

**ORLEANS PARISH COMMUNICATION DISTRICT
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

**REGULAR BOARD MEETING
September 19, 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), Lt. Joseph Piglia (proxy for Capt. Donovan T. Archote, LA State Police Troop B), Dr. James Aiken (proxy for CEO Emily Sedgwick, UMCNO), Col. Kenneth Donnelly, Ret. (LA National Guard), Supt. Roman Nelson (NOFD), Supt. Michelle Woodfork (NOPD), Dr. Megan Marino (NOEMS), Dr. Jennifer Avegno (CNOHD), and Dr. Brobson Lutz (Orleans Parish Medical Society).

CAO Gilbert Montaña (CNO) was absent.

III. APPROVAL OF JULY 6, 2023 BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Board Chairman Thomas called for a motion to approve the minutes from the previous regular OPCD Board meeting on July 6, 2023. The motion passed.

IV. FINANCIAL REPORT BY INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR KARL FASOLD

Interim Executive Director (ED) Fasold presented the current state of the agency to the Board. OPCD's financial position was grossly overstated by the previous administration. To make an accurate fiscal determination, the agency needs to complete a payroll cycle that includes no overtime, etc. before presenting its findings to the Board. The OPCD Finance team is working with Interim ED Fasold to gather documentation to determine if additional funding will be needed in the future. An update is expected in three (3) weeks. No additional Board action is needed.

Landline remittances have steadily decreased over the last four years and are continuing to do so. For 2023, \$400,000 was originally budgeted for remittance fees but the agency ultimately received \$140,000.

In line with the current national staffing shortage, OPCD continues to experience staffing issues. This is reflected in call answer times with 80% of the agency's 9-1-1 calls answered within 10 seconds or less. While that percentage is better than most of the country's call answer times, it is lower than the 90% boasted by the previous OPCD administration.

The 2024 budget includes a salary increase for Operations personnel on every level, from call takers and dispatchers to Operations Managers. This should avoid salary compression. The remaining departments, excluding Director level positions, will also receive a small raise. The Directors of 9-1-1, 3-1-1, Operations, Training & Compliance, the Deputy Director, and Executive Director will not receive a salary increase next year. This will be discussed in greater detail during the presentation of the compensation study. The agency is attempting to identify grants and other in-kind funds to match. The last course of action will be to abandon the capital outlay money from the state.

Last year's budget included an additional \$3 million: \$2.5 million for the Fire Station Alerting System and the rest for the jail portion of the Hexagon maintenance. Those expenses were flagged and have since been eliminated. OPCD lobbyists are optimistic the state will be amenable to a request for additional capital outlay funding, if necessary. The budget will continue to include major building repairs and renovations, but unnecessary additions will be eliminated.

Regarding 9-1-1 wireless fees, LA legislation states the city where the resident's phone is billed will receive the remittance fees. The area code of the phone number is irrelevant. Any changes to this remittance process would have to come from a national level effort through the FCC, and it seems unlikely that telecommunication carriers would support it. There have been discussions at NENA and APCO about possibly tracking where phones are predominantly used, but phone carriers have opposed this because it would significantly complicate how their fees are collected. Landline remittances have consistently decreased each year for the past four years.

The upside is how LA's prepaid wireless legislation was written. Fees are assessed at the point of sale and where the pre-paid phone cards are sold. It's likely a resident of New Orleans who uses a prepaid phone will also purchase phone minute cards in New Orleans, allowing the city to collect that revenue. In prior years, copper wires were used in phone lines making it easier to determine which wires went to a house, business, etc. Today, there are Session Initiated Protocols (SIP) VoIP, voice over IP lines that are effectively an internet connection to a switch that can realistically carry thousands of voice phone calls. There is currently no clear definition of the billing amount for a SIP voice trunk as that must be addressed at the state level.

V. NEW BUSINESS

Staffing Changes

Interim ED Fasold reported some administrative positions that were eliminated. The Director of Support Services and Chief of Staff positions were an unnecessary level of administration and were removed. A Chief of Staff position is unusual for an

organization of OPCD's size. Most have a Deputy Executive Director, which is defined as next in line to the Executive Director and designed as a direct support for several departments within the organization.

Thirty-one (31) people applied for the Deputy Executive Director position and only two met the preferred qualifications. The applicants were interviewed, and Ms. Heather Hilliard was selected and hired as the new Deputy Executive Director. During her tenure at Kenner's Fire Department, the agency received a Class 1 rating. She also brings a wealth of experience in finding grants so some of her focus will be towards ensuring the agency can qualify for assorted federal, state, etc., type funding. Ms. Hilliard has already begun researching suitable vendors for the building expansion project as well as additional funding to assist with increased expenses incurred due to Next Generation 911 functionality, ESInet, the Carbyne call handling system, etc. which are all required and are more expensive than previous technology. Ms. Hilliard began her tenure at OPCD on Monday, September 11th.

Organizational Chart

The organizational chart was updated and shows the agency's current structure. 9-1-1 Operations, 3-1-1 Operations, Training & Compliance, Human Resources and Facilities all report to the Deputy Director. Reporting to the Executive Director will be the Directors of Technology, Communications, Finance, and the Deputy Director. The new organizational structure will ensure departments are appropriately decentralized and shows a flatter organization with fewer levels between the bottom and the top of the chart and appropriate spans of control.

Sewer Repair Modified Resolution 23-02

Resolution 23-02 was passed at the July 6th Board meeting authorizing the agency to use up to \$100,000 to stabilize the sewer system on its main campus. The Board also authorized an emergency resolution to allow the agency to proceed with repairs without providing bids for an RFP. OPCD contacted several vendors to request a quote but received only one response. A copy of that quote was provided to the Board for review.

To review: two sets of PSAP sewer pipes currently need repair. One set connects the shower rooms and toilets and is completely obstructed. The other is located near the main bathrooms. The pipes run parallel under the building into a perpendicular pipe and are beginning to fall off their supports.

OPCD is requesting to increase the amount from \$100,000 to \$185,000 to repair all the pipes at once. The pipes currently in working order will likely fail within the next six months, so it is financially reasonable to repair all the pipes at once.

When originally repaired, the pipe support hangars were installed every four feet, which at the time was up to code. The current national standard is two feet between each hangar. The hangars underneath OPCD's site are currently up to Orleans Parish code, spaced four (4) feet apart, but the agency will space the hangars every two feet to account for the volume of usage and to avoid any future issues. The repairs will only replace the main sewer lines under the building.

Video that was taken showed pipe sagging and an obstruction inside the pipe collapsing on the back set of hangars. There's also a noticeable sag on the parallel set that is all cast iron pipe. A specific PVC pipe will be used for the new system and the hangers will be installed every two feet.

An architect engineer was not hired to determine the actual scope of this work. Although the agency is not violating any bid laws if an architect engineer is not hired, the Board feels it would provide an extra sense of security to have the work officially inspected. The concern is ensuring no unforeseen problems arise once the work is completed. The Board feels the final status of the problem should not be determined by the vendor.

To identify the problem, the agency used original drawings and hired the original plumber from the previous repair. The plumber ran a video camera through the pipes to determine in which area the problem likely exists. The problem has been identified and the agency feels confident in moving forward to resolve the issue. The vendor will replace the parallel pipe runs with PVC piping to be hung every two feet. This should solve any current and future problems. No other issues have been detected with the system.

Although the problem has been identified, the cause is still unknown. It could be a result of erosion, rust, etc. but that won't be determined until digging begins. Interim ED Fasold is concerned about having working restrooms in the event of a hurricane activation. Staff would need portable toilets, etc. for an extended period adding additional costs to an already strained budget.

It's uncertain when the sewer repair project will move forward. Before work can begin, Resolution 23-02 needs to be modified to request \$185,000 plus additional funds if more extensive work is needed up to, and not to exceed, \$200,000 for the project.

Some Board members suggested the agency continue seeking additional quotes since the project will not begin immediately. OPCD Facilities Manager, Dayton Gibson, will request the quotes to ensure the agency hires the appropriate business for the task. The agency will need to file a permit with the city to request an inspection.

Interim ED Fasold called for a motion to approve the modified Resolution 23-02. The motion was made by Chief Woodfork and seconded by Director Arnold. Board Chairman Thomas called the vote and the motion passed unanimously.

Resolution 23-04 Capital Outlay Project

As a formality, Resolution 23-04 will designate Interim Executive Director Karl Fasold as point of contact and give him authority, as requested by the state, to work with the state in all matters regarding the Capital Outlay Project. This includes expenditures, certifying disbursement of funds, and any other activities that may be required to complete the project. The resolution is simply stated based on the state's conditions.

During the discussion on Resolution 23-04, there was overall concern about the PSAP expansion project. The Board requested clear communication from Interim ED Fasold moving forward. Interim ED Fasold agreed that the childcare facility is a necessary and innovative project, but based on the information from today's meeting, the Board felt some proposed changes may need further investigation. Interim ED Fasold reassured the Board that he understood their fiscal concerns, but impressed upon them how vital some of the proposed changes are to the upkeep and growth of the agency. OPCD is in desperate need of bunk space, a commercial laundry and kitchen, and more office and training spaces. The building did what it was originally designed and built to do, but now it needs serious upgrades to meet the agency's current needs.

Suggestions were made regarding specific language and placement of certain phrases in the resolution. The changes were made, and a motion was called. The motion was made and seconded. The motion accepting the modified Resolution 23-04 passed unanimously.

2024 Budget Proposal

The Board members were given a copy of the proposed 2024 OPCD budget. It has been submitted to the city and an update from CAO Montagno's office is pending. The budget was \$3 million less than 2023 due to ending the Hexagon project and removing the Fire Station Alerting system from OPCD's responsibility.

Interim ED Fasold was intentionally conservative when planning the budget by choosing not to roll millages forward, by not requesting additional taxes following the property tax increase, etc. It is certain other entities will move forward with property tax increases and he doesn't want OPCD to add to the tax burden. ED Fasold requested \$25,000 more for salaries from the city, and he will likely request an increase in 9-1-1 fees, which will require a public vote. The OPCD Board has approved the maximum fees they can authorize, so the next step is to propose an increase in 9-1-1 fees on an upcoming election ballot. The police, fire, EMS and CAO's office contributions for operations, as required under the CEA, was increased by 10% in the 2023 budget. It was not increased in the 2024 budget.

The Board previously authorized OPCD to contract with Mission Critical Partners to perform a compensation study for the agency. One initial finding was higher compensation was needed for all agency employees, specifically call takers, whose salary is currently 28% lower than the average. To start, the proposed budget will increase salaries by 10%. Although the increase won't raise the salary to a competitive level, it is an advised starting point.

When the concept of a consolidated PSAP was introduced, there were challenges with hiring and retaining call takers and this issue remains today. Employees received a small raise added to their current pay instead of considering the salary that would be appropriate for the position. Pay scales were established to offer higher compensation than what was being paid to police, fire, and EMS staff. Overtime was allowed only during the Mardi Gras seasons and the only training available was when OPCD paid NOPD to cover positions so the agency could provide training to its employees. The

compensation study will determine salaries comparable to their respective positions. Staffing shortages are a national problem and often result in bidding wars.

Today OPCD wants to offer a strong career path and long-term benefits for call takers that other organizations don't offer. The agency's goal is to retain staff for as long as possible, and to only have to offer new hire classes annually. The current livable wage, as defined by the City of New Orleans, is \$15.00 per hour. While the agency does not expect to see major changes overall in 2024, it does hope to see significant progress with salary increases and staff retention. Board members remarked that perhaps more should be asked for in the budget for salary increases. Interim ED Fasold was amenable to any changes the Board wanted to make but reiterated he was being conservative with the 2024 budget.

Compensation Study

OPCD contracted with Mission Critical Partners (MCP) six months ago to perform a compensation study for the agency. Stacy Baker, Project Manager, David Jones, Client Services Director, and Louisa Lake, an expert on workforce and compensation subject matters, presented their findings virtually to the Board. Ms. Baker and Ms. Lake have worked on the project from its onset. Their study analyzed the market, in both the public and private sectors, to determine how to improve the agencies' compensation package. MCP took a holistic approach, and their goal for the agency was to recruit new employees while retaining the current staff.

The previous OPCD administration suggested some of the comparable agencies included in the study, but MCP expanded that list to include businesses within driving distance of OPCD. Most people who are established in a job are unwilling to relocate for a small increase in wages, so it was important to make comparisons with agencies closer to home. For example, Lafayette Parish's 9-1-1 communication center is smaller, with less work and stress, which makes it much easier to offer higher salaries to their staff with fewer challenges than some of the larger agencies.

MCP conducted several interviews with employees, collected a significant amount of data, and analyzed qualitative and quantitative data. An online survey by MCP received over 100 responses. An external survey was then conducted using neighboring agencies, but there were challenges with getting cooperation from some of those agencies.

OPCD ranked lowest among all the agencies studied in the compensation report. The ranking is especially low when considering call volume and the influx of visitors during festivals and other events. The employee benefits to which the agency currently contributes are less than the national average for state and government workers. The study report provides more in-depth details regarding the challenges of gaining additional information from comparable agencies and MCP's recommendations.

Some results from the study show that OPCD employees receive a longevity wage increase every five years and do not receive COLA funds. Excluding special

adjustments, no other financial benefits are offered. This is a major contributing factor to the lag with entry level and some operational positions remaining filled.

The lowest starting salary for an OPCD employee is \$32,760.00 and the lack of set adjustments significantly impacts the agency's ability to keep compensation competitive, especially when more desirable options are available. The starting salary for four (4) positions in Operations is below the livable wage. The two lowest paying positions are 3-1-1 Specialists and Facility Specialists. 9-1-1 telecommunicators' starting salary is just below the livable wage.

MCP concluded that, over time, the agency will need to raise wages by 28%, raising the minimum salary to around \$44,000.00. This wage is still lower than the average salary for telecommunicators in the United States. Currently, the average salary is close to \$47,000. It's understood OPCD will not reach that wage goal anytime soon.

MCP does not recommend increasing pay wages higher than 10% annually in order to close the 28% pay gap. They suggest increasing wages by 5%, which should put the starting amount at a little over \$37,000.00. A 20% overall increase is suggested for 3-1-1 Specialists, mainly because staff have dependents and medical benefits take a good amount of their pay. Finding employees who are experienced with 9-1-1 equipment and technology is rare, especially in a next generation 9-1-1 environment. A GIS technician, for example, can earn over \$100,000 at other agencies. In order to retain IT staff, a 15% overall increase is recommended. This increase does not extend to divisional Directors.

Although it isn't included in the study, MCP recommends offering ECS training with a lower wage to new employees. Once training is completed, the employee can train to become a Call Taker with the opportunity to increase their pay. It's important to maintain 10% between lower positions and 15% at the upper management level to avoid salary compression.

If OPCD cannot offer a step merit increase based on performance, MCP suggests considering a one-time lump sum payment to employees after being employed for a certain number of years as opposed to increasing salaries. A cost-of-living increase should reflect the actual cost of living. OPCD's annual and sick leave accrual is higher than the US average, which is a definite upside for employees, especially when there is adequate staffing.

Staff interviews indicated there is a growing need for additional mental health resources that address some of the challenges that go along with working in public safety. A report is included in the study about mental health benefits and where those benefits can be offered.

Increased OPCD contributions to employee healthcare benefits are highly recommended. About 18% of employee wages are spent on healthcare premiums for entry level positions, making it difficult to maintain insurance coverage. Health and wellness programs and additional related benefits are a big area of concern among the staff. All first responder agencies, including 9-1-1, are susceptible to mental health and

stress challenges because of the nature of the work they do. It's extremely important to support employee health and wellness.

MCP recommends establishing tuition reimbursement as an educational incentive. OPCD currently has a school loan reimbursement program for employees who have already completed their degrees. This request came from staff who are interested in pursuing higher education and would like to receive tuition reimbursement. Childcare benefits should also be considered in addition to the childcare facilities. MCP believes that would be a differentiator for OPCD.

Regarding staffing, the agency is prepared short-term. There is cross-training and training and development when available, but strategic succession planning is highly recommended. NENA has a template that can help facilitate such a plan. A succession plan will identify current staff who are likely to remain as long-term employees, and what their needs are in terms of professional development. Performance assessments can help identify areas of employee professional growth and additional professional development to provide a viable career path for employees.

There are inconsistencies in both the content and formatting of the OPCD's job descriptions, which directly affects job classifications, wages and identifying tasks. MCP recommends tailoring job descriptions to their specific organizational role. Some divisional Director positions have more levels of authority and responsibility than others, so it's important to determine if the classification appropriately aligns with the position's wages.

MCP recommends a job analysis be conducted for each position at OPCD to better understand associated tasks and responsibilities. The goal is to align job descriptions with national standards while ensuring they are consistent with each other. An analysis section in the compensation study looked at job descriptions and made high-level observations, however, a deeper dive is needed. OPCD staff has already begun updating job descriptions and the information provided by MCP can assist with that project.

A larger concern for OPCD is at the executive level. Currently, there are no leadership roles that can step into the Executive Director position in the event of an emergency. Although Interim ED Fasold deftly transitioned into the Executive Director position, there should be roles in place that can effectively step in as interim should anything arise in the future for any reason. The agency should perform a market analysis for the Executive Director position. There's higher compensation to consider for that position. MCP included documentation in their study to support this suggestion.

OPCD should consider expanding the organizational structure to support technology services. As the ecosystem continues to evolve in 9-1-1 emergency communications, dispatchers need the right equipment and technology to perform their duties and improve emergency response outcomes. The agency needs to ensure staff members are well supported so they can continue providing the services needed in the community.

Overall, OPCD employees love their jobs and are passionate about what they do. Many would volunteer if funds weren't needed to care for themselves and their families. They love New Orleans and what the parish is all about. That was a resounding sentiment. Adding additional benefits and incentives will provide more opportunities for growth and could potentially decrease employee turnover.

The results of the compensation study will be a part of next year's budget. The agency's focus will be to raise salaries while still giving attention to increasing contributions to employee medical benefits, etc. Longevity benefits are also worth looking into based on the response from NOPD staff who received a five-year increase.

MCP concluded their presentation.

Interim ED Fasold suggested expanding on the compensation study. A career path with scheduled salary step increases and a merit plan along with the federal government's normal plan will provide salary increases for employees with exemplary ratings who are compliant with standards. The goal is to have those incentives in place before the next budget season.

The Board expressed the need for mental health resources for the agency's staff. OPCD does not currently have a mental health liaison on staff, but it does have access to resources through EAP. An on-site mental health liaison would be available to proactively observe stressful calls and determine ways to diffuse and address issues before they turn into post-traumatic stress. It would also benefit the agency to have a social worker on site as well. Police, NOFD, and EMS reported they added mental health workers and found it to be very useful for their employees. OPCD has begun addressing this by scheduling dates and times for a trauma dog to walk the call center.

The Board recommended re-creating the Finance Committee. There was much surprise at how little was known about the agency's finances. The Board is asking to be kept more in the financial loop as a reporting mechanism, and as a part of how and why decisions are made. The Board previously had a Finance sub-committee and recommends reactivating it again.

There was some confusion about mandatory overtime for the staff. Call takers are open to overtime during Mardi Gras and other holidays, but only for a short period. After a while, the extra funds don't matter to them. Employees just want to go home. It disrupts their lifestyle and brings on mental health concerns and stress. Interim ED Fasold reported the previous administration allowed overtime, but that artificially masked the agency's true call answer times. Mandatory overtime hid problems and is only appropriate for short term problems. Activations during storms, Essence Fest, Mardi Gras, and similar events are short-term challenges that require additional staff. Mandatory overtime for long-term creates its own issues and can cause burnout and financial problems in the long run.

OPCD offers voluntary overtime to ensure major events are covered and mandatory overtime if no one volunteers. Staff are assigned to maintain minimum dispatch requirements for the safety of the field responders. If call answer times begin to drop and becomes of concern for public safety, then mandatory overtime will be required full time. Interim ED Fasold believes this issue underscores the need for more permanent employees and continued recruitment. The agency answered 90% of calls within 10 seconds with mandatory overtime, so if the agency can reach full staffing, it can maintain that percentage on a regular basis.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Interim ED Fasold called for a motion to enter into Executive Session to discuss agency personnel concerns. The motion was seconded by Supt. Nelson (NOFD). The motion passed unanimously.

The regular board meeting was adjourned.

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

VI. OLD BUSINESS

Dr. Lutz (Orleans Parish Medical Society) made a motion to recreate the three-member Financial Subcommittee of the Board. Members would be the Board Chair and two Board members chosen by the Chair to meet on an as-needed basis. They would report to the Board on any of their activities. Dr. Aiken (UMCNO) seconded the motion. ED Fasold called the vote and the motion passed.

Dr. Lutz (Orleans Parish Medical Society) moved for meeting adjournment, Dr. Aiken (UMCNO) seconded the motion, and the meeting was adjourned.

Submitted by,

Karl Fasold
Interim Executive Director