

THESE MINUTES ARE SUBJECT TO APPROVAL AT THE NEXT BOS MEETING

TOWN OF WESTBROOK, CONNECTICUT
Board of Selectmen
Special Meeting
Thursday April 4, 2019
Multi-Media Room
Mulvey Municipal Center

CALL TO ORDER

First Selectman Bishop called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. In attendance included: First Selectman Bishop, Selectman Hall, Selectwoman Labbadia, Bill Youell, Director Statewide Emergency Telecommunications, State of Connecticut, Clayton Northgraves, Director Emergency Telecommunications, State of Connecticut, Scott Wright, Telecommunications Engineer, Don Izzo, Director of Emergency Management, Donna Castracane, Director of Finance, Bob Hagemeister, Board of Fire Commissioners Chairman, Gregg Prevost, Westbrook Ambulance, Rick Darrin, Valley Shore, Paul Connelly, BOF Chairman, George Pytlik, BOF member, Lynne Spencer, Board of Fire Commissioner and Paul Fazzino, Valley Shore.

UPDATE ON BID FOR ADA RAMP AT FIREHOUSE

Mr. Bishop reported that the BOS, on 3/28/19, originally awarded the ADA Ramp project to Meco, Inc. in the amount of \$48,800.00. However, another contractor, Over the Top Lifting, did submit a lower bid on the project but due to an administrative error, their contact information was not included in the bid proposal reviewed by Mr. Scott and Mr. Riggio.

Mr. Bishop made a motion to rescind the following motion made at the 3/28/19 BOS meeting:

“Mr. Bishop made a motion to award the ADA Ramp project at the Firehouse to Meco, Inc. in the amount of \$48,000.00. Mr. Hall seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously”.

Mr. Hall seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Hall made a motion to award the ADA Ramp project at the Firehouse to Over the Top Lifting, Inc. in the amount not to exceed of \$30,100.00. Mr. Bishop seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

It is anticipated that the project will be completed in mid-May.

PROPOSED TWO-WAY RADIO INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT

Mr. Bishop reported that this evening's meeting is a “fact finding” mission. No commitments will be made relative to the proposed two-way radio infrastructure project. At the request of Commissioner Rovella, Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, Mr. Clayton Northgraves, Director of Emergency Communications, was asked to contact First Selectman Bishop to offer the State's assistance and options relative to the proposed radio project. Mr. Northgraves, Mr. Bill Youell, Director Statewide Emergency Telecommunications and Scott Wright, Telecommunications Engineer were present to provide an update on services and options that the State can offer regarding the proposed radio project.

Mr. Northgraves reported that 20 years ago, the State of Connecticut installed a State Police Radio system. The system provides 98% mobile coverage throughout the State and recently upgrades have been made to the system. As a result of the upgrades, capacity to the system has been increased. With that increased capacity, the State is asking representatives to visit communities to offer the State's system to the municipalities. To date, a number of communities have expressed interest and are currently on the State's system.

Mr. Youell commented that the increased services are available due to advances in technology. The State feels compelled to share these services with municipalities. They are not here to “sell” the town a system or a service. Today's meeting from the State's perspective is informational only.

Mr. Wright reported that the State is not affiliated with any specific vendor. They are interested in providing a “good fit” for Towns and Towns are able to access all or just portions of what the State has to offer.

Mr. Northgraves outlined the process and reported that towns typically come to the State with their requirements; i.e. the level of coverage necessary. The State knows conceptually what their coverage is in said town and shares that information. The State has 65 towers throughout Connecticut, with a 98% coverage rate, including a tower located at Troop F in Westbrook. Because the State has a tower of Troop F, the "footprint" in Westbrook is good. If applicable, an MOU is developed and includes all of the agreed upon parameters of a project.

In the Town of Stonington, for the price of one site, they were able to leverage the State's 5 site system thus saving money on infrastructure, construction and on-going maintenance. They are only responsible for their one tower. The Town of Stonington was able to save \$3.1 million by joining the State's system.

In Coventry, because the State's coverage there is excellent, they only had to purchase radios that are compatible to the State's system. For approximately \$100,000, Coventry was able to acquire a brand new radio system. Six years ago, quotes for a comparable system in Coventry totaled approximately \$3 million.

Mr. Wright reported that because, at this time, the State is acting in an advisory capacity, he was not comfortable commenting on the Town of Westbrook's proposal.

Mr. Hagemeister, referencing the Town of Stonington's project, asked if the towns surrounding Stonington are able to communicate with each other. Mr. Northgraves responded in the affirmative and in fact, most of those towns are coming onto the State's system. Not only can they communicate with Groton and very soon Norwich, they can also communicate with the troopers in their area. Local police now have the ability to communicate with their dispatch while in Hartford. With stand alone systems, once you get out of town, you cannot communicate. The State can also create interoperability through other mechanisms.

Mr. Northgraves continued that not knowing what system(s) Clinton, Essex, and Old Saybrook are on and the frequencies of same makes it difficult to comment; however, he was confident that it would be possible to provide a system compatible with surrounding towns that would allow for communication between the towns.

Mr. Izzo comment that if the Town of Westbrook was to go on the State's system, through the creation of templates, would we truly have full interoperability with various departments; i.e. CT DEMHS (he has no interoperability with them on the current State system), MT Rail, DOT. Traditionally, he is not permitted to go on Troop F channel 17 and channel 18.

Mr. Northgraves responded that this process is currently in development and under discussion. If the need arose, they would schedule a joint meeting with CSP Command staff to discuss interoperability and the benefits to having all departments communicate on the same frequency; especially in the event of a disaster.

Mr. Wright reported on the role of templates and the interoperability talk group with DOT Command Centers, Amtrak, and MTA. Every town the State has worked with has a template that includes common zones. In the event of a disaster, radio programming is in place.

Mr. Izzo reported that the cost of any fleet replacement is the responsibility of the town. He questioned the frequency of the maintenance and the responsible party for same. Is there a dollar figure based on whether I have 50 units on the system or if I have 200 on the system?

Mr. Northgraves responded that the State does not charge for the use of the system. The subscriber units are 100% the responsibility of the town; the town decides the maintenance, etc. The State simply allows the Town the use of the infrastructure. The State would not require the Town to adhere to any type of maintenance schedule with your subscriber. If Westbrook were to have infrastructure, consoles or fixed network equipment and builds a site, Westbrook would then adhere to the State's two year maintenance plan. Additional investigation would be necessary to provide a cost for same.

Regarding the possibility of additional sites, Mr. Izzo was willing to work with the State representatives on the propagation maps of the system relative to coverage per the NFPA 1221 standards.

Mr. Izzo reported that Westbrook is part of a regional dispatch center; Valley Shore. He questioned how the process would work if Westbrook were to move to the State's system without surrounding "Valley Shore" towns doing the same.

Mr. Wright responded that there are many options that would allow Westbrook to interface with the trunk system to Valley Shore; however, without specific details, it is not possible to provide cost estimates. However, any costs would be the responsibility of the Town.

Mr. Izzo expressed concern about the capacity of the State's system in the event that all 169 Connecticut towns join into the State's system. Mr. Northgraves responded the likelihood of all 169 towns joining the State's system is small; however, if/when additional capacity is necessary, the State will provide it. The system is monitored on a daily basis and at this time, is not close to full capacity. They would not allow the system get to a point where we are jeopardizing public safety.

Paul Fazzino, President of Valley Shore Mutual Aid, updated the group on the capabilities of Valley Shore. He reported that there is currently interoperability throughout their subscribing towns through varying frequencies. He did not want any town to become an "island". If the State's system can bring all of our departments together he would favor such a scenario. He reported that many of the small towns are struggling with budgets at this time and Valley Shore was able to acquire a grant for upgrades.

Mr. Wright responded that the State is interested in working with Valley Shore to see if we a program may be "tailored" to Valley Shore's needs. He discussed the creation of "talk groups" that allow coordination and communication. The State has access to large volume discounts that may be passed along to participating towns. Another benefit to the State's system is the ability to program "over the air". The technology is such that problems may be solved at little expense and without duplicating efforts. The State is not offering Westbrook only the radio system. They also offer fiber, microwave, etc.

Mr. Pytlik expressed concern regarding the potential for increased costs from the State in future years (similar to the continued cost increases with State Troopers).

Mr. Northgraves responded by providing the background on the State of Michigan's process when their statewide system was integrated approximately 10 years ago. Michigan's system consists of approximately 90,000 subscribers including counties and municipalities. Their Director has reported that the biggest barrier to interoperability relative to public safety is charging fees for use of the system. Michigan originally charged fees for usage and discontinued the program. As Connecticut rolls out its system, we are following the model of not charging for usage on the system. Also, as taxpayers, Westbrook residents' tax dollars have already paid once for the State's system. The State of Connecticut has been very active on a national level in working with our peer group throughout the country.

Mr. Northgraves continued that they currently have a "skeleton staff" and do not have the manpower to create invoices, and accounts payable, etc. and are not interested in hiring staff. We have had clear direction from the Commissioner and Governor to share our services, at no cost. It does not cost the State anything to have towns use their system. The infrastructure and maintenance costs are not affected whether Westbrook uses the system or not.

Mr. Wright reported that after 9/11, many communities purchased new systems. Currently, 18 years later, these systems are no longer supported and in many cases, the equipment is failing. The State is able to leverage savings via group purchasing.

Mr. Wright explained that the systems are now virtual. He has the capability of creating "talk groups" and they bring to the table the ability to have "talkies".

Mr. Izzo requested clarification to ensure that the State cannot take away the "talk groups" if they have not been used regularly.

Mr. Wright responded that the State and the Town would be partners. The State would not dictate how a partner would perform local operations. Their goal is to provide a service and resource to the Town. In addition, an MOU would be developed and any changes to it would need approval from all appropriate parties.

Mr. Izzo requested a commitment from the State that there would be no cost to the Town for the use of the State's system in later years.

Mr. Youell reported that presently, the State has no intention of charging for the use of their system. He had no control over what the State's future model would be and encourages Towns to "do the math" and determine if the Town would be saving enough money to address any possible future fees from the State.

Mr. Izzo questioned if there are any enhancements to the current state contract pricing for equipment. Mr. Northgraves responded that the State has worked with several vendors to extend to the municipalities the same type of pricing that the State receives as a large volume dealer. Stonington and Norwich have realized those savings. The State typically pays 25% to 30% below the state contract.

Mr. Bishop commented that the representatives from the State have taken a preliminary look at Westbrook's proposal but have not "drilled down" on all the aspects of it including pricing, etc. Mr. Bishop suggested that perhaps the representatives could review the documentation further and incorporate the comments from this evening's meeting into a proposal to include an overall review of how they see what we are asking for based on the questions.

Mr. Northgraves responded that until the Town determines exactly what their needs are, it is difficult for them to develop a proposal. If the coverage the State can provide in Westbrook fits the Town's need, the Town can simply purchase radios to be programmed on the State's system. If the Town desires enhanced coverage and intends to build a site in the Town, the process is complicated and the State's vendors would be engaged to develop proposals. It is up to the Town to decide, based on the information provided by the State today, whether or not the Town wishes to partner with the State.

Mr. Hagemeister commented that at this time, the Town does not, in his opinion, have enough information to make any decision. The State would need additional information from Mr. Izzo that they could review and provide feedback to the Town. With that feedback, the Town could determine if the State's system would benefit Westbrook.

Mr. Izzo requested permission from the First Selectman to compile the information provided by the State (in a "non technical" format) this evening and distribute to the BOS, BOF, Fire Chief, Fire Marshal and Board of Fire Commissioners.

Chief Jenkins requested the average cost of a radio. Mr. Northgraves responded that it is dependent on your requirements. Prices can range from \$1,000 per unit to \$10,000 per unit.

Ms. Spencer expressed concern that if Westbrook partners with the State, the various departments in Westbrook would be unable to communicate with neighboring mutual aid towns. Mr. Wright responded that the system can be designed to communicate with other systems. Their goal is to be inclusive. The State currently has users of the system surrounded by towns that operate on different systems.

Ms. Labbadia questioned if the Town's current radios were compatible with the State's system. Mr. Izzo responded that the Town's current radios, purchased 4 years ago at a cost of \$280,000, would not work on the State's system. Mr. Izzo reported that several years ago, in order to address the interoperability needs throughout the entire Valley Shore servicing area, each town worked together to build a system to allow the towns to communicate.

Mr. Prevost recommended the formation of a committee including the Fire Chief, EMS Chief, BOF member, BOS member, and Board of Fire Commission member to study the proposed project.

Mr. Wright reiterated that the State is not offering just a radio system. Many municipalities use the PSDN (Public Safety Data Network) and save money on a daily basis.

Mr. Prevost expressed the importance of working with our mutual aid partners in surrounding towns. The towns need the ability to turn the channel on their radio and be able to talk with all units in town. The digital system that was installed in Westbrook is not compatible with any of our neighboring towns or our local government. The equipment that was purchased was purchased in a format that was not compatible with our neighbors. Mr. Izzo disagreed with this statement.

Mr. Darrin reported on Valley Shore's efforts to work with a collective group of people/towns. He suggested that the State present their program to Valley Shore Mutual Aid. Mr. Wright replied that the State's goal is to be a partner and part of a solution.

Mr. Bishop requested that Mr. Izzo not circulate information relative to the project at this time until the Ad Hoc Committee has met and made recommendations to the BOS. The First Selectman's intent is to form a committee to include Mr. Prevost, Mr. Izzo, Chief Jenkins, a representative from the Board of Fire Commissioners, a representative from Valley Shore and Mr. Bishop will Chair the committee.

Mr. Bishop made a motion to form an Ad Hoc Committee to study the proposed Two-Way Radio Infrastructure Project. Committee members to include: Mr. Izzo, Director of Emergency Management, Mr. Prevost, Westbrook Ambulance, Chief Jenkins (or designee), Representative from the Board of Fire Commissioners, Representative from Valley Shore, and Noel Bishop, Chairman. Mr. Hall seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Representatives from the State were willing to be a resource to the Ad Hoc Committee.

Mr. Bishop thanked all of the participants in this evening's meeting.

FIRST SELECTMAN'S REPORT -None.

ADJOURNMENT

On a motion made and duly seconded, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

Attest,

Suzanne Helchowski
Administrative Assistant

Noel Bishop
First Selectman