

# MARIN EMERGENCY RADIO AUTHORITY

c/o Novato Fire Protection District  
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**DRAFT**

## **STRATEGIC PLAN: OUTREACH SUBCOMMITTEE**

### **MINUTES OF MARCH 15, 2011 MEETING**

#### A. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chair Kreins at 3:00 p.m. on March 15, 2011, in the Cavallero Conference Room at the Novato Fire Protection District's Administration Office, 95 Rowland Way, Novato, CA.

Committee Members Present:

City of Larkspur	Robert Sinnott
County of Marin Sheriff	Robert Doyle
City of Novato	Joe Kreins
Twin Cities Police Authority	Todd Cusimano

Staff Present:

MERA Executive Officer	Maureen Cassingham
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Guests Present:

Indie Politics	Dan Mullen
Price Campaign Solutions	Terry Price

Kreins said he invited Police Chief Jennifer Tejada, City of Sausalito, to join the Subcommittee to assist with the work ahead and she is attending today's meeting.

*M/S/P Sinnott/Cusimano to accept and welcome new Outreach Subcommittee Member Tejada.*

AYES: All  
NAYS: None  
Motion carried.

#### B. Approval of Minutes from February 16, 2011, Meeting

*M/S/P Doyle/Cusimano to approve the minutes from the February 16, 2011, meeting as presented.*

AYES: All  
NAYS: None  
Motion carried.

C. Discussion and Action on Internal and External Public Relations Proposal –  
Consultants Terry Price and Dan Mullen

Cassingham summarized her pre-meeting with Price and Mullen on March 2, 2011, providing them with background on MERA and the internal and external communications needs of the Authority. Cusimano reprised the February 16, 2011 meeting discussion of MERA's public relations needs going forward and his experience in working with Price and Mullen on multiple projects. Their expertise would be invaluable to MERA from the start in improving internal and external communications.

Price distributed a white paper he and Mullen developed entitled "Marin Emergency Radio Authority (MERA) – The Next Phase" which included their response to MERA's request for services and their qualifications. It was noted that this is not the complete proposal but highlights of activities that might be undertaken. He summarized their recent consulting experience on the Twin Cities Police Project which extended over two years. He and Mullen worked on both the information effort funded by the Twin Cities Police Authority as well as with the Citizens Campaign Committee to run the campaign for their ballot measure. The measure received 69% of the vote. Much effort was put into minimizing any opposition and addressing every citizen's needs. Prior to this project, Price and Mullen assisted the Citizens Committee and the campaign for the Sausalito Police and Fire facility. Another consultant conducted the education and polling side of things. The bond measure received 81% of the vote.

Price has 30 plus years of campaign consulting experience over 70 North Bay campaigns, primarily with candidates, school bond measures and these two capital projects. He has served as Congressional and State Assembly staff. Mullen has been a political consultant for 12 plus years and had his own consulting business since 2005. He has worked on numerous Council, Board of Supervisors and judges campaigns.

Kreins said he is familiar with their expertise and their success with Twin Cities and MERA will need this expertise going forward, especially initially, then over the long-term. He asked Cassingham about the availability of funds for such services. She said she has \$10,000 signature authority for the types of services needed for implementing the Strategic Plan and that these expenditures would be reported to the Executive Committee.

Mullen talked about the approach to this work beginning with an initial three month phase which would include an assessment of where we are and where we need to go. Price noted that the Strategic Plan has a number of moving parts including short and long-term funding plans which is what they are focusing on. He also said the Plan does not contemplate a ballot measure as a funding source. Committee overlap also needs to be sorted out. Mullen asked for a status on grant funding. Cassingham said she was advised by Mansourian that he was not aware of any grant funding to assist MERA with outreach; however, he will follow up. Kreins said Mansourian will be applying for a UASI grant of \$1-2M for a 700 MHz conventional interoperable interface with the current MERA system. He did not know if any of these funds might be available for public relations or outreach. He asked that Mansourian be contacted about this. Mullen clarified that MERA had received UASI Homeland Security funds for other purposes like technical assistance.

Price said, based on discussions with Cusimano and Cassingham, a current communications assessment was needed along with preliminary work on messaging, both internally and externally. They will approach this differently if a ballot measure is not involved. Kreins said, while there is no reference in the Strategic Plan to a bond measure, there have been discussions with the Executive Committee that there is no funding available from the members without going to a bond measure or something like that. Not enough is even known at this point about a replacement system. Price and Mullen asked about what resources MERA could bring to the public relations campaign leading to a ballot measure. Kreins clarified with Cassingham that MERA has reserves it could use to fund outreach. She noted that the Replacement Fund of \$700,000 plus has been used to-date to fund strategic planning and monies are available for a campaign for system replacement. Cusimano, in response to Mullen, said he could provide them information regarding all the bond-related costs for the Twin Cities issuance.

Cassingham said, before rolling out basic public messages about MERA, work needs to be done to strengthen internal communications with member agency governing bodies. Mullen agreed there is a sequencing of communications activities that needs to be based on a data-driven pulse before proceeding. Cusimano asked Cassingham if the timing of the three-month Phase I communications plan would coincide with the Sustainability Subcommittee's assessment of the best funding options to finance the new system including feasibility of a bond measure. Mullen said that in the next three months, they can advise about what the political climate is for this type of bond. Cusimano asked about the legal timeframe for bond issuance. Cassingham clarified that Sustainability has been rolled back into the Finance Committee for greater efficiencies and their charge over the next 12 to 18 months is to develop short and long-term funding plans for current projects estimated at \$12M and system replacement estimated at \$50M+. This clock started in December with the adoption of the Strategic Plan.

Kreins noted that presentations to individual agencies are doable provided we have a simple, short, standardized powerpoint presentation on MERA that can be delivered by their respective Board members. Doyle voiced concern about planning for the future when bonds for the current system are not paid off. Mullen said overlapping bonds happen frequently with school districts but this is a valid concern. Price talked about the timing of the bonds based on when funds are needed for the new system. Given the need for parallel systems while cutting over, system phase-in and the funding for same would need to be mapped out to effectively time a ballot measure. In addition to timing, Cassingham said MERA would have to know what its member agencies may be doing with their own ballot measures.

Price said in three months, we won't be able to answer all the questions, but we should be able to identify the next steps. A survey must precede a measure and it can get stale if not timed right. This would be part of the 60 hours of work over the next three months. Doyle said it might be helpful for Price and Mullen to meet with Mansourian for more information about system replacement timing. Mullen said it would keep their hours down if all the Committees could meet together with them.

Sinnott asked about providing a fact sheet to elected officials, some of whom believe MERA is still a new system. Now, in 12 years time, we are proposing to advance with new technology. He feels the need to "pre-inform" them first about where we are with the current system before there is a presentation on replacement technology. Given the varying degrees

of elected officials' institutional memory about MERA, Sinnott noted that some who opposed MERA might be concerned about migrating to a new system. Kreins said some also do not understand how MERA functions, which is another issue.

Price summarized their proposed two-step process as getting MERA information to elected officials and how to get a measure on the ballot. Tejada said the method we use in delivering this information is very important. She said face-to-face communications with elected officials via powerpoint or other means is key to the educational piece. Sending a packet to them is not effective. It was agreed that fact sheets are a start for getting people on the same page. Price suggested individual meetings to identify and power map elected official champions for MERA. Cassingham confirmed that there are currently no elected officials serving as MERA Board Members. Kreins said there would be electeds that would be willing to serve; however, many have overflowing plates as it is. Kreins said what has changed since the inception of MERA is 9/11 and the subsequent nationwide discussion about interoperability. Price noted while the Strategic Plan wanted to avoid alarming people, we must educate as to the problem facing MERA and that the fix requires money. Mullen said there is a difference between urgency and emergency and that a timely solution is needed without scaring the public.

D. Next Steps and Timeline

Price said they will come back with a revised proposal with specific services and agreement not-to-exceed \$10,000. One of them would serve as lead consultant. This will be presented to the Subcommittee at the next meeting. Price asked for clarification as to how literally to take the Strategic Plan. For example, the Plan refers to greater investment in MERA's website which they would not recommend as having impact on public education. The challenge is how do you drive the public to visit it. Kreins said they can develop recommendations that make changes to the Plan for presentation to the Executive Committee and Board. Doyle said there must be flexibility as we go forward with the Plan and bring in additional expertise. Sinnott said the Plan is a guide, not a contract. Tejada summarized her understanding of Outreach's charge which is, first to educate, followed by generating outreach once the funding plans are developed. She confirmed Outreach does not create these plans which are the responsibility of the Finance Committee. Price said creating public awareness of MERA throughout Marin County would be a monumental campaign, far beyond this three month assignment. Mullen said extending out to stakeholders is as far as we can expect to go in the next few months. Kreins agreed, plus MERA will need guidelines on how we begin community outreach. Price inquired about more hours of support from the Executive Officer, at least initially. Kreins responded that the Executive Committee is open to this based on Cassingham's availability. Price said this is one of the recommendations they will likely make. Kreins confirmed that what we will be looking for at the end of three months is a road map regarding a marketing and communications strategy going forward, including next steps. Price said the level of detail, including cost estimates for the next steps, could be a time-consuming process depending on how far they get.

E. Future Meetings

It was agreed by consensus to meet on Tuesday, April 5, 2011, at 3 p.m. at the Novato Fire Protection District Administration Office.

F. Other Information Items

None.

G. Open Time for Items Not on Agenda

No comments.

H. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 3:50 p.m.