

**MARIN EMERGENCY RADIO AUTHORITY**

c/o Novato Fire Protection District  
95 Rowland Way, Novato, CA 94945  
PHONE: (415) 878-2690 FAX: (415) 878-2660

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 22, 2010, SPECIAL MEETING**

**Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 3:32 p.m. by President Kinsey at the Novato Fire Protection District, Heritage Conference Room, 95 Rowland Way, Novato, CA 94945.

**Board Members Present:**

Town of Corte Madera	Roger Sprehn (Alternate)
City of Mill Valley	Wayne Bush
City of Novato	Joe Kreins
Town of Ross	Tom Gaffney
Town of San Anselmo	Charles Maynard (3:48) and Ford Greene (Alternate)
City of San Rafael	Ken Nordhoff
County of Marin	Steve Kinsey
City of Sausalito	John Rohrbacher (Alternate)
Inverness Public Utility District	James Fox and Scott McMorrow (Alternate)
Kentfield Fire Protection District	Paul Smith and Ron Naso (Alternate)
Marin Community College District	Charles Lacy
Marin County Transit District	David Rzepinski
Marinwood Community Services District	Bruce Anderson
Ross Valley Fire Service	Roger Meagor
Southern Marin Fire Protection District	Jim Irving
Twin Cities Police Authority	Todd Cusimano (Alternate)

**Board Members Absent:**

City of Belvedere  
Bolin Fire Protection District  
Town of Fairfax  
City of Larkspur  
Stinson Beach Fire Protection District  
Marin Municipal Water District  
Novato Fire Protection District  
Tiburon Fire Protection District

**Staff Present:**

Maureen Cassingham, Executive Officer  
Farhad Mansourian, County DPW Director  
Richard Chuck, Communications Engineer  
Denise Wade, Recording Secretary

**Guests Present:**

Dave Hutton, Town of Tiburon  
Deirdre McCrohan, The Ark Newspaper  
Tom Robinson, CBG Communications, Inc.  
Dick Nielsen, CBG Communications, Inc. (by conference call)

A. Executive Officer's Report (Cassingham)

1) Proposed Adoption of Ad Hoc Strategic Planning Committee's Recommended Draft –  
Marin Emergency Radio Authority Strategic Plan

Cassingham summarized her staff report by introducing the recommended draft Strategic Plan, noting work on it began in December 2009, by the Ad Hoc Strategic Planning Committee of Sheriff Doyle, Chief Pearce and City Manager Rodericks. At the Committee's fifth meeting, the Committee approved it for distribution to the Finance Committee for comment on its financial implications. Thereafter, it was considered by the Executive Committee on September 8, 2010. The Executive Committee recommended Board adoption of the plan as presented with consideration of recommendation No. 6 from the Finance Committee (removal of the reference to the Marin Transit District on pages 39 and 40 of the Plan) and proposed prioritization of certain steps to begin its implementation. Those steps include adoption of the Mission Statement, appointment of a Governance Work Group, approval of a Board self-assessment, appointment of a Sustainability Subcommittee and approval of the Operations Officer's formation of a Police and Fire Chiefs' Work Group to develop a technology and system replacement plan. Kinsey noted that beyond its substantial financial implications, the Executive Committee had an excellent document to move MERA forward strategically and thanked the Ad Hoc Committee for all its work.

Kinsey thanked Nordhoff for his contributions to MERA, noting that Nordhoff had accepted the position of City Manager of Walnut Creek.

Robinson stated his Senior Engineer Dick Nielsen was participating in the meeting by telephone as a technical resource. He recognized the Ad Hoc Committee's efforts and tremendous technical support received from Mansourian and his DPW team in the development of the Strategic Plan and its technical elements. He then summarized the purpose of strategic planning. It is intended to identify directions and goals in years to come that would build on the strengths of the organization while overcoming perceived weaknesses.

Robinson noted the two overarching goals of the Plan: (1) to help MERA fulfill its mission for the organization as a whole and its member agencies; and (2) to promote long-term sustainability. He described the four phases of plan development, which include process design; mobilizing the Ad Hoc Committee with the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges analyses and best practices review of other like organizations; the development of proposed directions, timelines and resources; and, finalization of the plan.

Robinson said the seven directions cited in the Plan were intended to view MERA holistically from financial, technical and organizational standpoints. The first direction was to develop a mission statement which has been based on the purpose for the organization from its joint powers agreement. The second direction, changes to MERA's governance structure, was based on the need for the Board to look at itself beginning with a self-assessment. The assessment could be undertaken by MERA on its own via a mechanism used by the National Association of Non-Profits or to have it facilitated. Additionally, a working group could be established as an extension of the Executive Committee, after the self assessment, to look at potential changes in the Board and Committee structures and recommend changes. Given MERA's twelve years of operations, the Ad Hoc Committee felt this was a critical juncture time for facing critical technical and financial issues ahead.

The third direction is the development of a system technology replacement plan that also looks at short-term capacity and coverage issues. Mansourian recommended that the work group needed to investigate technical options and develop a plan that would be best populated by experts from police and fire. This group would work closely with the Sustainability Committee to be discussed next. The fourth direction is the development of a long-term funding plan over the next seven to ten years that will ensure available funds when the MERA system needs replacement. A Sustainability Committee, attached to the Finance Committee, is needed to deal with not only financial resources but all the ways MERA can be the most efficient and effective organization in fulfilling its mission. This Committee would look for resources for replacement as well as short-term resources to address relocation to a new EOF, capacity and coverage projects and new frequencies. Traditional funding sources, along with those suggested in the AECOM report, like lease-purchase, taxes, fees and asset liquidation repurposing, would be reviewed by the Sustainability Committee. Given the magnitude of funding needed for system replacement, it is likely that funding will come from a combination of sources. These are the initiatives that would begin Plan implementation over the next three to six months.

Direction number five would launch a public education and outreach campaign demonstrating the value of MERA and garner support for the funding needed for replacement. Raising MERA's profile, however, can bring other challenges in the process. Robinson said formation of an Outreach Subcommittee to deal with public education would come after initiating work on the first four directions. Direction number six, expanding partnerships, would help forge bonds and leverage relationships. For example, Robinson said hospitals could provide invaluable support and fundraising expertise to assist MERA with a capital campaign. The Sustainability Committee, as they look at funding, would also look at partnerships.

The final direction, strengthening the common bonds of the membership, focuses on the cohesiveness achieved between the members since 1998 but also deals with the divergencies of member size, purpose and traffic issues that can create conflict. It is important to build on common bonds and also looking at where the benefits confer to the organization and the member agencies to keep everyone in lockstep.

Kinsey said the Executive Committee was very pleased with the Plan which identifies many issues. He is concerned about committee capacity to deal with the Plan's directions. The governance issue appears to be the first order of business.

Nordhoff asked, if adopting the Plan, given the financial issues in it, might our governing bodies think we are pre-making financial commitments to them. He asked how we inform our elected bodies to help them understand the Plan before we formally put it in place. Kinsey said the key thrust of the Plan is to figure out these issues over the next 18 months. He said any motion accepting the Plan should reflect commitment to the process, not its recommendations. We need to get information on the Plan out to elected officials and city managers about the process to come up with implementation decisions. Robinson noted that Plan implementation is contingent on the availability of resources and ability of the members to commit to those resources. Nordhoff said it is important to get the message out to the members.

Kinsey asked if the next-generation technology issue is one MERA is going to have to address constantly and what we can afford to keep up. The seven-to-ten-years replacement timeline suggests we need these next eighteen months to get going, then use all the rest of that time to deliver.

Kinsey suggested a self-assessment day that includes a cost benefit analysis for short-term and replacement projects that the Board could commit to before a governance group is convened. He said self-assessment was broader than the issue of governance. The question is, are our member agencies ready to be part of an effort to make a case to the public to take on something as ambitious as this. He asked whether MERA needed the most advanced technology, versus the most appropriate, like the County's current SAP challenge.

Robinson said MERA should be looking for technology that is not obsolete before you have to replace it again but not necessary on the "bleeding edge". Kinsey asked Mansourian if the current Operations group can weigh in on this with some augmentation. Mansourian said there will need to be two groups, one at the current operation's nuts-and-bolts level and one at the Police and Fire Chiefs' level focused on the appropriate technology. His view is the current system is ten years maximum away from being out-of-business. The original MERA system took eight years to implement with frequencies. Today, we would have to license additional frequencies. The Strategic Plan gives us the vision. The UASI grant study has explored options for MERA like 700 MHz, augment MERA with that, or a combination thereof. The Board should be thinking ahead to avoid a crash like the last time where we became a slave to the manufacturer for replacement parts.

Kinsey said the report also identifies \$10M-\$12M in existing system needs and he does not want strategic planning for the next generation to get in front of projects that must be addressed soon, like the new EOF relocation. Mansourian said staff is evaluating the prime-site move to the new EOF, wherever that may be, or stay and run a line to the new EOF. These near-term projects need to be looked at in the context of current and future system needs. Staff wants to avoid duplicate spending. Robinson noted that the Plan takes into account near-term capacity, coverage, EOF and new frequencies projects, all of which should be addressed in the next eighteen months to three years. Kinsey noted that the decision to move the prime-site to the new EOF must be made in the next six months and it has a fairly expensive price tag.

Kinsey said when the current system was funded, it was challenging bringing the smaller agencies along financially. Also, the Transit District is now using different technology which may lead to them not needing MERA anymore. Member organizations are going to have to face these new funding challenges which may mean we may have to look for other ways of funding the next time around versus digging into constrained operating budgets. Rzepinski asked if the Executive Committee will be open to Board members as it weighs in on these significant issues. Kinsey said rather than initiate new committees, the Executive Committee could handle outreach activity for the time being. He suggested that the sustainability effort grow out of the Finance Committee. He said the Executive Committee will not be making critical decisions in isolation. It is up to Board members to begin getting the word out to their governing boards about the challenges ahead. Big decisions will be reserved for the MERA Board. Anderson said the Outreach Committee could report to the Executive Committee, and its membership would not be limited to the Executive Committee but include anyone from the Board.

Kinsey said anyone willing to put time into the Executive Committee was welcome. Kinsey said he was open to the structural approach but would like to keep the Executive Committee focused. We can build off the current committee structure, inviting all who wish to contribute.

Robinson added that the Executive Committee also recommended revisiting the Strategic Plan every three years versus the five years set forth in the plan. Cassingham added Marin Transit's

request to remove the Plan's reference to their use of the MERA system on pages 39 and 40 in light of their switch to mobile data terminals on paratransit vehicles. Cassingham summarized the Executive Committee's suggested next steps with the plan. She cited appointment of a governance working group with some overlap with the sustainability group, going forward with a Board self-assessment performed in-house or with professional facilitation that would flow to the governance group, and creation of a sustainability group as an extension of the Finance Committee to possibly include Rock, representing the Ross Valley Agencies, Pearce for the Marin Fire Chiefs' Association, Revere for the Novato Fire Protection District and the County Finance Director. Other suggested actions included the previously discussed formation of a Police and Fire Chiefs' work group to assess and recommend near-term projects and technology replacement options. She reported on the discussion of the staff time needed to support these actions, which she feels can be handled initially within the fifteen hour per week schedule, subject to review by the Executive Officer Work Plan Committee.

Kinsey proposed that the only action that should be taken today is plan acceptance and scheduling of a workshop, preferably in the next 60 days. He asked for Cassingham and Mansourian to suggest a slate of working groups for the technical bodies leading to a selection of a governance committee at the workshop. In response to Kinsey's question, Cassingham reported that there are sufficient funds in the Replacement Fund to cover the workshop costs including professional facilitation. This has been the source of funding for the Plan's development to-date. She asked whether self-assessment would be a part of the workshop and how the Board would prefer it be conducted and if a near-term project review would be on the agenda.

Kinsey inquired if there was Board support for the workshop format to tackle these issues and Board members agreed with the approach and the use of Replacement Fund monies to conduct it. Kinsey will work with Cassingham and Robinson to develop a workshop agenda. He suggested all Board members be invited. Nordhoff said Board Alternates should also be invited since they may be needed to assist with some of the Plan work. Kinsey encouraged Board members to reach out to others in their agencies whom they think should attend.

Robinson confirmed that the self-assessment process be started in the workshop along with a review of the near-term project decisions that will have to be made. Likewise, the workshop agenda should include review of the mission statement, working groups' goals and timelines that will need to be determined to begin Plan implementation.

Robinson suggested creating a short questionnaire for the Board for general consensus on the Plan direction before the workshop. Gaffney asked for discussion of the current system's obsolescence at the workshop. Mansourian clarified that the system's life expectancy is another eight years. He said the prior system was extended a decade beyond its life expectancy; however, we must start planning now for its replacement so we are not responding on an emergency basis. Gaffney would like a paragraph explaining system life and obsolescence. Mansourian said many parts of the system have already failed, which is the world of electronics. Mansourian said we must look at our choices including keeping the current system, merging it with new technology or replacing the current system. Gaffney said we just spent \$27M on the system and now we are looking at another \$50+M. This needs to be discussed up front at the workshop.

*M/S/P Greene/Kreins to accept the Recommended Draft of the Marin Emergency Radio Authority Strategic Plan as presented, with the understanding that there is no commitment to the financial estimates or projections that are provided in it at this time.*

AYES: ALL  
NAYS: NONE  
Motion carried.

Discussion ensued regarding possible dates for the Workshop. Cassingham will work on the dates of November 10 or 17. Maynard said if these dates do not work, the Workshop should be held after the holidays to assure greater involvement of elected officials. Kinsey concurred.

Kinsey suggested a 4pm to 8pm time slot to help electeds participate.

2) Other Information Items

Cassingham announced that the Executive Committee, at their July 14, 2010, meeting, discussed MERA's meeting location at the Novato Fire Protection District and recommended that meetings continue there unless the Board determined otherwise. There being no comments from the Board, NFPD will continue as MERA's meeting venue.

B. Open Time for Items Not on Agenda (*limited to two minutes per speaker*)

None to report.

C. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 4:34 p.m.

**NEXT:**                    **REGULAR MEETING of MERA Board of Directors**  
                                 **Wednesday – December 8, 2010**  
                                 **3:30 p.m.**