation of decisions. The position also protects the system from the appearance of conflict, as member agencies may contract for the services described above.

The Executive Director

This person could be an independent contractor, an employee of a firm, or become an employee of a member entity that would contract his/her services to MERA. I would not recommend MERA take on the administrative burden and cost of becoming the employer of record for a

single employee. The hourly compensation should approximate that of a department head in the County or one of the two larger cities. I anticipate an average workload of 10 hours per week, possibly allowing for more hours during times of peak activity, such as contract performance evaluation, contract negotiations, professional conferences, and budget preparation. (List of anticipated duties attached, Exhibit "A.")

As the operation matures, there will be a need for more staff. Decisions about whether to hire directly or to use contract services can be made at that time.

Executive Director Services could be provided jointly or separately from MGSA and MTA.

Anticipated Issues

At this point, there seem only two major questions visible on the horizon. The first is the part MERA will choose to play in Wireless Marin. That will be worked out through the good offices of the Wireless Advisory Committee but certain parameters seem clear. One is that the new system will not use MERA frequencies, as the public safety capacity must be nurtured and protected.

The other is that MERA facility leases and locations might be utilized to achieve the Wireless Marin goal of countywide service. There may be no realistic alternative to this, if the service is to be countywide. However, this would not interfere with MERA's mission and additional users of the sites could reduce MERA's share of facility maintenance costs.

The second question is related to Marin County's participation in the San Francisco Bay Area Public Safety Interoperable Communications Initiative, the new Homeland Security interjurisdictional emergency communication network ("Super UASI"). This system requires extensive cooperation with other Bay Area counties but also brings funds for implementation. The perception outside Marin is that the County has not been involved but some County staff has attended meetings. Clearly, the Marin response needs to be coordinated and MERA is a logical player, whether in a lead or supportive role. (An explanatory newspaper editorial is attached, Exhibit "B")

Conclusion

The future of MERA seems predictable, assuming it can develop a successful maintenance program for the new system and the questions about Super UASI participation are resolved. Yet, with this important public safety communication system still in some ways in its early stages, that predictability is important. Once the system is robust and experienced, the JPA could consider expanding its operations. But I would not recommend doing so until that time.

I look forward to discussing these issues with you.

Exhibit “A”

List of Anticipated Duties MERA Executive Director

Under the Direction of the Board of Directors or the Executive Committee:

1. Prepare Board agendas and staff reports on recommended actions.
2. Follow up to assure implementation of Board- and Executive Committee-set policies.
3. Prepare, recommend and administer MERA’s annual budget.
4. Negotiate, monitor and evaluate the performance under contracts for services to MERA.
5. Invoice member agencies for their share of the budget; monitor payments to ensure receipt.
6. Monitor bond proceeds and interest earnings through Trustee and County Auditor/Controller.
7. Assemble and deliver to the County appropriate records and files for the public record archives.
8. Represent the Board and the Executive Committee in dealings with media, member agencies, other governmental agencies, the Bond Trustees and the public.
9. Coordinate legal actions initiated on behalf of or against MERA.
10. Coordinate annual audit.
11. Ensure that all Fair Political Practices Commission filings are made.
12. Ensure MERA compliance with all Federal and State mandates.
13. Perform other duties as assigned by the Board of Directors or Executive committee.

Exhibit "B"



Editorial

Communicating on emergency radio

The San Francisco Examiner Newspaper
Mar 17, 2007 3:00 AM

SAN FRANCISCO - When the post 9/11 emergency readiness reports began coming out, many in the Bay Area were dismayed to learn for the first time that our local police and fire departments, transportation agencies, ambulances and hospitals were largely unable to communicate with each other by radio. All used incompatible equipment, transmitting on different frequencies.

And last year, when the federal government began requiring the Bay Area to apply as a region for Homeland Security preparedness funding, The Examiner strongly suggested the top priority for the 2006 grant should be a start toward standardizing regional emergency radio communications, instead of being scattered into smaller projects.

The money available then might not have been enough to make much of a dent in upgrading first-responder radio compatibility. But in December, Congress approved \$1 billion for "interoperability" communications funds, to be distributed to public safety agencies this fall.

Washington's guidelines for grant eligibility will be released next month, and presumably will require compatibility with a new 700 megahertz band that the Federal Communications Commission will open in 2009 for emergency communications.

This high-frequency, 700 MHz band will be able to transmit not only sound, but also data and video, so that public safety agencies will be able to transmit text files, photos and even stream videos instead of being confined to voice communications.

It is encouraging that San Francisco and San Mateo counties already are partnering with Contra Costa and Alameda counties in the East Bay to create a \$307 million emergency radio system that will put all their public safety, medical and transit agencies on the same communications frequency. The group hopes that more of the nine counties in the Bay Area, such as Marin and Santa Clara, will join in.

This projected \$307 million cost for the Bay Area Public Safety Interoperable Communications Initiative includes \$67 million already invested in existing infrastructure such as communications towers, which can be incorporated into the new 700 MHz system. The counties will need to contribute \$40 million in local funding to qualify for \$200 million from the federal program.

Next week, the Communications Initiative officials will meet with California authorities to examine whether the Bay Area proposal would be sufficiently interoperable with state, federal and military users. The Department of Homeland Security analyzed emergency communications interoperability of 75 urban/metropolitan areas and issued the report card in January. San Francisco, Marin and San Mateo counties earned only "C" as their collective grade.

We are counting on an "A" no later than 2009, as soon as the 700 MHz federal frequency is available. For a region as vulnerable to earthquakes and tempting to terrorists as the Bay Area, that is the least the public should expect.