

MARIN EMERGENCY RADIO AUTHORITY

c/o Novato Fire Protection District
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DRAFT – 3/7/11

STRATEGIC PLAN: OUTREACH SUBCOMMITTEE

MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 16, 2011, MEETING

A. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by consensus at 3:10 p.m. on February 16, 2011, in the Heritage 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
Twin Cities Police Authority	Todd Cusimano

Committee Members Absent:

City of Novato	Joe Kreins
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Staff Present:

MERA Executive Officer	Maureen Cassingham
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B. Appointment of Chair

M/S/P Doyle/Cusimano nominate Kreins as Chair.

AYES: All
NAYS: None
Motion carried.

Cusimano was elected Vice Chair by acclamation.

C. Review of Subcommittee Charge

Cassingham distributed the sections of the Strategic Plan relating to the Outreach Subcommittee's charge (pages 52-56) and updated MERA Board and Committee lists. She noted that the Governance Work Group had met on February 9, 2011, and the Sustainability Subcommittee will be meeting on March 2. All three groups will need to meet jointly at some point due to the interconnectedness of their charges. Governance will want updates on this Subcommittee's communications strategy and Sustainability will want information on public messaging as it seeks public support for funding a next gen system.

Vice Chair Cusimano noted that the Outreach charge is best summarized on Page 56 of the Plan, as assisting with the development of messages MERA needs to convey and helping implement new communications tools. The Subcommittee, in the next six months, needs to craft and deliver messages for Executive Committee and Board review and action.

Cassingham summarized the Board Self-Assessment Survey findings noting that there were a significant number of “don’t know” responses related to Board/Agency membership relationship issues. 25% percent also disagreed that the MERA Board reports to its agency members annually regarding MERA’s ongoing programs, future goals and challenges. She attributed these findings to Board member and Alternate turnover. As a result, respondents tended to not know their roles and responsibilities, indicating that there is quite a bit of work to do to overcome this. Cassingham said in her 2011 Work Plan that she was to provide an orientation for new Board members, Alternates, member agency elected and appointed officials and any other interested parties. She expects to schedule an orientation in April. She has also identified a disconnect between some MERA Board members and their governing bodies. During her annual meetings with the MCCMC JPA Oversight Committee, some Committee members voiced concerns that there is not enough communication between MERA and member City Councils. The City of Sausalito, at the last Marin Managers’ Association meeting, requested a special presentation from MERA to their City Council. While she is willing to do so, she noted that there are 24 other member agency governing bodies who might want the same presentation which would be challenging and potentially untimely.

Another idea from the MMA was to schedule a MERA panel presentation at a future MCCMC meeting to update electeds from all over the County at one time. Another MMA suggestion was to video her upcoming orientation and make it available over the internet to those unable to attend or new members as they come aboard. While MERA’s updated website is a very helpful tool and full of information about MERA, Cassingham said it is impersonal and possibly impractical to refer new members to it to “sort it out for themselves”. While the Plan identifies the need to educate the public about what MERA is, along with the possible need for a new system in 7 to 8 years, she said improving internal stakeholder communications needs to precede these efforts. She summarized that this Subcommittee needs to package an internal and external communications strategy for Board consideration. The MMA would be interested in a briefing by the Subcommittee before any strategy is implemented so that managers can be working ahead with their Councils and Boards before going public.

Doyle said he didn’t understand why elected officials seemed not to know what was going on with MERA when they or their subordinates serve on the MERA Board. Sinnott responded that there are so many JPAs and other agencies that it is hard to keep up to speed on what is going on with all of them due to level of interest, time constraints and other priorities. Interest peaks, however, when money is involved. Cassingham said the JPA OC was very concerned to learn the cost of MERA replacement technology when the system would no longer be supported on or before the end of its life. The point of strategic planning is to identify system replacement options and funding strategies before the end of the current system’s life. She noted that the JPA OC is particularly mindful about MERA since there are now no elected City Council or County BOS Board members with Steve Kinsey’s new Alternate status. The Governance Work Group has discussed how MERA might help Board members develop a protocol for reporting to their governing bodies.

Sinnott said it is important to remember that electeds are volunteers for the most part who must deal with packed agendas and activities/organizations like MERA are not on their radars. The replacement discussion has been a bit of a shock since low-band was around for 40 years and now we are talking about the next MERA. Doyle said the original MERA Board was comprised of electeds and once MERA became operational, appointed officials began taking their places. Cassingham said unless a capacity or coverage issues affect the delivery of services, electeds have not been involved with MERA. She said elected officials need to be brought back into the fold as we look ahead to replacing a system that Motorola will no longer support at some point. Sustainability is charged with identifying funding the new system, likely from a variety of sources, which might provide some relief for member agency budgets once the Debt Service and Project Note for the current system are retired.

Cusimano discussed the Twin Cities Police Authority JPA formation of a Community Facilities District (CFD) to fund a new police facility with a Mello-Roos tax requiring 51% of the vote. A county-wide tax to fund the next gen of \$50 or less is what's passing and probably the best avenue to take. Outreach would work side-by-side with Sustainability to develop public support.

D. Framework for Work Plan Development

Cusimano clarified that the resources to develop messages for an education and public outreach campaign were the four members of this Subcommittee. At some point, consultants like Terry Price and Dan Mullen, who helped Twin Cities with their messaging, may be needed. They could help explain what MERA is, what the problem is, and what the solution is and which tools to use to get the message out, like the press, our website, members' websites, and more. Public funds can legally be used for such services. Cassingham said the Strategic Plan identified implementation costs, including public relations help, some of which could come from the Replacement Fund which funded MERA's strategic planning efforts. \$140,000 was noted in the Plan as needed over the years to conduct an outreach campaign. Doyle said if we need to go to the voters at some point, MERA will need professional advice on election psychology and a phased plan of action. If proposed taxes are kept and used locally, the chances for voter support are much greater. Our elected officials understand this process and their support is critical to voter approval. Doyle said P.R. is the key but it cannot be used for political purposes, just for public information. Cusimano said we will need this kind of help to develop messages for internal use and with the public.

Cusimano said Mullen and Price have worked on Twin Cities and Sausalito's police and fire house projects and have in-depth knowledge of Marin. For a few thousand dollars, they could develop factual information for us that would identify the problem and solution, create a fact sheet and FAQs to help us with presentations to member agencies, messaging on our websites and providing information to the press. This would serve as the kick-off to our public information campaign. Cassingham said we are at the PSA stage at this point and trying to create awareness of what MERA is about.

Cusimano said professional P.R. advice is necessary at the start. It would be helpful for the Subcommittee to meet with P.R. consultants to give input and get their guidance. Doyle commented on the need for professional guidance from the beginning to get the foundational messages right. Sinnott said the need is to get good, substantial, general and easy-to-

understand information out much like Twin Cities did preceding their measure. Cassingham noted the importance of using the tools we have to tell MERA's story while being mindful of the best use of volunteer and staff time. Cusimano said MERA needs to help its 25 member agencies with the message and it is up to them to get the information out since they know their communities best. Professional P.R. guidance will provide members with the steps needed to get the word out to their communities. It is the member agencies' responsibility to do that.

E. Timeline for Work Plan

Cusimano discussed a check-back process to keep member agencies on track for getting information out to their communities once messages are developed. He said some members may need some help from other members to do this. Sinnott said it is the responsibility of every Board member to keep their CEO or Manager well-informed about MERA and to assure their elected body is well-informed. These are the core groups to communicate with and then we start to reach out to the public. Cusimano suggested linking member-agency websites to MERA's website. Sinnott said once we go to the public, elected officials must be prepared well in advance for any questions about MERA.

F. Future Meetings

It was agreed to invite Mullen and Price to the next Subcommittee meeting on March 15. Cassingham said they could review pages 52-56 of the Strategic Plan and other information on meraonline.org ahead of the meeting. They need to know we are looking at a 6-month message rollout and that this Subcommittee must stay in communication with Sustainability and Governance as it proceeds. Cassingham said if a tax is involved in funding the next gen system, MERA governance will likely require citizen participation or advisory oversight so the public education strategy needs to anticipate this. Cusimano said the Twin Cities Police Authority facility bond has an independent citizen's oversight committee that meets quarterly to go over expenses which takes away all the concerns and answers questions. Doyle said with MERA, it is invisible. People need to know what it is about and why it is important. Many may inquire why you need a new system when you just put this one in. They need to know that as systems age and are no longer serviced, this is what happens to a lot of technology. Cusimano said people understand bricks and mortar and those are tough sells. We need to translate MERA into a critical public service.

Cassingham suggested a pre-meeting with Mullen and Price before March 15 to better prepare them before they meet with the Subcommittee. Doyle said, preliminarily, it would be good to explore a P.R. message strategy with these consultants and, while there are others we could use, Mullen and Price seem suited and successful in working on this type of campaign, what messages people will respond to, which constituencies vote and message timing. Cassingham restated the Plan timeline for delivering initial messages is within 6 months to the Board and development of a more extensive image-based information within 18 months. She reiterated earlier discussion that we need to address internal communications first before the public education process.

G. Other Items

None.

H. Open Time for Items Not on Agenda

None.

I. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 4 p.m. to March 15, 2011, at 3 p.m. at NFPD.