

PS COMMITTEE #2
April 30, 2014

Worksession

MEMORANDUM

April 29, 2014

TO: Public Safety Committee

FROM: Susan J. Farag, Legislative Analyst *SJF*
Essie McGuire, Senior Legislative Analyst *McGuire*

SUBJECT: **Worksession: FY15 Operating Budget
ECC Transition**

Those expected for this worksession:

Assistant Chief Luther Reynolds, Montgomery County Police Department (MCPD)
Division Chief Scott Goldstein, Operations, Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service (MCFRS)
Bruce Meier, Office of Management and Budget (OMB)
Amy Wilson, OMB
Neil Shorb, Budget Director, Montgomery County Police Department
Dominic del Pozzo, Budget Manager, MCFRS

Background

The ECC answers all 911 calls dialed in the County, as well as non-emergency police service calls. The current operation is a bifurcated model with separate Police Department and Fire and Rescue Service call takers and dispatchers. Police staff are civilian. MCFRS call takers are civilian, but their dispatchers are uniformed firefighters. Police call takers answer all incoming calls to determine if the caller needs police, fire, or medical assistance. If the caller needs police assistance, the call “stays” on the police side of the ECC operations. If the caller needs fire or medical, the initial police call taker routes the caller to MCFRS call taker (opposite side of the same room), who then further assesses the situation.

The Public Safety Committee began discussing changes to ECC operations with Executive Branch staff as part of the FY13 budget. At that time, the intent was to move to a Universal Call Taker (UCT) model, which would combine and cross train all call takers so that all calls could be processed without the need for a second transfer step.

The FY13 Police Department Operating Budget included \$1.9 million to implement the new system, which included adding 17 new positions. Of these 17, 10 (and \$537, 697) were transferred from the MCFRS budget.

The transition was delayed in 2013 due to difficulties with the implementation of the call taking protocol software, and ultimately the procurement was cancelled. At the same time, Executive branch staff began to reevaluate how to move forward. In September 2013, Executive staff discussed with the Committee the need to pause and reassess how to best address several inter-related components that affect ECC operations. Briefly, these include:

- **Call Taking Protocol System:** The ECC must still secure an appropriate call taking protocol software before implementing the UCT;
- **Public Safety System Modernization:** PSSM implementation involves several public safety system upgrades, including a new Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD). The project is scheduled to be completed in 2016. A new CAD will likely mean the need for a new call taking protocol system. The PSSM project is also using significant ECC resources as staff are regularly detailed out to assist with the PSSM;
- **Current Staffing Shortages:** Shortages are driving a high demand for overtime and the increased need for training resources;
- **Civilianization in MCFRS:** The Executive's FY14 Operating Budget submission stated an intent to civilianize the fire and rescue dispatch function of the ECC. The FY15 recommended budget includes nine new civilian FTEs and \$225,329 to begin this effort.

Gartner Report: The Executive branch retained a consultant (Gartner, Inc.) to evaluate how best to proceed with the UCT in particular, and with more long-term operational planning for the ECC in general. Executive staff indicated the report was less a roadmap for operations and more a starting point. As the Committee discussed in March, Executive staff has at this juncture decided that ultimately the ECC should be housed entirely within the Police Department.

At the March briefing, Executive staff stated that the specific steps needed to implement this transition remain to be determined, planned, and coordinated. Executive staff also provided a broad overview of several near-term, mid-term, and long-term steps that will be involved in the transition of ECC operations. Near-term steps included:

- Hiring of a Transition Leader
- Hiring of a Change Manager
- Begin work on developing a modular introduction to MCFRS Operations for Police ECC incumbents and new hires
- Begin work on developing modular introduction to Police Operations for MCFRS ECC civilian incumbents
- Introduction of law enforcement and fire call taking protocols and an update of current emergency medical protocol system
- Identification & remediation of possible operational inefficiencies

- Develop FY15 budget impacts
- Develop Governance
- Develop Organizational Model

FY15 Operating Budget

In the MCFRS budget, the Executive has recommended \$225,329 and nine FTEs associated with the first year of a four-year plan to civilianize fire dispatch functions in the ECC. The recommendation is an increase because no uniform positions are planned to be abolished until the second year of the plan, allowing for overlap and training to ensure continuity. The recommended FY15 operating budget for the Police Department does not include any new funding for the planned transition, even though Executive staff has indicated that all staffing will be consolidated in the Police Department in the future.

Civilianization has been identified as one component of the overall transition plan, although it has initially been identified as a mid-term step. While Council staff supports the long-term goal of civilianizing fire dispatch, it is unclear whether this timing and approach make sense within the planning and sequencing framework still to be done for the ECC transition and the large number of civilian positions that will need to be created, hired, trained, and consolidated in the Police Department in the near future.

Discussion Issues

1. How does Executive staff envision the proposed FY15 civilianization steps fitting in with the overall transition plan? Why is funding included in MCFRS when these positions will eventually move to Police? Should civilianization wait until other steps occur within the transition process?
2. One of the first near-term steps identified is the need to hire a Transition Leader. No funding has been included in either MCFRS or the Police budget for this position. What is Executive staff's plan regarding this position and the timeframe for hire? Would it make more sense to hire this position first and then have the new manager determine how and when to initiate civilianization?
3. Executive staff has identified the need to over-hire call takers in order to meet current and future operational vacancies within the ECC complement and to facilitate training on the many new systems and processes that will be part of this transition and of PSSM. Would this over-hiring be more appropriate in the Police Department? Executive staff have reported that the Police Department is authorized to over-hire, but that no funding has been allocated for this purpose. Does the Police Department expect to implement over-hiring in FY15?

Given the critical importance of maintaining continuous and effective ECC services to the County's public safety system, the Committee has agreed with Executive staff that adequate time be taken to plan a careful transition of the many personnel, technological, and operational factors involved in this undertaking. **Based on what issues come to light in the discussion**

today, Council staff suggests the Committee choose its recommendations for the FY15 budget from the following options:

- 1. Approve both the MCFRS and Police Department budgets as submitted by the Executive with respect to their ECC-related funding.** This option would assume that ECC over-hiring (if necessary) and a Transition Leader can both occur within recommended resources, and that civilian Fire dispatch positions created now will coordinate successfully with the future Police civilian and consolidated structure.
- 2. Add funding for a Transition Leader position.** Given the scope of the project, a Transition Leader seems critical to coordinate the many moving parts. The Committee will want to be assured in today's discussion that Executive staff have identified resources to support this position. Additional funding would be necessary if existing resources are not available to implement this position quickly. Funds could be in either the Police Department, or a more central administrative office (such as within the office of the Chief Administrative Officer).
- 3. Reduce the MCFRS recommended budget by \$225,329 for FY15 and defer Fire dispatch civilianization.** The Committee may prefer this option if the discussion today leaves concerns about the integration of this effort into the overall ECC process before that process is well defined. This option would allow the new Transition Leader time to identify and sequence next steps, and reassess the need for funds and FTEs in the FY16 budget.