

**Montgomery County Board  
Special Meeting Minutes**

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**for Monday, January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020 – 5:30 PM**

The following are minutes of a special meeting of the Montgomery County Board held at 5:30 PM on Monday, January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020 in the County Board Room, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Historic Courthouse, Hillsboro, Illinois. **The meeting was called to order by County Board Chairman Evan Young at 5:30 PM.**

**Roll call: 19 members present, 2 members absent.**

**Members Present:** Connie Beck, Megan Beeler, Bill Bergen, Glenn Bishop, Ronald Deabenderfer, Tim Fogle, Kirby Furness, Chuck Graden, Mark Hughes, Jeremy Jones, David Loucks, Dennis McCammack, Gene Miles, Jim Moore, Earlene Robinson, Glenn Savage, Bob Sneed, Donna Yeske, and Evan Young

**Members Absent:** Sandra Johnson and Richard Wendel

**Pledge of Allegiance to the flag** was led by Hillsboro City Police Officer Tim Hopper, who was in attendance.

**COORDINATING COMMITTEE:** Given by Chairman Evan Young:

1. **Information regarding the ETSB/911 Services and Policies Update/Approval:**

Former 911 Coordinator Greg Nimmo shared a timeline of the history of 911 services in Montgomery County and the past 911 Financial Issues contributing to their agreement with the Montgomery County Sheriff's office. He also gave an overview of the current negative economic outlook at the county level due to the recent VISTRA Power Plant closure, which prompted the ESTB/911 Board to vote to consolidate with Christian County. Nimmo stated the current Christian/Shelby ESTB/911 structure has been in place for three years and is going well at this time. He said the ESTB/911 Board is in control of their funds, and if the County Board votes not to consolidate they will stay, but they are concerned about how to pay for it. Nimmo introduced Joint 911 Christian/Shelby County ESTB/911 Board Chairman Andy Goodall to those in attendance.

Nimmo also introduced Christian/Shelby County ESTB/911 Board Director Mickie Ehrhardt, who stated she has been in public safety since 1993, and has been 911 Coordinator since 1998. Ehrhardt said they have a multi county network which is working well, and they can easily bring on another county.

Nimmo gave a budget projection for the next six years, which lists in FY2022 a deficit of \$3,800, in FY2023 a deficit of \$108,000 and in the sixth year showing ETSB/911 would break even without enough funds for upgrades or repairs. Nimmo stated he has been reassigned recently as Christian/Montgomery EMA Director, and will not be 911 Coordinator if it stays in Montgomery County.

Nimmo then introduced Statewide 911 Coordinator Cindy Barbera-Brelle and told those in attendance she approves all 911 service activity for the State of Illinois. Barbera-Brelle gave a brief history of her credentials in 911 dispatching and coordinating 911 services. She gave an overview of 911 funding for counties since its inception and stated the current funding flows through the Illinois State Police and includes surcharges on cellphones, as well as landlines, which have dramatically increased the revenues for county 911 services. Barbera-Brelle stated current state law requires new technology for "Next Generation" 911 be in place by all counties

in Illinois by July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020, but the reality is the Statewide 911 network will not be ready for "Next Generation"911 by then themselves. She said the State of Illinois hasn't selected a vendor to put that system in place, which she anticipates to be a time consuming process.

Barbera-Brelle said the needs of the new "Next Generation"technology is a work in progress, with the 1<sup>st</sup> tier requirements being hardware and maintenance-related items while the 2<sup>nd</sup> tier requirements includes a public alert system for emergency events. She said counties may not charge fees to pay for 911 administrative costs since this is considered a diversion of funds under Illinois law. She stated in order for State 911 to meet the guidelines for federal funds, they can't misuse grant money nor can the county 911 services. She stated if consolidation would be approved by Montgomery, Christian and Shelby counties, they would be eligible for a state grant, with the deadline set for February, 2020. She said these grants should be offered annually if the counties don't decide to consolidate now.

Much discussion was held by county board members and members of the public, which is documented as follows:

Chairman Young asked if the population of counties required to consolidate by Illinois law would be lowered to include our county in the future, and Barbera-Brelle said she wasn't sure, since that directive would have to come from the Governor's office.

Deabenderfer asked because state grants are available for consolidation if this is a recommendation from the State. Barbera-Brelle said there is an expense to updating the system to meet state requirements and she thinks consolidation makes sense. Hughes asked how many counties have consolidated, and Barbera-Brelle sited the names of consolidated counties at this time, saying this is an opportunity to save some dollars in administrative costs.

Jones asked if consolidated counties can revert back to providing 911 services on their own, and Barbera-Brelle said there is no provision under the law to do this, and once an ETSB/911 has been dissolved it cannot be re-created. Jones also asked how we are charged or get our surcharge money from the state if consolidation is done, and if consolidated, Barbera-Brelle stated the surcharge funds are placed together in one fund, not separated by county.

Members of the public in attendance were given an opportunity to speak by Chairman Young, and comments were made in favor of keeping 911/ETSB/911 services in Montgomery County by retired Hillsboro Fire Chief Richard Hewitt and Hillsboro City Commissioner Don Downs. Hillsboro Ambulance Director Barb Schmedeke stated there are issues with the Christian County backup pages now, and Nimmo responded they are in the process of upgrading this technology and it will take a \$39,000 investment to resolve this issue. Coffeen Fire Department representative Terry Bone said the backup page issue has been going on for years, but nothing has been done. Nimmo stated they need to contact him personally and he will look into their specific issue, and Bone responded this has been done, with no resolution of this issue.

Litchfield Mayor Steve Dougherty asked how many dispatchers Christian/Shelby counties have now, and Ehrhardt responded they presently have 9 dispatchers covering 32,000 calls with two dispatchers per shift covering 190 calls per day. She said if Montgomery County comes on board they would add another person per day, since they anticipate approximately 20,000 more calls annually.

Nimmo stated Christian County is presently our backup. The current Montgomery County dispatcher staff handles prisoner bonding, matron duties and records management, in addition to their regular duties. If consolidation goes through, all dispatchers would just be doing dispatching functions and not any other distracting duties.

Montgomery County Search and Rescue team leader Dan Hough asked if the county has initiated a contract with Motorola for the equipment and software purchases, and if so are we obligated to them for this purchase. Nimmo stated a contract at a cost of \$900,000 to be paid over 5 years is in place, and if we stay in Montgomery County we will pay for it, the money will have to come from somewhere. He said we are in trouble paying for the Motorola contract in the third year. Nimmo said he feels if we consolidate with Christian and Shelby counties and they agree to take the Motorola contract we will be okay, however if they don't want that contract, we may have to buy it out at approximately \$200,000.

Hough encouraged the county board members to keep the issue of the Motorola contract in mind as they make their decision whether or not to consolidate.

Hough then asked about the funds the county now receives from the Illinois State Police from the phone surcharge. Barbera-Brelle said funding is defined in the state law, and since 2017 the surcharge has been set at \$1.50. She said Montgomery County receives approximately \$42,000 a month from the surcharge. She also stated should Montgomery County be consolidated with Christian and Shelby counties, a new joint ETSB/911 board would be formed with Christian County having five members, Montgomery County having four members and Shelby County having four members. Hough stated he would like the county board to think long and hard about leaving our county before making this decision.

County Board member Glenn Bishop stated he would like to slow down this process so the County Board can think about this some more. He said there could be some out of the box ideas that would allow Montgomery County to keep 911 here. Bishop said the state obviously wants consolidation, but if we must consolidate we may be better off to look to Bond or Fayette counties to join us here. He also stated the county signed a contract with Motorola they shouldn't have. He said we need to remember ETSB/911 was in bad shape at one time and the county bailed them out.

County Board member Bill Bergen stated Chairman Young gave him permission to do some research on the ETSB/911 budget to see if we can keep this service in the county. He said he will bring his proposed budget to the Finance Committee meeting this coming Wednesday and also to the next full County Board meeting.

Witt Firemen and former ETSB/911 dispatcher Dan Rogers asked the county board members how many of them are first responders, and two members raised their hands. He said public safety is not a spot to cut costs. He understands the county board has to consider finances, but if ETSB/911 moves out of the county, we will lose valuable knowledge of the dispatchers. He cited a recent failure from the Christian County backup system where first responders received new pagers at \$500 each, but their reception in an emergency event only produced tones with no voices. He also stated once we dissolve our ETSB/911 board there is no going back and cited the concern of the funds Montgomery County would have to pay for the Motorola contract if we consolidate and Christian County doesn't want it.

County Board member Mark Hughes asked how someone could get the minutes of the 911 Board meetings, and Nimmo responded they could contact him and he would provide them.

Hillsboro resident Patty Whitworth asked if anyone has spoken with Motorola regarding the status of the contract. Sheriff Rick Robbins responded he has been in touch with their salesman recently and there is a 5 year payment plan being considered. Whitworth also asked about the breakdown of the \$42,000 surcharge amount we receive, and Barbera-Brelle said it comes to the county in a lump sum payment. Whitworth then asked why there have been no equipment upgrades in the past several years, and Robbins responded he was involved and didn't feel the

annual maintenance costs we were spending was worth the money when it was needed elsewhere within the office. Robbins also stated he now feels differently, and with technology changing so quickly it is important to pay annual maintenance costs and keep the dispatching system up to date.

Whitworth then asked if anyone from Shelby County was in attendance, and if so what is their opinion about this consolidation. There were several Shelby County board members there, and they reported the current system has needs, with reports of missed calls and dispatching to the wrong counties. Barbera-Brelle stated new technology is available to do better pinpointing of calls, and more funding for the current system is needed to implement it. Another Shelby County board member stated the Christian/Shelby system is in the crawling state now and he feels they should work out the bumps in the road between them before taking on another county. Another Shelby County board member said they would not be voting on anything on this topic until they hear from us.

County Board member Megan Beeler said in 2012, the ETSB/911 Board owed \$50,000 from the past, and the 911 surcharge wasn't enough for salaries and costs. This is why the Sheriff's office absorbed 911 and staff's dispatcher duties were shared with sheriff duties. ETSB/911 revenue increased in 2017, which has contributed to the level of revenues we are seeing now. She said the big difference from the beginning of 911 services to now is our personnel costs since we try to pay livable wages in Montgomery County. She said we tried to pass a public safety sales tax twice and it failed. If it would have passed, it would have helped with Sheriff and 911 expenses. Beeler also clarified the county board has never charged ETSB/911 for rent, IT expenses, office supplies, phone access, personnel costs including benefits and union negotiations, etc. She said ETSB/911 was also asking to leave the Sheriff's office and stay in the county, so the conversation started for them to pay for all of their services but ETSB/911 could not afford to go on their own. Beeler said because the power plant has closed the county cannot afford to float the ETSB/911 services without charging them an operational fee to help with administrative costs. She said this amount came to \$60,000 and it was negotiated down to \$27,000.

Retired Hillsboro Fire Chief Richard Hewitt said the original agreement with the county and 911 called for no charges from the county and 911 was to be housed at the jail. Robbins gave a history of the working environment when 911 was just housed in the jail, which resulted in two dispatchers sitting side by side and not working together. Robbins said the current environment offers cross-training between staff which is working well. He also said we need new equipment so first responders and the citizens of Montgomery County are safe, so he is asking the county board to take their time before making this decision and look at other options. Robbins stated he is 100% behind keeping this in Montgomery County if we can afford it, since if it is consolidated it will never be as good as it is today.

Beeler said this is a lose-lose situation, since if they stay we will lose, and if they go we will also lose. She said there is an \$800,000 deficit in the county general fund budget now and we are starting to negotiate with VISTRA for property tax assessment. Beeler said the entire county budget deficit is \$3,000,000, and we only have \$1.7 million in reserves now.

Dan Rogers asked if the possibility of consolidating ETSB/911 was in motion before we knew the power plant was closing, and Beeler responded this has been a topic for about 18 months.

Hough asked at what point does the State of Illinois come in and force counties to consolidate, and Barbera-Brelle responded there is no statutory authority to do this now. Hough

asked what if we aren't "Next Generation" 911 ready by then, and Barbera-Brelle responded the state probably won't be ready by then either.

Nimmo stated the State of Illinois 911 office has the authority to make sure we are using our 911 funds correctly, and Barbera-Brelle responded affirmatively, if a threat is deemed to public safety.

Beeler asked Barbera-Brelle if she knows what the county will receive after the "Next Generation" 911 vendor has been selected, and Barbera-Brelle responded she does not know this information. She said the state retained a consultant to do a study at a cost of \$20 million dollars, and there is a possibility the revenues given to the counties will go down. She said there also is a possibility legislation could change to increase the \$1.50 surcharge to help with the new system costs.

Ehrhardt said the Christian/Shelby system is ready for "Next Generation" when the State of Illinois is ready to go live. Nimmo confirmed the Motorola contract includes "Next Generation" technology and meets compliance with the state.

Beeler stated the ETSB/911 Board has the authority over how they provide 911 services and the county board can't make them stay here. She said if they move away, the Sheriff will still have to have dispatchers and the "Next Generation" technology. Robbins agreed with Beeler about the financial issues, and urged the county board members to finalize an actual cost of the Motorola buyout if it is needed. He stated perhaps another attempt to pass a public safety sales tax is in order. Beeler asked Clerk Leitheiser about the timeline when monies would be received should a sales tax referendum be passed, and Leitheiser responded it could be a year to one and half years depending on the election.

Hillsboro City commissioner Don Downs asked why the board hasn't tried to get a state grant, and Nimmo responded we got a \$194,000 grant for 911 technology needs which must be spent by August of this year.

Discussion and questions from the public was held, including questions about if first responder agencies were contacted about ETSB/911 Consolidation, statements about the ETSB/911 Board appointment structure by the county board, the accountability the county board has to their constituents as elected officials, the negative repercussions consolidation would have on the existing Litchfield and Nokomis Sheriff dispatching contracts, and the time delay issues faced when dispatching is done from a long distance source.

State police officer Jim Holliday stated his preference to keep ETSB/911 services in Montgomery County, saying the best emergency service is done with a local dispatcher.

Chairman Young gave former 911 Coordinator/current Christian-Montgomery EMA Director Greg Nimmo an opportunity to make a closing statement. Nimmo said no matter what the outcome of this consolidation will be, he pledges when it comes to public safety all involved will help each other and work together. He said there are many passionate people in this room, and he is a Montgomery County resident himself so he sees both sides. He stated if the county board members want ETSB/911 to stay in Montgomery County, they need to come up with the money to keep it here. He will have no hard feelings either way, and Nimmo stated his opinion doesn't rule.

County Board member Jim Moore asked to hear from the ETSB/911 Board members who voted to consolidate with Christian/Shelby counties. ETSB/911 Board member Joe Gasparich came forward, and stated he has had over 20 years on the ETSB/911 board and watched it go broke until then County Board Chairman Roy Hertel came to the rescue by offering to combine it with the Sheriff's department. He said the ETSB/911 Board still owes Montgomery County

\$50,000 from the plan. Gasparich stated if consolidation is agreed upon, four dispatchers from Montgomery County will go to Christian County so local presence will remain. He said the ETSB/911 Board made their decision so they could look into the future, and he doesn't want to see 911 go broke again. He said if ETSB/911 remains in Montgomery County and the "Next Generation" 911 technology goes into place the Sheriff's office will be down for two weeks. County IT Director Curt Watkins said this is not a true statement. Gasparich said the ETSB/911 Board has been beating their heads against the wall for the past two weeks trying to keep 911 going.

County board member Jeremy Jones said he didn't know the county board had a voice in the location of the 911 services. Gasparich said the ETSB/911 Board tried to do what's right. He said he won't stay on the board if it remains in Montgomery County because he knows they are going to go broke again in three years.

Beeler asked Barbera-Brelle about the consolidation grant deadline, and she said the deadline is February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020, but another round of consolidation grants will be offered in February, 2021.

Robbins stated if consolidation takes place he will keep seven dispatchers who are senior members and have to lay off 4 other dispatchers. He also informed members there is a significantly lower pay in Christian County. Ehrhardt stated if displaced Montgomery County dispatchers want to go to Christian County they will be given first priority and she will not advertise the openings. She stated they would earn about \$4,800 less in Christian County.

County employee Terry Rogers asked Ehrhardt how many of their current Christian/Shelby County dispatcher staff are from Shelby County, and Ehrhardt responded of 9 dispatchers, one full-time and one part-time position is from Shelby County.

Hillsboro Mayor Brian Sullivan encouraged the county board to make it happen to keep 911 in Montgomery County, and agreed it is a funding problem either way.

ETSB/911 Board member Darin Beckman stated he voted for consolidation and didn't like it but it came down to money. He said we have some of the best dispatchers in the state. He would like for ETSB/911 to stay here if the finances can be worked out. Nimmo stated the names of all the sitting ETSB/911 Board members in attendance at the meeting: Mandy Schebscheck, David Beal, Tom Rogers, Joe Gasparich, Darin Beckmen, and Bill Bergen. He stated member Dave Weir was not at this meeting.

1. Other Business Update/Approval: Chairman Young deferred to County Clerk Sandy Leitheiser, who invited all to attend an upcoming Census Leader Training with two sessions to be held at January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020 in the County Board Room.

**Adjourn: Until the Full Board on Tuesday, January, 14<sup>th</sup>, 2020 at 5:30 PM in the County Board Room, Hillsboro, Illinois.**

**Motion by Beeler and second by Miles to Adjourn the Full Board Meeting. All in favor, motion carried.** Meeting Adjourned at 8:10 PM. Minutes respectfully recorded and submitted by Montgomery County Clerk and Recorder Sandy Leitheiser.