



## City Council Agenda Item

**City Council Meeting Date:** November 2, 2021

**TO:** Jim Throop, City Manager

**FROM:** Alicia Welch, Fire Chief  
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**SUBJECT:** Authorization to Execute an Agreement with the Santa Barbara County Fire Protection District to Provide Dispatch Services via a Combined Regional Fire Communications Facility

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### **Recommendation:**

Staff recommends the City Council:

1. Authorize the City Manager to execute a five (5) year Cooperative Dispatch Agreement (Attachment 1) with the Santa Barbara County Fire Protection District (District) to provide all fire and emergency medical services (EMS) dispatch with anticipated cost not to exceed \$350,000 annually (attached); and
2. Refer the item of regional dispatch to the Finance Director and the City Manager to discuss and recommend funding options.

### **Background:**

Fire dispatch have changed dramatically over the last 30 years. We have failed to adapt to those changes. Multiple reports (including Grand Jury and Consultant) suggested regionalizing the County's fire and emergency medical services dispatch system would provide a much more streamlined and efficient emergency Fire/EMS dispatch system.

Fire agencies have long-integrated response through a mutual aid system that is the envy of first responder organizations around the world. However, that integrated response begins with the first 911 call and is predicated on sending the closest resource, regardless of jurisdiction without delay. Currently, the County of Santa Barbara does not have this in place. While agencies regularly respond into neighboring jurisdictions, the responses are initiated via multiple dispatch centers, causing exorbitant and needless response time delays.

The fire agencies of the County are partnering in a new regional fire dispatch center. With regional dispatch, a 911 call from any law enforcement jurisdiction Public Safety

Answering Point (PSAP) could be routed to a single fire dispatch center for immediate interrogation and response from the closest fire unit regardless of jurisdiction. “One center, one call” is the mantra for the new Regional Fire Communications Facility (RFCF).

When operational, the RFCF will dispatch the closest Fire/EMS units required to mitigate the incident, regardless of agency jurisdiction.

**Discussion:**

The Lompoc Fire Department (LFD) continues to see an increase in call volume requiring comprehensive all-risk hazard mitigation. Additionally, our incidents are becoming more complex as COVID-19 has compounded mental health and addiction issues. Thus, overlapping or back-to-back calls for service are on the rise for LFD. The Lompoc Police Department (LPD) is also experiencing increased calls for service. These issues, along with aging communications equipment and low dispatch center staffing, are a recipe for disaster. Although LFD is appreciative of the LPDs dispatching services, the opportunity to join the RFCF has many advantages to be considered.

Moreover, emergency incidents often do not lie within a single jurisdiction. The main benefit to having one regional fire communications center is that the closest available resource will always be sent to a given emergency. This ensures that the community is receiving the most timely and comprehensive response available. An additional benefit is the sharing of costs and resources.

Advantages of the RFCF include:

- One fire dispatch center for all municipal fire and EMS units in the County (resource sharing);
- Closest and most appropriate fire resource response regardless of jurisdiction;
- Fire-centric expertise and dedicated fire and EMS dispatching within the RFCF;
- A robust immediate response force from the regional fire agency’s 37 fire stations, 18 of which are located in the north county;
- No time-consuming delays due to multiple dispatch centers;
- Dedicated incident dispatcher support during major emergencies;
- Emergency Medical Dispatch (EMD) screening, which means 100% of calls are vetted using call type categorization, and customers are offered pre-arrival instructions by trained and qualified personnel as necessary);
- Reduction in call overlap between police, sheriff, and fire which is burdensome on existing PD dispatchers; and
- The addition of a redundant dispatch center to be placed in Santa Maria, which will act as a stand-alone center if the main center goes down.

The following Santa Barbara County regional fire agencies have committed to joining the RFCF:

1. Santa Barbara County Fire Protection District;
2. Santa Barbara City Fire Department;
3. Santa Maria Fire Department;

4. Carpinteria-Summerland Fire Protection District;
5. Guadalupe Fire Department; and
6. Montecito Fire Protection District.

At the present time, LFD is the only area fire agency who has not committed to the RFCF partnership. The Fire Chief is requesting authorization from City Council for the City Manager to sign the Cooperative Dispatch Agreement. The Agreement ensures that the City is committed to the RFCF. Acceptance of the Fire Chief's recommendation allows the LFD to be a participant in the early phases of system development to include: EMD call typing, boundary designations, radio frequency development, and selection of the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) System.

**Fiscal Impact:**

All initial and capital costs for the RFCF will be paid for by the District. The District has secured adequate funding to proceed with the construction phase of the center. The District will assume the costs for building design and construction, telephone and Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) purchase and installation, and the hiring and training of all dispatchers and logistical staff support. The City will not be required to contribute funding until Fiscal Year 2024 (January 2024).

The Biennial Budget Fiscal Years 2021-23 provides the following budget costs for dispatch:

	<b>2021-2022</b>	<b>2022-2023</b>
Police Dispatch	\$ 589,328	\$ 579,037
Fire Dispatch	\$ 515,463	\$ 541,237
Total costs	\$1,104,791	\$1,120,274
FY 2021-2023	Biennial Budget Dispatch =	\$2,225,065

If the City joins the RFCF, then the financial commitment will be calculated on a per-call basis and due annually. At present, it is estimated that LFD will respond to 4,153 calls for service for an annual cost for calls for service at \$310,839.56. There will be an annual cost for fixed expenses estimated at \$21,218.80, which brings the total participant cost for LFD to approximately \$332,058.36 annually.

LFD acknowledges the budgetary concerns of Chief Mariani. Although the RFCF appears to be a more cost-effective dispatching option for LFD, we have identified the following areas in which to find savings based on estimated costs that the City has identified in the Capital Improvement Plan (2022-2027):

- Fire Traffic Preemption (reallocate entire amount toward fire dispatch); and
- Fire Station Structural Evaluation and Mitigation (recommends new build).

Additionally, the passage of Measure Q funds is exactly aligned with improving this critical public safety function of dispatch. With the expected increase in cannabis manufacturing

in the City, we must be proactive in enhancing the Cities communication and dispatching capabilities.

Public safety functions are primarily funded through the City's General Fund. At this time, staff have not been able to identify grant funds or other sources that will cover the cost of the RFCF. The voters of Lompoc passed Measures I and Q, which clearly articulated their support of funding fire and police needs moving into 2022 and beyond. Although the City's first payment will not occur until FY 2024, City Council action to approve this agreement will commit the City to the 5-year term. However, the agreement does have an escape clause for any partner who suffers financial hardship and cannot continue with the center participation. Staff will plan to recognize this action as a financial commitment beginning on the 2022 budget planning process as a use of General Fund dollars.

**Conclusion:**

Staff respectfully requests that the City Council approve the Cooperative Dispatch Agreement with the Santa Barbara Fire Protection District and the City of Lompoc. Staff further requests that the funding for this agreement be referred to the Finance Director and the City Manager for discussion and direction moving forward.

Respectfully submitted,

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Alicia Welch, Fire Chief

**APPROVED FOR SUBMITTAL TO THE CITY COUNCIL:**

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Jim Throop, City Manager

Attachment: Cooperative Dispatch Agreement