

# **MARIN EMERGENCY RADIO AUTHORITY**

c/o Novato Fire Protection District  
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**DRAFT: 4/11/13**

## **EXECUTIVE BOARD**

### **Minutes of March 13, 2013 Meeting**

#### **Call to Order:**

The meeting was called to order by Chair Hymel on March 13, 2013 at 3:02 p.m. in the Heritage Conference Room, Novato Fire Protection District Administration Office, 95 Rowland Way, Novato, CA 94945.

Hymel announced the meeting would be adjourned in memory of former Twin Cities Police Chief and MERA Governing Board Member Phil Green.

#### **Board Members Present:**

County of Marin	Matthew Hymel
Marin County Sheriff	Robert Doyle
City of Novato	Jim Berg
Fire Services	Richard Pearce
Police Departments	Todd Cusimano
Ross Valley Cities/Towns	Debra Stutsman
Special Districts	Bill Hogan

#### **Board Members Absent:**

City of San Rafael	Chris Gray
Southern Marin Cities/Towns	Jim McCann

#### **Staff Present:**

MERA Executive Officer	Maureen Cassingham
MERA Operations Officer	Craig Tackabery
DPW Communications Services Manager	Shelly Nelson
County Communications Engineer	Richard Chuck
Recording Secretary	Gretchen Felciano

#### **Guests Present:**

Indie Politics	Dan Mullen
Price Campaign Solutions	Terry Price
Marin County Fire Deputy Chief	Mark Brown
Novato Resident	John Coleman

A. Consent Calendar

All matters on the Consent Calendar are to be approved with one motion unless a member of the Executive Board or the public requests that a separate action be taken on a specific item.

1) Minutes from January 16, 2013 Meeting

*M/S/P Doyle/Cusimano to approve Consent Calendar Item 1 as presented.*

AYES: All

NAYS: None

Motion carried.

B. Executive Officer's Report (Cassingham)

1) Report #11 on Strategic Plan Implementation

Cassingham summarized her report on Strategic Plan implementation activities since December 12, 2012. Mullen reported on the initial public opinion poll findings. A more extensive presentation will be made to the Project Oversight Subcommittee on March 29. While respondents were generally favorable about MERA, many do not know what MERA is. 68% were favorable about County government versus 24% unfavorable, which is very good since the County will be placing the proposed measure on the ballot. 58% support the measure with 37% opposing. With more information, 64% favored it versus 33% opposing. Much work lies ahead in educating voters about what MERA is and does and why this project is important and must be done now. There is no understanding of the urgency of the project. Hymel asked about willingness to pay. Mullen said support goes to two-thirds at the \$25 level. G.O. bonds and sales tax fared much worse. Berg asked whether these numbers could predict future success. Mullen said more analyses are needed to determine on what basis voters could be persuaded and on what message points. He said this poll is much more favorable than the parks poll which passed with over 70%. Berg noted MERA's numbers could be improved with education.

Price cautioned against elaborating on the poll until March 29 when it is presented in greater detail. Clearly, more work needs to be done with voters. Price said the favorable rating of local police departments was 89% and fire departments was 94%.

Cassingham finished her report noting the Finance Committee reviewed the revised FY 12-13 Outreach Budget and recommended Executive Board approval. The \$42,000 increase will likely not be expended and consultant costs may be offset with the hiring of the Special Project Manager. She mentioned work being done by General Counsel Karpiak with County Counsel on compliance with CEQA.

Cassingham provided an update on the recruitments for the part-time Special Project Manager and Administrative Assistant. She distributed updated job descriptions for both. She said the hourly rate for the Manager will likely be \$80-\$100 and the Assistant's hourly rate will be \$25-\$35. The Manager recruitment is being conducted to identify candidates with Marin public safety and MERA experience. Chiefs Cusimano and Sinnott have

announced the position within their Associations and she has reached out to former Board members for leads. At least three possible candidates have been identified. Hogan suggested that the Subcommittee have more involvement in the interviews since it will be working closely with both positions. Cassingham will seek three volunteers from the Subcommittee to serve. Price cited the need for the AA position to be filled more quickly given pending Newsletter and database development tasks. Hymel said Cassingham could proceed to fill the position which she shared could be filled on a temporary basis until the Manager is aboard and can participate in the selection. Cassingham suggested a temp could be hired under Price and Mullen's contract.

Cassingham will work with the Subcommittee on the timeline for Executive and Governing Board actions on the Next Gen Project. She will also work with Tackabery on the annual update of the Strategic Plan for presentation to both Boards in May.

*M/S/P Pearce/Berg to receive and file Report #11 on Strategic Plan Implementation and approve the revised Outreach Plan Budget for FY 12-13 to be re-presented in May.*

AYES: All  
NAYS: None  
Motion carried.

2) Approval of NBS Proposal – MERA Parcel Tax Study

Cassingham summarized the staff report and presented the Finance Committee's recommendation of NBS to conduct a parcel tax study for MERA at a cost of \$24,765 plus expenses. County Tax Collector Givens, at the Committee's request, reviewed their proposal and confirmed their qualifications to perform the work. Cassingham and Gaffney will work with NBS to reduce the project timeline from 16 to 12 weeks during the kick-off meeting.

*M/S/P Doyle/Pearce to approve NBS's proposal to conduct a Parcel Tax Study for MERA at a cost of \$24,765 plus expenses.*

AYES: All  
NAYS: None  
Motion carried.

3) Request for Recalculation of MERA Member Debt Service Payments  
Based on Current Radio Totals – City of Novato

Cassingham presented her staff report on the Finance Committee's review of this request. The Committee considered JPA formula factors, members' percentage of debt service, current radio allocations, call volume and the Board policy on additional radios. In summary, they discussed system use or call volume as being more representative in relation to debt service than the number of radios members have. The Committee noted that Novato's call volume of 10% is very close to their percentage of debt service which is 10.4%. They recommend not revisiting the debt service formula at this time given we are seeking public support for future capital costs.

Hymel added that if the Next Gen System were to be funded by members, many of them might want to revisit the formula. A parcel tax strategy would alleviate the need for a debt service formula. Also, revising the formula at this time could be divisive among the members whose support is needed for a successful tax measure and who will benefit from the savings from an outside source of revenue. Berg noted that his point in asking the question was that Novato was down to 6% of the total radios while still paying 10% of the debt service. This inquiry was informational only and he is understanding of the need for member support of the Next Gen Project. Pearce added that fire use of radios assigned is minimal which the number of radios does not belie.

It was the consensus of the Executive Board to concur with the Finance Committee's recommendation to retain the debt service formula as is.

4) Proposed Preliminary FY13-14 MERA Operating, New Project Financing and Revenue Bonds Budgets

Cassingham presented the proposed Preliminary FY13-14 Operating Budget of \$1,641,642 which is a 3.1% increase over prior year. She also reviewed the Revenue Bond and Project Note budgets for FY 13-14 for which there is no discretion. With Board concurrence, member contributions for these budgets will be disseminated tomorrow to assist with their budget preparation. She noted the primary variances in the Operating Budget over FY12-13 are County System Maintenance costs and Site Rentals & Leases.

*M/S/P Cusimano/Doyle to approve the Preliminary FY2013-14 MERA Budgets for Operating, New Project Financing and Refunding Revenue Bonds for immediate distribution to members.*

AYES: All  
NAYS: None  
Motion carried.

5) Other Information Items  
None.

C. Operations Reports (Tackabery)

1) Coverage Committee Update

Pearce provided an update on the Committee's work in looking at coverage issues with the current system, work-arounds being suggested by providers, identification of other options with members and coverages with the Next Gen System. The Committee has been meeting since October and is making good progress. Tackabery said the primary coverage issues are with Stinson Beach. Short-term and Next Gen options are under review. A short-term option that seems feasible will be followed up with Chief Stevens. DPW is also following up with Inverness on their issues. At the next meeting, DPW will present Next Gen coverage map scenarios including three recommended new sites and others to improve coverage which will affect project and operating costs. Pearce said this has been a good process to address issues raised at the Workshop.

2) Status/Work Statistics Reports (Chuck)

Chuck summarized System activity reports through February 2013 including transmissions and air time hours. The top five users include the Sheriff's Office, San Rafael P.D., Novato P.D., Southern Marin P.D. and Central Marin Police Authority, which account for 57% of total System usage for February.

3) VHF Overlay Plan

Tackabery introduced County Deputy Fire Chief Mark Brown who presented a PowerPoint presentation on the updated VHF Overlay Plan. Tackabery noted that on May 20, 2009 the MERA Board accepted the original VHF Overlay Plan. The Operations Work Group has been working on an update with Brown taking the lead. The action being requested is acceptance of the Plan and direction to promulgate to MERA members to use for staff training.

Brown began the PPT with the purpose of the Overlay followed by the organized framework for migration and migration decision process, description of the VHF channel allocation and immediate fire migration for dispatch centers. He described the County's unique good fortune in having a complete back-up communications structure. We are leveraging the State's mutual-aid back-up system as well, which greatly increases overall interoperability and access to fire and law enforcement resources out of the area. He said the use of the overlay is exercised at least annually and that it can be partially and totally implemented, such as in the event of a major earthquake. While the VHF Overlay is modeled on wildland fires, it can be used in other arenas. MERA system use will be monitored in the event the VHF Overlay is implemented.

*M/S/P Pearce/Cusimano to accept the updated VHF Overlay Plan as presented and make it available to all members.*

AYES: All  
NAYS: None  
Motion carried.

4) T-Band Give-Back Legislation

Tackabery updated status of the legislation and summarized the FCC Public Notice in the Board packet. Comments are due May 13 including input on the proceeds of the auction from T-band spectrum for grants. This is part of our grant strategy that is aggressively being pursued. The County's Federal Lobbyist is aware of our interest. Hymel asked what would this mean if we were successful. Tackabery said potentially the new subscriber units or core systems might be covered by a grant. The challenge is to get a grant before 2021. He said DPW will work on a response before the deadline and welcomed comments. The reply comment date is June 11.

5) MERA Switch Cutover Plan – New County Emergency Operations Facility

Tackabery distributed copies of the Project 25 Master Site Switch Conversion Project – EOF Phase 1 Preparation and Cutover Event Overview and User Impact handout. Nelson presented a PowerPoint for the project noting the need for the 7.13 dispatch system which is required to support the new EOF Center. She provided a project overview, list of events prior to the cutover, cutover events and post-cutover tasks, a timeline and user impacts, and Motorola and DPW communications plan. All dispatch consoles must be upgraded along with system-related software and will be tested before installation. Dispatch consoles and sites will be taken from the current 3.0 system to the 7.13 system. Sites will be transitioned one at a time and will go into site trunking. Vendor and DPW personnel will be in the field and working together. Delivery and installation will start in April. In late May, there will be a trial test for the cutover. July 15 and 16 are the tentative dates for cutover. Dispatchers may need to use their control stations for a maximum of two hours during the cutover. She is asking for contact persons for every dispatch center and police, fire and public works departments of every member for the April staging meeting. Nelson confirmed this upgrade is 700 MHz capable and that this project is funded by a \$1M grant from 2011.

6) Other Information Items

Tackabery said the MERA Ops Group is still meeting every other month. They are reviewing radio types that will work with the Next Gen and current systems. They cost 50% more. He will bring forward a proposed policy on this for Executive Board consideration. Also, the Group will be proposing an updated Mutual Aid and Communications Plan for Executive Board review and acceptance.

D. Open Time for Items Not On Agenda

None.

E. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 4:47 p.m.