

911 Regionalization Study Update

March 3, 2021

3:02 p.m.

Present: Commissioner Stamper, Commissioner Pollock, Commissioner Swope, County Manager Erik Martin, Centralia Mayor Sue Luond, Monica Lynn of DELTAWRX, Michael Galvin of DELTAWRX, Chehalis City Manager Jill Anderson, 911 Communications Administrator Scott Smitherman, Centralia City Manager Rob Hill, BOCC Office Manager Lara McRea, Chehalis Mayor Dennis Dawes, Kelly Sneed, Kevin Anderson, Chehalis Fire Chief Ken Cardinale, Riverside Fire Chief Mike Kytta, Lee Coumbs of Riverside Fire, Becky Butler, Steve Wohld

Guests: Brad Flexhaug, Edna Fund, Jeff Jaques, Jay Johnson, Jeanine (last name not listed), Gregg (last name not listed), Randy (last name not listed), Mike Dorothy, others

Recorder: Rieva Lester

County Manager Erik Martin said the consulting firm DELTAWRX has concluded its assessment of the feasibility of regionalizing the Lewis County and Thurston County 911 call centers.

He said DELTAWRX determined the likely disadvantages outweigh the potential advantages.

Erik said the study was motivated by three primary drivers:

- The desire for improved communication services.
- Potential cost efficiencies from regionalizing operations.
- Thurston County Communications (TCOMM) has a reputation for providing outstanding and professional service to public safety agencies.

Erik provided the following overview of DELTAWRX's findings:

Disadvantages:

- **Lack of cost benefits to Lewis County.**
 - LCCC has a lower salary and benefits compensation structure than TCOMM.
 - No staffing efficiencies would be gained from transitioning operations to TCOMM.
 - Lewis County would incur costs from maintaining staff and equipment during the transition period.
- **Lack of shared political will for regionalization.**
 - The TCOMM board is not convinced that the benefits of a regionalization outweigh the risks to Thurston County.
 - There is concern about the impact on TCOMM employees.
 - TCOMM expressed concerns about governance, community support and funding.

- **Potentially negative impact on Lewis County Communications Center (LCCC) employees.**
 - Thurston County representatives indicated that it would be unlikely for TCOMM to absorb all LCCC staff.
 - LCCC staff would need to apply to work at TCOMM and, if hired, start with zero seniority and go through a lateral training program.

Conclusion / recommendation: Focus resources into addressing challenges and creating optimal environment for Lewis County Communications.

Next steps:

- Develop strategic plan
- Revisit governance structure
- Rebuild trust

Monica Lynn of DELTAWRX said the majority of the responding Lewis County entities indicated they would prefer to stay with Lewis County.

Monica said severe staffing shortages hampering Lewis County's efforts. She said DELTAWRX has suggested the county create four or so more positions. She and Scott Smitherman discussed challenges regarding training and retention.

Erik Martin said Lewis County, Centralia, Chehalis and Riverside partnered together to commission the study.

Mayor Dennis Dawes voiced concerns about first responders' safety in connection to the county's antiquated equipment. He said the area should consider a dedication funding source, similar to efforts in Thurston County, which collects a sales tax to pay for operations.

Erik said he would share the consultant's findings with the group.

Chief Stacy Denham said he would like access to the consultant's findings.

Chief Cardinale said rates and service have not improved over the six years since the user groups first raised concerns. He said the lack of information regarding the study findings further fuels feelings of distrust.

Monica Lynn reviewed the costs associated with keeping communications in Lewis County vs. the costs of moving to TCOMM.

Erik noted that over the next seven years, the costs would be as follows:

- Keep in Lewis County: \$18,631,600
- Move to TCOMM: \$22,089,400

Erik noted that \$9 million in radio tower infrastructure needs was not taken into account because those upgrades need to take place regardless.

Erik said the more extensive report was shared with the partners in December.

Jay Johnson of Riverside and Mayor Dawes expressed support of looking for a local funding source in the future.

Monica said the state offers several options for governance.

Chief Cardinale said his frustration is that he feels members of the Combined User Committee aren't always heard.

Commissioner Stamper suggested staff send information out and then meet again in April.

Commissioner Pollock said the governance and sales tax structures would need to be addressed.

Erik said he will send the PowerPoint information to the county's 32 user groups. He said he'll have DELTAWRX look at governance options.

Centralia City Manager Rob Hill urged the group to acknowledge DELTAWRX's findings about whether a move to TCOMM would work.

Commissioner Swope left at 4:13 p.m.

Meeting adjourned at 4:16 p.m.