

TOWN OF BOONTON

PUBLIC SAFETY DISPATCH

EVALUATION OF OPTIONS PRESENTED BY PUBLIC SAFETY AGENCIES

GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT ADVISORS, LLC

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Introduction

The Town engaged Government Management Advisors to examine options for the provision of dispatching services for police, fire and emergency medical services and make a recommendation on the most viable option, cost and other factors considered. The objectives of this examination are to review four main options which include:

- Plan 1 - upgrade existing radio system and continue dispatching with Town employed dispatchers,
 - Plan 2 - utilize Morris County Communications Center,
 - Plan 3 – utilize State of New Jersey PSIC, and
 - Plan 5 – provide dispatching through another shared service.
-
- Plan 4 is to do nothing and is certainly an option; however, it is not without costs as the current hardware needs new parts and replacements. None of the emergency service directors feel this is a viable choice as it sacrifices reliable service to the community. Therefore, this option will not be explored further.

According to emergency service personnel, the genesis of this exploration of options is due to the nearing obsolescence of the current radio system where needed replacement parts are no longer available and there is a lack of technical support from a primary vendor and the telephone company. These issues have caused broadcast disruptions which compromise service to the public. Like most other towns, cost is a major driver in decision making and while local control and upgrading of the Town's system may be an ideal solution, it would be difficult to justify without an examination of other options as well.

It is important to note that there is no perfect solution, and each will have some downsides. Selection of the best alternative for the Town of Boonton must include a balancing of each of the options benefits, weaknesses, and cost factors. In other words, which of the options provides the Town with the best available price/service/value relationship.

Another crucial aspect of the success of this project will be the willingness and ability of all parties to embrace the final solution chosen and work together to make it successful for the community they serve. All parties comprise the administration and the emergency service directors, including police, fire, EMS (emergency medical services) and OEM (Office of Emergency Management). Each has fully taken part in discussion meetings, in giving detailed information, and in answering lots of questions to help make this report as comprehensive as possible.

Executive Summary

While GMA was tasked with evaluating five (5) options that had been identified by public safety personnel, the reader will soon see that there are really only two (2) options that are available for consideration.

The Governing Body must decide between a plan with substantial cost savings where a series of adaptations and accommodations will need to be made and the more costly plan to continue the present methods of providing public safety dispatch services.

As enunciated by the County Communications Director, no matter which choice is made by the Governing Body, there is a need for “buy-in” by all public safety sectors. For example, if the Governing Body decides that the cost of the service is very important, all agencies need to agree that they will embrace the decision of the Governing Body and do whatever it takes to make the chosen course of action work. They will be inventive and creative in developing adaptations that accommodate their service objectives with the cost containment objectives of the Governing Body. Without this commitment, the results may be the failure or perceived failure of the chosen plan, if only as the result of a “self-fulfilling prophecy.”

The Report

Introduction

Cost is always a consideration in local government and for the foreseeable future it will continue to be a matter of concern, especially given the recent legislation on the federal level that limits the deductibility of state and local taxes and the horrendous fiscal condition in which the State of New Jersey finds itself. If controls on salary and wages, pension costs and health insurance are eliminated, municipalities will experience significant pressure to not only stabilize the cost of municipal services but also to reduce them. Therefore, one focus of this study is to supply the Governing Body with as accurate a cost analysis of the available alternatives as the data supplied permits.

Expectations of service is another matter of concern to governing bodies generally. Hence, you will find this report addresses some issues raised by the public service agencies about impacts on current service levels from the options explored.

PLAN 1

Rebuilding Existing System

Rebuilding the existing radio system would entail contracting with a vendor for the purchase, installation, and training of a completely new radio system. The system is primarily used for radio communications between dispatchers and the various emergency service responders and among members of the emergency response departments. The Town would have a state of the art radio system which would sustain dispatching operations to some point in the future, 25 years according to Chief Mayhood. This plan would retain local dispatchers and would be only marginally different from existing services. Existing radios can be used in the rebuilt system, although some new radios will be

needed, and dispatchers would continue to provide community services such as answering general questions from the public, monitoring the street and building camera system and performing other clerical duties as outlined by Chief Mayhood in the attached report [Attachment 1].

The new radio system is costly and would need ongoing maintenance and future upgrade costs all which would be the responsibility of the Town. The frequency, timing and cost of future upgrades are unknown currently. In addition, personnel in the police department would handle managing the upgrade installation process and training, troubleshooting problems once installation is complete and administering maintenance contracts.

After the new system is fully operational, the Town would continue to employ dispatchers, quickly replace them when they leave to keep overtime and police officer backup costs down, give initial and ongoing training and fund annual increases in the dispatcher wages. Costs associated with these employees also include health and dental benefits, pension, payroll taxes, worker's compensation and liability insurance.

A police records management system (Lawsoft) would need to be kept along with its annual costs and future upgrades.

Local control of all decision making, and dispatching would be retained in Plan 1.

Issues to be addressed if Plan 1 is selected:

- Will the new radio system have redundancy for transmission? Morris County Communications Center has 13 tower antennas serving the county with redundancy for all communities served. Will the new radio system have the same redundancy of coverage and reception within the Town as would the County system?
- How will the Town continue to fund the costs of continual technological improvements to communications systems? For example, the County 9-1-1 telephone system is significantly more advanced than that of the Town. While standards have not yet been established for Next Gen 9-1-1, the County has incorporated VoIP features such as SMART 911, which allows all persons within a service jurisdiction to place voluntarily personal information such as health issues that can be accessed by first responders in the event of a call for service, and mapping capabilities to identify the specific location of callers.
- If this plan is chosen, it is recommended that the Town explore the costs of hiring per diem dispatchers or more full-time dispatchers to replace the police officers who are providing dispatching services on Sundays and Holidays. To do this, the Town must negotiate with the PBA as the contract states "Regular police officers shall first be offered the opportunity to work available overtime before special police officers are contacted." Preferably, this provision should be eliminated altogether or at least changed to exempt dispatching duties.

PLAN 2

Morris County Communications Center

The option of a County Communications Center to provide dispatching service is an alternative that does not exist in most counties in New Jersey. In addition, the Morris County Communications Center has been operational since 1980, therefore this choice is not risky in the sense that it is fully tested.

Currently 23 of the 39 municipalities in Morris County utilize the full cadre of county dispatching services with numerous other entities utilizing some portion of their services, for a total of 72 agencies receiving some level of dispatching from Morris County.

Migrating dispatching services to Morris County would eliminate the need to buy a new radio system, however new portable radios compatible with the County system are needed. It would also entail loss of local control over dispatching decision making, laying off current dispatchers (or some other plan the Town devises – moving them into vacant positions etc.), and utilizing the established County-wide dispatching protocols rather than unique protocols tailored to the Town.

Although the annual fee to Morris County is substantial, most costs associated with dispatching are included (Attachment 2). The annual fee is calculated based only on the additional cost of new dispatchers for each municipality who joins the County system. To this effect, the County Administrator John Bonnani has written a letter (Attachment 3) to Boonton dated September 21, 2017 indicating that “the Freeholder Board will assess Boonton the cost of additional staff and fringe that will be incurred by the County to provide said services. The County will attempt to absorb all future cost increases refraining from passing any of these costs on.” In fact, they have done so for the 2018 rates, which are the same as 2017.

All costs for the employment of dispatchers are included such as wages, health benefits, pension, payroll taxes, unemployment, workers compensation and liability insurances. Costs of hiring and training new dispatchers are included. The Town would also be relieved of supervision, collective bargaining, and grievance administration for this group of employees freeing up time for current police staff for other duties. Boonton dispatchers would be eligible to apply for the new dispatcher positions at Morris County.

Morris County has a state of the art dispatch center that is receiving regular capital investments. Maintenance costs associated with the computer aided dispatch system (CAD) hardware and software and upgrades to the CAD system are part of the annual fee. Morris County has not assessed municipalities for any costs associated with capital improvements to their system.

For large scale incidents, Morris County has interoperability channels for exclusive use that police, fire, emergency medical service and public works can move to during an incident.

Joining the County system also provides access to the County records management system (RMS) which integrates with the County CAD. The annual cost for Lawsoft, the vendor currently supplying CAD and RMS to Boonton, could be eliminated if this option is chosen.

Morris County has a fully redundant radio system with 13 transmit locations.

Smart911 is another service available through the County Communications Center, allowing residents to create a safety profile for their household that includes vital information that they want 9-1-1 call takers and emergency responders to have in the event of an emergency. Residents can offer as much or as little personal or business information as they wish.

The Town will need to buy new portable radios for compatibility with the County system at considerable expense. The maintenance of these radios as needed will also be the responsibility of the Town. The County has already provided Boonton mobile radios for police, fire, emergency medical service vehicles

at no cost, which the municipality will be permitted to retain. But all additional radios will need to be purchased by the Town.

Boonton residents pay for some part of dispatching services now through their County taxes although they are not receiving any of the benefits aside from occasional backup dispatching. This is true because the fees paid by the participating municipalities do not equal the costs of providing service to each municipality with the difference subsidized through general county taxation.

Issues to be addressed if Plan 2 is selected:

- One concern expressed in migrating to Morris County is the possible federal decision to move communications systems nationwide off **T-band**, which Morris County uses. Mike Peoples, Director of Morris County Communications, told the consultants that should this need occur, the County will change out all the radios at no cost to the towns. If this choice is selected, we suggest language to this effect being incorporated into the agreement with the County.
- Another concern expressed in migrating to Morris County involves Boonton being on a shared channel with other communities; at this point it has been suggested that these communities would be Mountain Lakes and Boonton Township. The County uses call processing software with prioritizing software and extensive didactic and experiential training that assists the dispatcher to prioritize the processing of calls for service.
- Providing a workable “**talk around**” has also been noted by emergency service directors. “Talk around” is the ability to have a closed group of emergency service responders who are on the ground during an emergency, such as a fire, be able to communicate with one another without other radio traffic. There are two practical alternatives to this. The first is that during an incident, emergency responders would have access to a shared county channel. This channel only has a one-mile radius, so chances are it would be private, however this could not be guaranteed. The second alternative is for the Town to keep some of its current radios on the current Town radio frequency to use during the emergency. This alternative would continue a small portion of the Town’s current costs of radio and frequency maintenance; however, these radios would not need to be connected to the County system and would not incur the per radio fee.
- A decision would have to be made on how to handle the **Fire Department and EMS paging**, as the County trunked system would not support existing pagers. There are several viable options depending on the specific needs of the departments.
 - new pagers that can be bought that work on a trunked system,
 - there can be a simulcast to the Town’s low band system and the County high band system,
 - the Town can use apps, such as Active 9-1-1 which turns cell phones into pagers,
 - in addition, Chief Mayhood notes in his report that the Fire Department is currently dispatched through the e-dispatch system and this can be extended to EMS,
- The County system can send dispatch messages by text or email to the members, or another option that some municipalities in the system use is to send one email to the e-dispatch system and e-dispatch sends the messages to individual members who are designated by the municipality depending on the type of notification.
- There is also the issue of how to handle **non-dispatch services currently provided by dispatchers**. Chief Mayhood says that dispatchers spend 75% of their time on activities other

than dispatching. This means that the Town is paying a premium for some services – such as giving directions and answering informational calls – which could be done by clerical level employees less expensively. However, if dispatching moves to Morris County, these non-dispatch functions should not automatically transfer to police personnel as suggested by the Chief. The Town should conduct a detailed analysis of the non-dispatching services provided asking a series of questions, including but not limited to those below:

- Does the Town want to continue providing this service? (Example: giving directions for lost travelers who come off 287).
 - Can the service be provided differently? (Example: Post directions for lost travelers on a bulletin board, refer them to police clerical or town clerical staff, at less expensive rates, or post directional signs at the building.)
 - If service is needed, determine level of service that will be provided and who can best provide the service.
 - Can work be reassigned to police clerical or other town clerical who currently handle public inquiries?
 - Can an auto attendant be used for non-emergency call distribution?
 - Can an auto attendant be used for giving out general information in lieu of a live person? (Example: directions).
 - Is it cost effective to add a Police Aid position, working only critical hours, in lieu of the dispatchers
- The County vendor charges a **per ticket fee for e-tickets** issued. Info Cop, the Town’s current e-ticketing system, also has per ticket fees, but the Town outright bought the hardware and software and pays a current annual licensing fee of \$1,837.50 according to Chief Mayhood.

The vast majority of participating police departments in the Morris County Communications System utilize the County’s e-ticket and records management system (RMS) services provided through the County. The system has been developed by and licensed by CSI Technology Group. It utilizes per ticket financing model in which the fixed costs of hardware (PDAs, printers, etc.) and installation are funded until the fixed cost is recouped. The fees are \$3 per ticket until fixed costs are recouped and then \$1.50 per ticket to offset costs of ongoing licensing and maintenance.

The principal benefits of participating in this program are being included in the nearly county-wide records management system gaining regional crime information on regional perpetrators operating within the Town of Boonton. It provides access to a regional data base and incorporates Boonton data into the regional data base making that data available to other participating police agencies.

The cost will be greater than the current cost, principally because the Town purchased the PDA’s, printers, etc. and now only pays an annual licensing fee. Any potential added cost could be mitigated by increasing the fees for municipal tickets.

PLAN 3

State of NJ PSIC

While this alternative was viable in the past, the State has determined that due to their close working relationship with county communications centers and the funding that has been provided to them, they

will no longer offer access to the PSIC dispatching services to municipalities in counties where a county communications system is in operation.

PLAN 5

Shared Service Opportunities with Boonton as Lead Agency

The Chief of Police has suggested that the Town could serve as a lead agency for a dispatching shared service with Boonton Township and Mountain Lakes, however, there has been no investigation into this alternative unlike the previously identified alternatives. There is no analysis of the cost, income, advantages, and disadvantages. GMA is aware that sharing police services was investigated actively about a decade ago and was not pursued by Mountain Lakes. It is not the role of this study to examine in depth such an alternative. In addition, both municipalities are dispatched by the County Communications Center. Chief Maywood is also of the belief that significant pressure would be brought to bear on the governing bodies of these communities if they attempted to withdraw from the County. The lack of information and documentation on this alternative at this time must eliminate it from consideration.

Likewise, as the consultants were investigating satisfaction with the County system with other jurisdictions, we learned of efforts in Parsippany to develop their own dispatch operation. Parsippany is of sufficient size and location to be a substantial candidate for such a shared service and they contacted the consultants to express an interest. However, their time line does not coincide with Boonton's needs. In addition, any other municipality of sufficient size to be a lead agency for a shared service is currently using the County Communications Center. Therefore, this alternative will not be considered within this study.

Summary of Interviews with Stakeholders

During the interviews that were conducted with various public safety personnel, the consultant came away with the following impressions:

- The Police Department is very comfortable with the current arrangement, Plan 1, and sees only the need for replacement of equipment, though no concern was expressed about the lack of redundancy. Given the overtime opportunities for police officers, a question arose as to the role of economic determinism.
- The fire personnel who were very concerned about their ability to serve their population well seemed to lean in the direction of a shared system, either the State PSIC, Plan 3 that is not available, or the County system, Plan 2, due to the need for mutual aid.
- The EMS service presented a well-reasoned argument for inclusion in the County system, as can be seen in the Attachment 4.
- OEM simply structured the decision based on whether the Governing Body would decide to keep dispatching in the police department or utilize another agency to perform the function. No preference was stated.
- Public Works likes the way things are. They have been assured that they can continue to use their radio system, no matter how public safety communicates, though the Director did point out the assistance that is provided by police during snow storms and community events.

Evaluation of Alternatives

Plan 3 is rejected above as the State has confirmed to the consultants that they will not provide this service in Morris County.

Plan 4 has been rejected by police, fire and emergency medical services given the fragile condition of the current system.

Plan 5 has been rejected by the consultants as stated immediately above.

Therefore, the alternatives that remain to be evaluated are:

- Plan 1 - upgrade existing Town radio system and continue dispatching with Town employed dispatchers,
- Plan 2 - utilize Morris County Communications Center

As stated above:

It is important to note that there is no perfect solution, and each will have some downsides. Selection of the best alternative for the Town of Boonton must include a balancing of each of the options' benefits, weaknesses, and cost factors.

The consultants have met with all the stakeholders either face to face or via telephone conversations. We have also reviewed the reports prepared by the various parties which are attached as exhibits and the responses to the questions posed to them regarding their reports. Lastly, the consultants have examined the County Communications system, met with those in authority and discussed the level of satisfaction with the County system with users of the system. Based on this and our experience managing municipal services which include dispatch, we offer the following analysis of tradeoffs.

Cost Out of Plans 1 and 2:

First and foremost, it needs to be pointed out that the cost of either plan is heavily dependent on the number of mobile and portable radios that will be purchased. For the Plan 2, the annual cost of the system is also dependent on the number of radios on the system. According to the EMS analysis in Attachment 4, the Town already possesses about 16 mobile/portable radios on the County system. According to the Director of the Communications Center, every one of the Town's and Kiwanis' public safety vehicles are equipped with a County mobile radio along with several portable radios such as the one provided to the OEM Coordinator. GMA's attempts to accurately specify the number of radios already possessed by each agency and determine the needed number of new radios to be purchased has failed to arrive at a confirmed number. Therefore:

- The number of radios on the cost out sheet is based on data supplied by the Town and its public safety agencies. The variations are a result of differing responses.
- When a final decision is made to go with either plan, the Town will need to specifically identify the exact number of needed radios and the type of radios, both of which will impact the final cost.

- If Plan 2 is chosen the Town is advised to confer with Michael Peoples, the Director of the Morris County Communications Center to obtain his perspective on the optimal number of radios needed for operations and to minimize the annual cost to be incurred by the Town for ongoing cost of participation.

The attached analysis (Attachment 6) shows a Plan 1 one-time cost of \$353,120 for the upgrade of the Town's radio system and an ongoing annual cost of \$401,813 in 2017 dollars. The annual cost does not include annual increases for personnel at around 2%, increase in pension, payroll taxes, health and dental benefits, worker's compensation and liability insurance or unknown increases in cost of goods and services.

Plan 2 one-time costs are \$305,620 for the purchase of new radios and according to the proposal provided to the Town from Morris County Communications ongoing annual costs are \$226,354, which the County has communicated an intention to maintain. Note the one-time cost could be significantly less if lower cost radios were purchased by the Town. (See Attachment 4)

Financially, the comparison between Plans 1 and 2 is simple. Plan 1 will cost the Town \$222,959 more in year 1 (with the Town radio upgrade) and \$175,459 more annually in 2017 dollars. If the only factor is service cost, the decision is simple and Plan 2 to move to Morris County Communications will save the Town substantially.

Other Issues to be addressed if Plan 2 is selected:

Town stakeholders and consultants noted many issues that would need to be understood and effective solutions chosen in order to move to Plan 2 if desired. Some of these items are detailed in this report under the description of Plan 2 and have been repeated here to show a complete list. Some answers to these issues have been provided by Morris County dispatch and the consultants have provided some suggestions as to how to approach solutions to other of the issues. There are also some issues where insufficient information is known at this time and will require further exploration from the Town.

- One concern expressed in migrating to Morris County is the federal decision to move communications systems nationwide off **T-band**, which Morris County uses. Mike Peoples, Director of Morris County Communications, told the consultants that should this need occur, the County will change out all the radios at no cost to the towns. If this choice is selected, we suggest language to this effect being incorporated into the agreement with the County.
- Providing a workable "**talk around**" has also been noted by emergency service directors. "Talk around" is the ability to have a closed group of emergency service responders who are present at an incident during an emergency, such as a fire, be able to communicate with one another without other radio traffic. There are two practical alternatives to this. The first, preferred alternative is that during an incident, emergency responders would have access to a shared county channel. This channel only has a one-mile radius, so chances are it would be private, however this could not be guaranteed. The second alternative is for the Town to keep some of its current radios on the current Town radio frequency to use during the emergency. This alternative would continue a small portion of the current costs of radio and frequency maintenance, though eventually these radios would in all likelihood not be able to be

maintained. Also, these radios would not need to be connected to the County system and would not incur the per radio fee.

- **Monitoring fire ground operations:** Concern was raised as to how to handle Fire fighter “may day” calls. When a fire fighter is in distress, standard operating procedure is to inform the dispatcher over the radio of being in distress. This is typically done by making a “May Day” call. In Morris County, for those municipalities on the Morris County Communications System, most fire service agencies use the fire incident channel providing point to point communication at the fire ground incident. For this communication method, the dispatcher is not engaged as once the agency switches to point to point communication, the dispatcher ceases to be involved. However, radios are equipped with a “Firefighter down” button which is monitored by Morris County Communications dispatchers. If this alert is activated, the dispatcher can communicate with the incident commander to inform him/her of the event and identify which firefighter’s radio has sounded the alarm.

An alternative to this procedure would be establishing a fire ground safety officer who is responsible for monitoring fire fighter radios at the fire scene. This solution would retain some number of existing Town portable radios to be used as in #2 above. Again, these radios would not be connected to the County system and the fire scene radios would run independent of the County system. Only the Incident Commander at the scene would need to have two radios.

- A decision would have to be made on how to handle the **Fire Department and EMS paging**, as the County trunked system would not support existing pagers. There are several viable options depending on the specific needs of the departments.
 - a. new pagers that can be bought that work on a trunked system,
 - b. there can be a simulcast to the Town’s low band system and the County high band system,
 - c. the Town can use apps, such as Active 9-1-1 which turns cell phones into pagers.
 - d. In addition, Chief Mayhood notes in his report that the Fire Department is currently dispatched through the e-dispatch system and this can be extended to EMS.
 - e. The County system can send dispatch messages by text or email to the members or some municipalities in the system with e-dispatch have one email sent to the e-dispatch system and e-dispatch sends the messages to individual members.
- There is also the issue of how to handle **non-dispatch services currently provided by dispatchers**. Chief Mayhood says that dispatchers spend 75% of their time on activities other than dispatching. This means that the Town is paying a premium for some services – such as giving directions and answering informational calls – which could be done by clerical level employees less expensively. However, if dispatching moves to Morris County, these non-dispatch functions should not automatically transfer to police personnel as suggested by the Chief. The Town should conduct a detailed analysis of the non-dispatching services provided asking a series of questions, including but not limited to those below:
 - a. Does the Town want to continue providing this service? (Example: giving directions for lost travelers who come off 287).
 - b. Can the service be provided differently? (Example: Post directions for lost travelers on a bulletin board, refer them to police clerical or non-police clerical staff, at less expensive rates, or post directional signs at the building.)

- c. If service is needed, determine level of service that will be provided and who can best provide the service.
 - d. Can work be reassigned to police clerical or other town clerical who currently handle public inquiries?
 - e. Can an auto attendant be used for non-emergency call distribution?
 - f. Can an auto attendant be used for giving out general information in lieu of a live person? (Example: directions).
- The County vendor charges a **per ticket fee for e-tickets** issued. Info Cop, the Town's current e-ticketing system, also has per ticket fees, but the Town outright bought the hardware and software and pays a current annual licensing fee of \$1,837.50 according to Chief Mayhood.

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The cost will be greater than the current cost, principally because the Town purchased the PDA's, printers, etc. and now only pays an annual licensing fee. Any potential added cost could be mitigated by increasing the fees for municipal tickets.

- **Community Security Cameras:** Several years ago, the Town made an investment in 11 current street and 6 municipal facility cameras. This system is expandable, if the Town wishes to do so. The street cameras monitor selected locations in the Town while the other 6 cameras monitor the drop off box for medication, building entrances and the drop box for tax and utility payments. These have been monitored by dispatchers at the desk in police headquarters. This is a special circumstance in the Town that is not replicated in many other jurisdictions. While the cameras and monitors could remain, the question that arises is who will keep a watchful eye on and manage/assure continuous operation of these? Or, would they be used as an historical record of what transpired during the past period of time.
- **Municipal Alarms:** At this time the dispatch desk serves to transmit information provided by municipal alarms for fire, water levels and security of municipal facilities. If the dispatch center is vacated as would occur under Plan 2, who would be responsible on a 24/7 basis to receive and transmit information provided by these alarms? The Director of the County Communications Center informed the consultants that Morris County Communications does monitor municipal alarms – water, building, burglary, fire - and will call appropriate Town personnel. Municipal alarm lines can be directly connected to the County alarm receiver without using a central station. The County system contains notes on who to call for each type of alarm. These messages can also be texted or emailed to the appropriate Town personnel.

- **Prisoner Management:** Currently, prisoners are held in cells or on the “bench” for a period of time while the arresting officer completes assessment reports and delivers this information to appropriate court officers as is required under the new Bail Reform procedures to determine if the individual may or may not be released on bail. Unless the procedures are changed, the arresting officer can be engaged for a couple or more hours completing assessment reports. During this time the arrestee must be observed to assure that the arrestee does not injure him/herself or others. Currently, dispatchers have cameras observing the arrestee(s). Without the dispatcher, there will still be a need for this function to be performed.
- **Special Law Enforcement Officers (SLEO) – Class 1:** The dispatchers are all certified as SLEO. With this certification they can perform certain law enforcement functions such as routine traffic detail, spectator control, and similar duties. In Boonton, the dispatchers are hired as Class 1 SLEO’s and perform duties typically the responsibility of regular police officers such as prisoner checks, assistance in preparing basic police reports and monitoring the above-mentioned street and municipal building cameras. The Police see this as a benefit for their operation as these personnel often wish to become police officers and this experience permits Police management to evaluate their performance as dispatchers and SLEOs. Fire and EMS see this as detrimental to mature experienced dispatchers on which they can depend. The turnover in dispatcher ranks is viewed as a negative by these first responders.
- **Walk-In Requests for Service:** It is alleged that persons walking into the department to the dispatcher seeking information number as many as 20-30 per month. Please refer to #5 for more details on how to assess this issue.
- **Police Knowledge of All Activities:** The current design of the Town’s radio system provides every on-duty officer with knowledge of a call about fire and emergency medical services. Under the County system, the “disciplines” are segregated. Calls to Fire and/or EMS will not be heard by police until the town is assigned to a specific channel to manage a specific incident.
- **Labor Day Event:** This parade event engages all public safety and public works elements of the municipal organization. Both dispatch consoles are utilized for this event to coordinate the activities of all involved personnel. Under the County System, this would need to be replaced with the “talk around feature” where a channel would be dedicated to Boonton Town for the entire day. See #2 above for more details regarding “talk around.”

Conclusions

- The idiosyncrasies of public safety communications in the Town of Boonton have evolved over time. Personnel, both paid and volunteer have evolved with it. These special conditions set the stage for a level of service expectations that cannot fully be duplicated.
- To achieve economies of scale and efficiency, it is often necessary to sacrifice conditions with which we have become comfortable and familiar for conditions that produce some temporary anxiety, while we work out effective adaptations and accommodations.
- Boonton's 2010 Census set its population at 8,347. About a decade ago, the Legislature was flirting with the idea of penalizing municipalities under 10,000 population if they did not merge or consolidate. Sharing services, while not a silver bullet to make services supported by the property tax affordable, is one method of pursuing this objective. How important is it to the Governing Body to pursue actions that will reduce the cost of municipal services?
- The Town's Governing Body must make a binary choice here. Neither choice is inherently good, the choices emphasize cost or maintenance of special conditions. The choices are:
 - Reduce the cost of providing public safety dispatch services by a significant amount and devise adaptations and accommodations to retain as many special conditions as can be retained, or
 - Continue the service levels exactly as they are today and forego potential savings (cost reductions) in this sector of municipal services.

List of Attachments

Attachment 1 – Report from Boonton Police Department

Attachment 2 – Proposal from Morris County Communications

Attachment 3 – Letter from County Administrator John Bonnani

Attachment 4 – Report from EMS

Attachment 5 – Report from Fire

Attachment 6 – Cost Comparison of Plan 1 and Plan 2