

**ORLEANS PARISH COMMUNICATION DISTRICT
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

**REGULAR BOARD MEETING
March 16, 2023, 10:00 a.m.
Chief Warren McDaniels Board Room**

MEETING MINUTES

I. ROLL CALL AND CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Director John Thomas called the meeting to order. The roll was called with the following attendees present:

Chairman Director John Thomas (Public Safety and Homeland Security), Vice-Chairman Director Collin Arnold (NOHSEP), Lt. Joseph Piglia (proxy for Capt. Donovan T. Archote, LA State Police Troop B), CAO Gilbert Montaña (CNO), Supt. Roman Nelson (NOFD), Supt. Michelle Woodfork (NOPD), Chief William T. Salmeron (proxy for Dr. Megan Moreno, NOEMS), Dr. Jennifer Avegno (CNOHD), Dr. Brobson Lutz (Orleans Parish Medical Society), and Juan Lizarraga (LaFleur & Laborde).

CEO Emily Sedgwick (UMCNO) and Brig. Gen. Keith Waddell (LA National Guard) were absent.

II. APPROVAL OF DECEMBER 6, 2022 BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Chairman Thomas called for a motion to approve the minutes from the previous regular OPCD Board meeting on December 6, 2022.

Director Arnold (NOHSEP) motioned to accept the minutes and Dr. Lutz (Orleans Parish Medical Society) seconded. The motion passed.

III. FINANCIAL REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TYRELL MORRIS

This is the second full year with the agency's new financial system which can provide up-to-the-minute live financials. From a revenue perspective, the agency is on target. It's important to note most of OPCD's larger carriers pay their fees quarterly, usually around April or May, so first quarter remittances usually come in the first part of the year, but carrier remittances are on track with where they were last year.

This year, OPCD negotiated with the City of New Orleans to be paid half of the annual CEA payment at the first of the year (as opposed to quarterly payments). Many OPCD contract payments are due in January and receiving a larger portion of the city's annual CEA payment helped alleviate the cash flow issues experienced in past years. There were no issues covering OPCD overtime payroll during Mardi Gras. Additionally, there's been a significant increase in the amount of interest the agency's investments are earning as OPCD was able to move an additional \$1 million dollars into the agency's

investment account. In 2022, the OPCD investment account was earning approximately \$600 per month in interest. Currently, the interest earned is approximately \$4,000 per month due to the increased principal amount in the investment account.

Letters were sent to some of the agency's carriers requesting an explanation for their reduction in landline remittances, and most of the carriers responded by pointing to their loss of business. However, the loss seems to be made up in other areas. While many residents are getting rid of their landline phones, OPCD is seeing an increase in wireless remittances, which costs \$0.25 more per line.

ED Morris met with the new Public Service Commissioner, Mr. Davante Lewis, who has taken an interest in this topic. The Public Service Commission (PSC)'s telecommunication authority only covers landlines. ED Morris believes the state legislature is considering expanding the PSC's regulatory authority to include wireless carriers since they are currently unregulated in the state of Louisiana. If the legislature agrees to increase the PSC's authority, that would strengthen the OPCD's abilities to request carrier audits and records. The law currently doesn't provide penalties or an authoritative entity to complain to when carriers do not comply with audit notices. If the legislature expands PSC's authority, it appears the Public Service Commission will be the party responsible for issuing those penalties.

Dr. Lutz raised a question regarding how calls are billed if someone makes a call in a specific area of the city. Specifically, who receives the billing fees if a person uses a carrier whose business is located outside of Orleans Parish? ED Morris and IT Director Karl Fasold explained 9-1-1 fees are based upon billing address and not from where the call is placed. The first three digits of a phone number (prefix) are assigned a geographic location and do not correlate with how 9-1-1 fees are assessed.

ED Morris added the challenge is with VoIP phones. For example, Harrah's Casino's headquarters is located in Las Vegas, so their billing addresses are also in Las Vegas, but their device physically resides in Orleans Parish. A request has been made for a statewide legislation change because right now, the device is not described or defined in the law. Harrah's considers a device to be a switch physically located in a server, not each device capable of making a 9-1-1 call. A device is defined as a piece of equipment with the ability to dial 9-1-1, and OPCD believes each device should be assessed a charge. The legislature will need to discuss it but on the carrier side, phone companies are strongly resistant to changing the status quo.

Technology has evolved faster than the law, so the FCC launched their own probes into 9-1-1 fees and the diversion of fees and they are investigating carriers who may be doing this willfully and taking action against them. A board member asked if any existing local ordinances could be used to assist with fee collection and enforcement. ED Morris explained an additional fee could be added to the state fees paid by the carriers.

CAO Montañó (CNO) asked for clarification on budget personnel benefits. ED Morris explained all personnel services were rolled into one. Pensions and retirements were not spread out in the budget and the actual numbers are consistent with the anticipated

amount spent. Also, the 5% pay raise for OPCD employees went into effect January 1. The funds were budgeted and included in the current financial report.

Another challenge surrounding phones is the introduction of 9-8-8 (Mental Crisis Hotline). There has been conversation about continued funding for the service so it's possible the city will assess a 9-1-1 type of service surcharge for 9-8-8 services. Currently, the service is funded using a mix of federal funds and state allocated funds. This funding mandate is temporary so the states will have to figure out how to make it long term. While ED Morris is unsure of the state's plan, he understands they may be considering assessing an additional surcharge on phones to provide 9-8-8 service across the state. Eventually, federal funds will not be available, but the FCC has said they may auction certain radio spectrums to fund it.

Diversity Recruitment

Chairman Thomas requested a discussion about diversity in employee recruitment. OPCD does not culturally represent the residents the agency serves, but it has an interest in balancing gender diversity and cultural diversity. Publicly, there's been conversation around non-English language access. From a service delivery perspective, OPCD has responded by providing an interpretative language service using the federal contractor that aligns with best practices. The agency has room to grow internally both organizationally and culturally, and the Chairman wanted to discuss this matter with the Board.

The discussion was prompted by the incident involving a Hispanic citizen who called 9-1-1 after being shot and who ultimately became paralyzed due to an issue with the translator with whom he spoke. The Chairman inquired about existing outreach that could hire people in the community who are bilingual. He suggested putting a system in place that would provide backup to assist the way NOPD has. NOPD's consent decree requires their policies to be written in English, Spanish and Vietnamese. The Chairman believes it is important to reach out to the non-English speaking communities and recruit from those communities to bring more diversity into the 9-1-1 Call Center.

ED Morris explained there are some things to consider with this request. For instance, if call takers were allowed to speak their native language on a 9-1-1 call, the agency would need to certify the language being spoken is authentic. Calls are periodically used in evidentiary and criminal cases, and it's recommended that a city of our size should use a certified entity to provide translation services. The service the OPCD uses today guarantees 250 languages.

Members of the Board thought it was important to note the call taker and dispatcher who assisted in that specific call followed procedure and did nothing wrong. The caller was unable to specify the building where he was located, and the translator gave a personal opinion of the caller's location. Ultimately, NOPD was able to locate the caller and provide assistance.

Chief Nelson (NOFD) added that most agencies are having trouble with recruitment and staff shortages. Agencies are forced to hire whoever is applying and there should be discussion on reaching people who are more qualified. With regards to a permanent

translating core on staff at OPCD, the Chief expressed concerns. How many languages will the translator be able to translate? Is it more feasible to staff a full-time translator than the service currently available that provides translation services 24 hours a day? Chief Nelson also wants to remove the narrative that that specific 9-1-1 call was a failure. He strongly encourages diversity in recruitment and believes it would greatly benefit the agency to increase the capacity of multi-language speakers as much as possible.

Dr. Avegno (CNOHD) has noticed that one of the more common languages she is seeing is a dialect of Spanish from Guatemala and it's very difficult to find a translator for this language. She believes it would be wasteful to attempt to address every variety of language, but she does agree the agency should find ways to show the community its interest in addressing some of the more common languages.

ED Morris added that many times the chaos level can be extremely high on 9-1-1 calls where a language translator is necessary. The OPCD Public Engagement and HR teams have been tasked with connecting with NOLA Ready to identify persons to contact when preparing for hurricane season. It's important to have a presence in those spaces where help is needed.

Chief Salmeron (EMS) suggested, from a public safety standpoint, offering one language resource for the City of New Orleans. He also noted that, out of the millions of calls received, that particular call and outcome was rare. He suggested that a centralized language line can be secured that will support staff on the ground, under the headset, in police cars, etc. so someone who speaks Spanish will have the resources they need. Director Arnold (NOOHSEP) and his staff are actively pursuing a contract with the local translation company that was used during the pandemic.

The Board next discussed holding a joint recruitment event with Police, Fire, and EMS within the non-English speaking communities. Joint recruitment has been attempted in the past, and the public safety agency chiefs are supportive of leveraging recruitment efforts to encourage applicants to apply to all agencies offering employment. So, if an applicant applies for a position with NOFD but doesn't meet the qualifications or is not suited for that position, that applicant would be pointed towards the other agencies as a potential means of employment.

Operational Updates

ED Morris has seen a significant increase in 9-1-1 calls for services. In February alone, the OPCD took an additional 9,000 calls, which is a 20% increase across the city. Other agencies are also experiencing increased calls for service.

ED Morris stated that OPCD has been under scrutiny for call answer times. OPCD is responding by hiring more staff. A recruit class has recently graduated, and the current class is in the middle of its final training. Call takers are working hard to answer phone calls faster. The agency met the national standard in February by answering 90% of 9-1-1 calls in 15 seconds or less, even with the 20% increase in call volume.

ED Morris attended the 9-1-1 Goes to Washington Conference at the end of February and held a round table with 9-1-1 Directors of major cities. Many were surprised when ED Morris explained how New Orleans call takers typically answer 9-1-1 calls within forty seconds or less. Other cities are reporting a 6-, 9-, or even 11-minute hold time for 9-1-1. This is certainly something to celebrate, especially considering the size of New Orleans, and it shows the agency is making steady improvements with call times.

OPCD currently has thirty-five call taker vacancies. An OPCD job fair is scheduled for Saturday, March 11th. To date, 120 people have signed up to apply. The agency can train a maximum of twenty-four people at one time. The recruitment process has been condensed to a one stop shop. An applicant can potentially complete all five steps in the same day, from exam, to interviewing, to fingerprinting, to background check, to drug screen. The goal is for successful applicants to leave the job fair with a conditional offer of employment. ED Morris invited the Board to the job fair and encouraged members to stop by and drop off material for recruitment so if applicants are unsuccessful with the OPCD process, it will be suggested to apply at a different agency.

ED Morris announced a new OPCD public-facing, quality assurance web portal. The public can go to the OPCD website and submit an inquiry or give a compliment on an experience they've had with 9-1-1. The submissions immediately go to the Training and Compliance Bureau to be investigated and the public should receive a response within seven (7) calendar days about the findings of that investigation. The names of the individuals submitting the comment will not be identified, but the public will be able to see the complaint, its findings, and comments.

Compensation Study

Once the budget was approved in 2022, OPCD began a Compensation Classification Study. It is currently underway. There are internal surveys happening among staff and external surveys happening amongst agencies that are comparable with OPCD. ED Morris is anticipating the results of the study within the next six to eight weeks, and he will make the report that includes the results available to the Board and to the public.

Fire Station Alerting RFP

Procurement of a new, \$2.5 million Fire Station Alerting System is well underway. ED Morris anticipates the draft RFP will be ready for review by the NOFD very soon. Once the last of the information is reviewed, OPCD will complete the state RFP template and submit it to be published in the state procurement advertising system. The new FSA system is expected to be deployed approximately three months from the time the contract is awarded.

CAD Upgrade

OPCD is preparing for a CAD upgrade. The agency is also updating mobile data terminals located in police cars, firetrucks, and ambulances. OPCD has transitioned to a cloud based 9-1-1 system so officers and field responders will have instant access in their vehicles to the audio from a 9-1-1 call that has just occurred, as well as location information or any text or video sent to 9-1-1. Right now, the process to retrieve 9-1-1 audio is labor intensive, and the upgraded CAD technology will provide first responders real time information while they are investigating a scene.

Hexagon On-Call Records Project

The Go Live date is scheduled for August 29, 2023. The project has six milestones, each with their own element of risk, and the agency successfully passed every critical milestone. OPCD is in the final phases of the project developing training materials and making final configurations in preparation for the Go Live date. There is also a training session scheduled today for the NOPD Property and Evidence team.

IAED Protocol

OPCD is reviewing emergency call taking protocols from the IAED (International Academy of Emergency Dispatch) and taking a deep dive into the processes by looking at 9-1-1 calls that took longer to dispatch than others. The purpose is to see where any issues exist, perhaps in the ProQA protocol or the way questions are asked. The caller may not understand the questions being asked so it may be necessary to re-phrase questions or even leave the protocols altogether. While the EMS protocol is set and cannot be changed, Law and Fire protocols may need some tweaking. There were no existing ProQA guidelines at OPCD when the agency consolidated in 2016, and the current protocols are very regimented, maybe even too regimented.

This is also an opportunity to confirm whether any protocols need to be adjusted to better handle dispatching for the Mobile Crisis Response Unit. Currently, mental health calls are processed under ProQA Law protocols, but there is a ProQA EMS protocol designed specifically for mental health emergencies. Because police protocols are always determined to be paramount in these types of responses, it's possible to miss asking the additional medical-related questions that would help answer why someone may be in crisis. ED Morris thinks the EMS protocol is more appropriate to use to get a better assessment of the situation. All OPCD requests for protocol changes have been accepted by IAED. OPCD is not arbitrary with these requested changes which are supported with examples, audio, and science.

An on-scene service contract has been executed. Equipment has been ordered and their employees came in recently to get CJIS clearance. Once they are deployed, they will be assigned all vehicle accidents while in service which will free up NOPD units to respond to more serious calls.

OPCD Expansion Project

The legislature will soon be in session to decide on capital outlay for the expansion project. OPCD has submitted a cost amendment to the project to include inflation, but the project scope hasn't changed. The agency has received letters of support for the project from almost every member of the state delegation. Once the capital outlay bill is released by the Governor, they will announce if OPCD was considered. If not funded, lobbying efforts will continue. The project has been partially funded at \$18 million dollars, but ED Morris increased the ask to include inflationary costs for construction. The bill expected to reach the Governor's desk within the next couple of weeks will state what is included in the capital outlay budget. OPCD has not asked the City of New Orleans for any capital outlay for this project.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

There is no new business to discuss.

V. OLD BUSINESS

There is no old business to discuss.

VI. ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements.

VII. ADJOURN

Chairman Thomas called for a motioned to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed. The meeting was adjourned.

VII. END OF REGULAR MEETING

Submitted by,

Tyrell Morris
Executive Director