

**ORLEANS PARISH COMMUNICATION DISTRICT
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

**REGULAR BOARD MEETING
December 12, 2023, 10:00 a.m.
Chief Warren McDaniels Board Room**

MEETING MINUTES

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Director John Thomas called the meeting to order.

II. ROLL CALL

The roll was called with the following attendees present: Chairman Director John Thomas (Public Safety and Homeland Security), Vice-Chairman Director Collin Arnold (NOHSEP), Dr. James Aiken (proxy for Interim CEO John Nickens, UMCNO), CAO Gilbert Montañó (CNO), Supt. Roman Nelson (NOFD), Dr. Megan Moreno (NOEMS), Dr. Jennifer Avegno (CNOHD), and Dr. Brobson Lutz (Orleans Parish Medical Society).

Capt. Donovan T. Archote (LA State Police Troop B), Col. Kenneth Donnelly, Ret. (LA National Guard), and Supt. Anne Kirkpatrick (NOPD) were absent.

III. APPROVAL OF SEPTEMBER 19, 2023 BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Board Chairman Thomas called for a motion to approve the minutes from the previous regular OPCD Board meeting on September 19, 2023. The motion was made by Dr. Lutz and seconded by Dr. Moreno. The motion passed.

IV. OLD BUSINESS

Sewer Repair Update

During the September 2023 board meeting, the board suggested OPCD hire an engineer to review the proposal for the plumbing repairs needed in the call center. The agency moved on that suggestion and the proposal was reviewed and considered acceptable according to engineering standards.

Attempts were again made to find additional bidders for the project but were unsuccessful so the agency will negotiate with the contractor who responded to the RFP. The project is scheduled to begin in January 2024 contingent on reallocation of funding in the budget to cover it. The board previously approved Resolution 23-02 to increase funds from \$100,000 to \$185,000 to cover the cost of the repairs.

Expansion Project

The CEA for the scaled back expansion project was submitted to the state and plans are currently on hold until the agency receives approval. Interim ED Fasold requested a waiver of the matched funds and immediate access to the requested \$6,000,000.00 for startup costs to be used to engage a new architect and create plans for the project. Funding is in P5 status until the CEA has been reviewed, at which time, the agency will determine how to proceed with the project and will report back to the board with an update.

Compensation Study

The classification study identified four (4) positions salaried below the minimum living wage for the city of New Orleans, one of which is ECS1, or Call taker, the most essential position in the agency. The original budget that was submitted included a 10% increase for the ECS1 position, but during the budget presentation, the City Council asked that Interim ED Fasold resubmit the budget and include the full 28% recommended by the compensation study. The budget was resubmitted as requested and was approved. The Budget Committee passed the ordinance on December 7th.

The ECS Recruit pay rate was established as recommended by the study at 10% less than the ECS1 rate to provide an incentive for employees to invest their time and talents and remain with the agency long-term. The next OPCD training class is scheduled to begin on January 8, 2024. There are currently four applicants who will receive offers of employment pending the results of their drug screening and fingerprints. To avoid losing potential employees before training begins, applicants will be hired immediately and placed in departments that may be backlogged and need some assistance then transition easily into their training classes.

An evaluation process is being created to determine if employees are meeting the agency's requirements. At the beginning of the 2025 budget process, employees will be advised what the ratings will entail in the first quarter of the fiscal year and what their annual evaluation will be. OPCD will copy NOPD's model which requires individuals to perform extensive self-evaluations then meet with their supervisor, etc. Q scores on 911 calls will be a part of these evaluations. The Compliance department is developing a QA/QC process for all dispatch disciplines, along with 311 and Public Records. These results will also feed the evaluation system.

The 28% pay increase recommended by the Compensation study will be applied to the ECS I position, and cascade through operations as required to maintain appropriate delta's between positions and avoid salary compression. The compensation study also recommended significant pay increases for non-ops personnel.

V. NEW BUSINESS

Mental Health Support

A full-time (40 hours per week) on-site Chaplain will be assigned through the Chaplaincy program of the non-profit Baptist Community Ministries at no cost to the agency aside from the use of a desk, computer, and cell phone. A schedule will be

created, with the assistance of Operations personnel, to ensure the Chaplain will be available to staff as needed.

As part of its health coverage, OPCD currently offers a dial-in mental health crisis options employees can use, but most employees agreed this option was best used for major crises. Most approved of having a Chaplain on-site as the preferred choice. The Chaplain has already assisted the agency with a previous incident at the request and need of an employee and their family so their presence has already been a helpful addition to the agency.

OPCD is implementing a pilot program with NeoGov, one of the agency's vendors. The program is a mental health assistance peer to peer counseling program that will use an application that can be installed on a cell phone. OPCD and a California 911 Center are the pilots for this program. Peer counselors have been trained and will be ready to work when the program begins. In addition, the Louisiana chapter of NENA/APCO is implementing a statewide voluntary mental health support program and the OPCD is supporting that initiative.

OPCD will work to create a social worker position using a process that mirrors the process NOFD used to create the position within that department. We'll use NOFD's job description & duties as a starting point for definition of the OPCD position.

Insurance Premiums

OPCD is unable to address increased insurance premiums currently, but the topic will be reviewed in Spring 2024 and discussed with the City Benefits Department. The goal is to implement changes in 2025.

Succession Plan

The compensation study recommended a succession plan for the Executive Director position. A resolution was offered but after discussion tabled pending revision.

OPCD Job Descriptions

Most OPCD job descriptions have been reviewed and analyzed by an external professional to ensure they are appropriate in content, share the same language, and match in format and design, with the intent of reviewing all early in 2024. Organizational structure changes are still being made to align the agencies personnel assignment with its' mission.

Finance Subcommittee

The board previously discussed establishing a Finance Subcommittee to provide financial resources to OPCD and address any budgetary concerns that may arise. Chairman Thomas asked to table the matter until CFO Norman White has been given the opportunity to review financial statements provided by OPCD's Finance Department and submit a report of his findings to review. The board needs clarity on the agency's true financial status before moving forward with the Finance subcommittee. This request is due to discrepancies found in OPCD's financial statements that showed available funds that did not exist.

Dr. Aiken suggested creating a sub-Committee while waiting for CFO White's recommendations to keep things moving along and the Committee should include at least one non-city related member. Chairman Thomas will be a member of the sub-Committee and agreed to select two board members to serve with him. Chairman Thomas anticipates providing an update at the next board meeting.

Operational Changes

Some topics discussed during the City Council Budget Subcommittee meeting have resulted in changes within the Operations Department. In the past, if an NOPD Code 2 call was pending with no units available for dispatch the call would be broadcast once, followed by direct notification to the ranking officer of that district to request they free a unit from an existing call to be assigned. While OPCD can preempt a unit en route to a call, we cannot pull a unit who has arrived on their assigned call – that authority rests within their supervisor. Moving forward, pending Code 2 calls will be periodically broadcast as a reminder and district ranking officers can determine if an officer needs to be released for the pending call.

OPCD created an auxiliary position that will make call backs to pending Code 2 calls if no unit(s) can be dispatched immediately & advise the caller. This will help ensure the caller is in a safe place & allow us to determine if anything has changed, i.e., if the matter is escalating. The goal is a minimum of every 15 minutes until the call is dispatched. This does not affect call backs to abandoned 911 calls. Those calls are always returned as quickly as possible.

The vacant 311 Analyst position will receive additional responsibilities to include tracking top locations where 311 complaints are being made and reaching out to the agencies where those issues belong to receive weekly updates on the progress for that complaint. One major complaint was the lack of feedback on incidents reported to 311 so the agency will focus on proactively contacting the responsible city agencies to determine the top 5 locations for complaints.

Additionally, 311 tickets with no movement/updates will be addressed on a weekly basis to determine any progress being made. The goal is to be more responsive with callers requesting an update.

Coding Changes for NOPD

The agency is actively engaged with NOPD to revert to signals and codes for incident types from the alphabetic coding. A working group consisting of an NOPD Captain, Lt., Sgt., SVU Detective, representatives from the Domestic Violence Task Force, the OPCD CAD Manager, a dispatcher, and a policy writer from the NOPD Staff has been formed. The initial meeting of that working group was attended and addressed by the Consent Decree Monitor, the NOPD Deputy Chief and Interim Executive Director Karl Fasold. During that meeting, the group was instructed that no topic was off the table during discussions and the goal was to determine the issues and resolve them.

Determining the correct path forward from the working group recommendations has proven more difficult due to the methodology used in implementation of the 'plain speech' incident types. The training side of CAD has been updated and SMEs are now ensuring changes were properly made and no gaps exist. Once those changes are confirmed, OPCD will work with NOPD to schedule a staged rollout date. NOPD is also working to ensure their policies and procedures are updated to handle any issues related to the Consent Decree Monitor and that their staff has been trained to understand the codes.

There was some confusion regarding best practices. The issue is not what is said over the air or how units are dispatched, but how CAD incident types are coded. OPCD will continue using plain speech responses to dispatch units. It is required by NIMS and done to ensure mutual aid units are able to understand the incidents being dispatched..

Discussion ensued regarding the issues with the plain text incident types, including compression / loss of information related to sexual assault and domestic violence cases. The changes to signals are not retroactive and will not change crime statistics that occurred between September 2022 and when the reversion occurs.

UPS A Failure

There was a major failure of Building UPS A about two weeks ago, causing one half of the Call Center's stations to lose power, however, the staff quickly adapted and, because of their resiliency and redundancy designed into the systems, the staff were able to continue doing their jobs without any field responders or media noticing any difference in operations. Fortuitously, a CAD hardware upgrade had been scheduled for the same night as the failure occurred but was cancelled at the last minute due to an unrelated issue. Because of the scheduled CAD upgrade, everything was in place for planned CAD downtime. The system was back up and running within 30 minutes.

The UPS was completely rebuilt by the manufacturer under the agency's maintenance contract and resumed normal functionality. The quick resolution to the UPS failure speaks to the hard work and level of professionalism of the OPCD staff.

2024 Budget

CAO Montañó expressed concerns with the 2024 budget. The compensation study was not mentioned in either the motion or the ordinance and there is a significant financial gap between the proposed budget and the adopted budget. The board, through the

Finance Committee, will need to reestablish a baseline budget. The agency has significant cash flow concerns that were discussed at an emergency meeting with the City's CAO & CFO last week. Any potential cash flow issues expected to occur through the end of 2023 have been resolved but the agency will need to reestablish a baseline budget that will delineate the 28% pay increase to the call takers and recommended 2½% increase for professional staff. This is the most financially prudent pathway for solvency and success and will be the baseline moving forward. The anticipated date operations employees can expect to begin receiving pay increases is the first full pay period of 2024, beginning January 7th and paid on January 26th.

CAO Montaña believes the agency's focus should be to ensure the budget can carry over into the next year. OPCD's lack of funds is a huge concern and discussions regarding compression and salary issues are missing the target concerns. CAO Montaña would like to reevaluate the budget with Chairman Thomas to determine what is best for the agency moving forward. Cash flow for OPCD is the top priority. Interim ED Fasold requested to defer the topic until the Executive Session where there will be a presentation.

Overtime scheduling is a normal part of the call takers' 12-hour workday and is used for holidays, special events, emergency situations, etc. Unscheduled overtime is still necessary to maintain minimum staffing for dispatchers. The 8 (eight) potential new hires will help with call answer times. Forced overtime was stopped in September, and is not a sustainable solution. The NENA standard for call times is 90% of 911 calls answered in 10 seconds or less and OPCD is currently at 80%. Last year, during forced overtime from Mardi Gras to the beginning of September, the agency's call answer percentage was a little over 90%.

The salary increase for the ECS1 position is expected to garner major interest. The agency has received 91 applications since the increase was announced on the news. Unfortunately, 41 applicants did not pass the pre-employment Criticalll testing, which includes skill sets, ability to listen and type simultaneously, and a psychological evaluation. The remaining applicants are going through the interview process, followed by fingerprinting for background checks, & drug screenings. All who successfully complete that process will be invited to spend 4 (four) hours with a call taker on the Ops floor where they will see the job happening in real time. They'll receive offers of employment.

The agency was on level 2 activation through Bayou Classic, where half of the employees who would normally be off are required to report. During that week, 90% of calls were answered within 10 seconds or less and 95% were answered within 15 seconds or less. Once additional call takers are hired, the agency should start achieving the national standard on a regular basis.

One of the agency's current tasks is to determine an appropriate FTE count for Operations. The consolidation study performed in 2016 is the last analysis used to determine staffing (& provide FTE's for budgetary purposes), but much has changed since that time. Now we have Carbyne call handling, which provides true Next

Generation 911 functionality including pictures and video, text-to-911, different call patterns, etc. Call volume has increased, but call handling for many calls decreased.

OPCD is only covering call-outs by ECS's when we reach a critical level. Dispatch overtime is used more liberally to cover call-outs due to minimum requirements to ensure field responder safety. In that case forced OT is used if no one voluntarily takes it.

Since the same pool of ECS's answer 9-1-1, the 10-digit emergency line, and the non-emergency line 504-821-2222, OPCD would like to encourage more use of the non-emergency line by callers reporting past events. OPCD is working on language to do so. This will ensure emergency calls are answered first.

A major concern is when city functions don't work on a regular day-to-day basis and citizens are left with no choice but to contact 911 for assistance. The number of inappropriate calls to 911 would decrease if the daily concerns were consistently addressed. However, it is still important to educate the public on when and how to use the non-emergency number. Interim Executive Director Fasold explained 311 is not staffed 24/7 and the non-emergency number is answered when emergency queue's are clear. The problem with using 9-1-1 for non-emergencies is that real emergencies are then waiting in the call queue.

Dr. Avegno added the public needs feedback and updates, so they'll know their concerns are being addressed. She also believes it will be difficult to explain the difference between calling 311 and the non-emergency number 504.821.2222. Questions like how long you should expect to be on hold and how long you should expect before getting a response are some that will need to be answered.

The non-emergency number cannot be changed to a 3-digit number such as 511 because that is done on a federal level, but the agency is working on the verbiage for a voice menu that will prompt the caller to perform certain actions. There will be a text or call back function during business hours that will take you to the non-emergency number.

Supt. Nelson asked if it were possible to prompt 311 calls to the non-emergency number to avoid the non-emergency calls in the 911 queue. The message should make the caller aware they may be on hold for an extended period and please wait on hold until their call can be answered. Interim ED Fasold explained when calling 311, there is an expectation of the report being taken and a ticket being opened but that does not happen after hours. In addition, sending 311 calls to the non-emergency number may create bad customer service because people will expect to report their specific concern, and the non-311 staff cannot accommodate. The call volume for 311 calls outside of normal business hours is very small, but a typical 311 call takes much longer to process than a 911 call.

Director Arnold expressed concerns that no one will report flooded streets, those in need of assistance during freeze plan activations, etc. if they have to wait on hold to do

so. Interim ED Fasold pledged to take the matter under advisement and report at a future meeting.

V. NEW BUSINESS

Policy Revisions

All existing OPCD policies have been reviewed by a committee of department heads and are presently being by legal counsel. A policy requiring policy reviews every first quarter was established to ensure policies are regularly updated and revised. An OIG report released on November 16th contained matters regarding the previous Executive Director but also included recommendations for the agency. Interim ED Fasold followed the report with a press release explaining the agency previously identified policy issues approximately nine (9) weeks before the report was released and were already working on them.

The agency has reverted to the original version of the vehicle policy. It was created from the city's vehicle policy, so it requires a police report and drug and alcohol testing for any accident involving an agency vehicle. OPCD has three (3) assigned take home vehicles for the Executive Director, Deputy Executive Director, and Director of Operations. Only one is currently being used as a take home vehicle. The agency has a contract with TDAL (Tulane Drug Analysis Lab) that includes drug testing for as well as pre-employment screening and random and probable cause testing. OPCD is invoiced for this service. (This lab is the same one used by NOPD)

All OPCD policies are managed in Power DMS. If a policy is deleted, the agency can access edits on that policy, but for a significant fee. The OIG did not request OPCD pursue restoration of the questionable vehicle policy as they were able to complete their investigation using other means.

Chairman Thomas inquired about the status of the Bylaws update effort. Interim ED Fasold requested the board appoint a subcommittee to assist with drafting bylaws to ensure the agency's staff and attorneys don't miss anything that would need to be included. Director Arnold (NOHSEP) agreed to lead the Bylaws Revision Subcommittee.

The CEA is scheduled to expire at the end of 2024. The agency will request a draft extension and plans to present the draft for consideration.

Chairman Thomas inquired about when the legislative audit will be completed. Interim ED Fasold explained there are two legislative audits being worked on but there is no deadline. All requirements for the annual financial audit have been completed and an engagement conference will be scheduled for after the start of the year.

The LA Legislative Auditors Performance Standards Division is performing an audit of 911 responses in New Orleans – both NOPD's response to 911 calls and OPCD's handling of them. Interim ED Fasold attended the first meeting this past Friday and will

be working with the agency to complete the audit. Interim ED Fasold notified the LA Legislative Auditors of a duplicate audit being performed by the OIG and suggested the two agencies coordinate their efforts. An update is pending.

Resolution 23-05

Resolution 23-05 will establish the 2024 Board meeting dates. The proposed meeting dates are March 12, June 11, September 10, and December 10. Once the resolution passes, the board dates will be set but may be rescheduled at the discretion of the Board Chair.

Interim ED Fasold requested a motion to accept the proposed Board meeting dates. The motion was made by CEO Montañó and seconded by Director Arnold. The motion passed unanimously.

Resolution 23-06 and 23-07

The position of Executive Deputy Director was created by recommendation of the compensation study and replaced the Chief of Staff position. Two candidates were interviewed, and Ms. Heather Hilliard was hired. In the event the Executive Director position becomes vacant, Resolution 23-06 will allow the Executive Deputy to fill the role of Interim Executive. The purpose is to provide continuity with the existing Executive Director and if it's decided a different candidate is better for any reason, the decision would require board approval.

CAO Montañó recommended deferring Resolutions 23-06 and 23-07 (Adoption of 2024 budget) until the board has a better grasp of the agency's staffing procedures and its current financial position. There was some confusion about the need to insulate the Deputy Executive Director role so tightly. The board currently governs the Executive Director position only. They expressed uncertainty about the need to give the board control of internal personnel decisions because it isn't standard practice to do so. There was also hesitation because the board does not play a part in the hiring process and that creates challenges as well. The board wants to be more educated and personally engaged in some of the agency's hiring practices. Interim ED Fasold agreed to withdraw Resolution 23-06.

Chairman Thomas suggested having an HR representative present for applicant interviews to ensure a fair process across the board to avoid unintended consequences.

CAO Montañó made a motion to defer 23-07 until an internal and finance meeting can be set and suggested the meeting take place soon to not linger the issue. Dr. Avegno seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Interim ED Fasold requested a motion to enter into Executive Session to discuss agency personnel concerns. The motion was made by Chairman Thomas and seconded by Supt. Nelson (NOFD). The motion passed unanimously.

The regular board meeting was suspended.

Upon resumption of the Regular Board Meeting, the meeting was called to order.

VI. OLD BUSINESS

Upon returning from Executive Session, a motion was made by CAO Gilbert Montañó to pass the 2024 budget and provide the recommended raises to OPS Personnel and those other employees identified as paid below the "New Orleans Living Wage". Other personnel will receive no raise at this time while the City Council intent is clarified. Any raises provided following that process to non-OPS personnel will be retroactive to January 7th (the start of the first full pay period of 2024) The motion was seconded by Dr. Moreno. The motion passed unanimously.

Dr. Brobson Lutz made a motion to make Karl Fasold the permanent Executive Director based on the board's evaluation of his work since he was made Interim Executive Director on July 11th. The motion was seconded by Dr. Aiken. The motion passed unanimously.

Counsel provided information that all previous Executive Directors had served under an employment contract executed by the Board Chair. The board agreed as a whole that counsel should provide an agreement for Mr. Fasold following previous history, to be signed by the Board Chair.

VI. ADJOURN

A motion was made to adjourn the board meeting. The motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned.

Submitted by,



Karl Fasold
Executive Director