



# City of Lake City

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April 5, 2011

Jody Dupree, Chairman  
Columbia County Board of Commissioners  
P.O. Box 1529  
Lake City, Florida 32056

Re: Combined Communications Center (CCC) Initiative

Mayor-Council Member  
STEPHEN M. WITT

Vice-Mayor-Council Member  
MELINDA MOSES

Council Members  
JAKE HILL, JR.  
EUGENE JEFFERSON  
GEORGE WARD

City Attorney  
HERBERT F. DARBY

City Manager  
WENDELL JOHNSON

City Clerk  
AUDREY E. SIKES

Dear Chairman Dupree:

We applaud Columbia County's recent completion of its 911 communications system overhaul which is now operational and providing encouraging results. The City has for some time understood the need for this major upgrade based on the findings of the Kimball Communications Assessment Report and realize that many technical issues have apparently been resolved and that the new system conforms to the recommendations of Kimball's final report from October 2007.

Aside from the improved technology of the Communications Center, the City has persistently conveyed several concerns about the "relationship" and "governance" components of a CCC. Innumerable meetings, discussions, and varied correspondence have emerged over the last many months in which the City has adamantly expressed the position that the success of a combined dispatch service must be founded upon a trusted and politically secure governance structure. At this time, we do not feel that such a foundation is in place.

County Manager Williams' letter of February 21, 2011 was clear regarding the management of the CCC based on his statement that ***"The Combined Communications Center is a department of the Board of County Commissioners. As such, it is governed by the policies of the Board."*** Mr. Williams' view evidently represents the position of the BOCC and indicates that the Sheriff, a privatized EMS provider, nor the City will not have any "stakeholder rights" regarding the technical, operational, funding, or governance perspectives of the center. Fundamentally, the present scenario is not reflective of a "multi-agency" Communications Center at all.

Chairman Jody Dupree  
April 4, 2011  
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In conclusion, we again contend that Combined Communications can be of immeasurable benefit to Columbia County and Lake City. But the only path to success in this endeavor must be through objective political leadership and sound decisions with the ultimate goal of putting the needs of our citizens first. Hopefully, in given time, the foundation and harmony essential to overcoming what appears as only political obstacles may be amicably resolved to the satisfaction of all participants and that the reality of a true CCC may then be achieved.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Stephen M. Witt". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Stephen" and last name "Witt" clearly legible.

Stephen M Witt  
Mayor

cc: City Council  
City Attorney  
City Manager  
Police Chief  
City Fire Chief  
City Executive Director of Administrative Services  
Columbia County Sheriff  
Columbia County Manager

# **CITY OF LAKE CITY**



## **COMBINED COMMUNICATIONS CENTER PROJECT**

**April 2011**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Columbia County Combined Communications Center (CCC) initiative was "formalized" in June 2009 via an Interlocal Agreement (ILA) between the BOCC, City Council and Columbia County Sheriff. As stated in the ILA, the purpose for the CCC is to "effectively receive calls for emergency assistance, to efficiently coordinate response resources to emergencies and to efficiently and effectively coordinate public safety/emergency services radio communications. The design and size of the center is such that all participating agencies would share a single public safety answering point (PSAP) for the receipt of emergency assistance requests which would allow for the control of coordinated dispatch and radio communications services for law enforcement, fire and emergency medical services. The primary objective of the Center is to eliminate duplicate facilities and systems while improving the delivery of emergency services with a goal for economic enhancement through staff level reduction and communications systems automation.

The City has and will continue to stand fast that before agreeing to the consolidated communications arrangement, everything must be done to ensure "it is done correctly across the board" with a result that the CCC will be in the best interests of the critical life safety and public safety operations needs of all participants.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Florida 911 Legislation**

The Florida Legislature has enacted the Emergency Communications 911 State Plan with the intent that 911 services be available throughout the State. The State mandates all counties to provide and manage 911 services. The State Plan provides for a funding provision and expenditures by counties of the 911 Fee which supports the intent of the Plan to the greatest extent feasible within the context of local service needs and fiscal capability.

### **Quality of Public Safety Services**

The primary end product is the delivery of professional, fast, efficient and effective public safety services. This is an expectation from all citizens. City of Lake City leadership establishes the level of performance, timeliness (i.e., response times), efficiency and effectiveness from their Police and Fire Departments. The Call Taking/Dispatching process and CAD/RMS system employed will have a significant impact on public safety operations. The City must ensure CCC participation can "and will" meet its desired public safety performance expectations.

### **Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) and Return on Investment (ROI)**

There should be evidence to demonstrate a positive CBA and ROI for the County BOCC, Sheriff, and City of Lake City. The current ILA agreed amount of \$300,000 per year for eight years (\$2.4 million) is paying for legislatively mandated services. Recently, the BOCC discussed and determined that the cost for City dispatch services should be a "non-debatable" \$675,000. In any regard, investment by the City of Lake City will require:

- Guaranteed performance standards
- Performance metrics
- Professional management

- Documented conflict resolution process
- Policy and SOP enhancement process for the center
- Information sharing and Data mining capabilities via automated reporting
- Operational input

Currently, the BOCC offers none of the above to the Sheriff or Lake City for CCC participation

### **911 Funding Sources**

In relationship to the legislation issue stated above, 911 services to the City of Lake City are not voluntary and "discretionary" added costs may not be assessed to the City. The City must have accurate information on all revenue sources via clear reports which reflect how the revenue is used by the BOCC to provide 911 services. Customary Funding Sources would be:

- 911 Communications Surcharge -Landline, Cellular and VoIP
- BOCC Communications Tax
- Grants
- Other

### **911 CCC Funding Allocation**

The above revenues fund the mandated 911 infrastructure, technology systems, and even CCC staff. The City of Lake City must know precisely how the BOCC is expending 911 related revenue. For example-

- How much of current CCC operations is 911 revenue funding every year?
- How much is the county subsidizing every year excluding 911 revenue or grants?
- Did 911 revenue pay for the new SmartCop CAD/RMS system for the county? If yes, why does the City of Lake City not also receive a portion of the revenues for CAD/RMS related projects'?

It is appropriate that Consolidated Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) utilize a formula to fairly distribute the cost according to requirements, workload and shared resources. For example

- The total cost of CCC operations is **X**
- 911 revenue and grant allocations is **Y**
- $X - Y = Z$
- **Z is the amount that requires additional funding.**

For a consolidated PSAP, Z is typically funded through a formula using a baseline dollar amount for shared expenses as follows:

- 25% of Z is based on population
- 25% of Z is based on previous year's percentage of 911 calls.
- 25% of Z is based on percentage of CAD workload for each participant (department) of the CCC
- 25% of Z is based on the number of dispatchers or specific FTEs required to meet the needs of a specific department.

## CONCLUSIONS

Beginning in July 2009, the City has conveyed in every meeting and stated in every document support for a Combined Communication Center (CCC). The caveat in all instances was that a trusted and mutually beneficial operational, governance, funding, and technical process must be in place to protect the interests of all participants.

Neither the current City Manager (Johnson) nor Police Chief (Gilmore) was employed by Lake City when the initial decision was made by the City to participate in the CCC initiative. For the first several months following appointment, both the City Manager and Police Chief thoroughly familiarized themselves with the history of the CCC initiative. Subsequently, effort was initiated during July 2010 to facilitate "due diligence" and to formulate a relevant plan which would ultimately benefit all participants of the CCC. Initial observations revealed that a host of issues existed with the CCC planning process which included but were not limited to

- a. The June 2009 Inter-local Agreement (ILA) has not been followed by the County, Sheriff, or City.
- b. A feasibility Study has never been completed to reflect true Cost Benefit or Return on Investment.
- c. CCC capital and operational funding allocations were not defined; distribution costs among participants was not reliably determined. The City's cost share was based upon what was believed to be the existing cost (\$300,000) of eight (8) Lake City Police Department Dispatch personnel for a period of eight (8) years, totaling \$2,400,000. The rationale for the eight year payment arrangement has not been defined. To simply move the city dispatchers and their salaries into a combined center and start dispatching in the city is not a plan set for success. Cost allocation for each participating agency must be through a recognized funding formula and all eligible funding sources must be identified and applied to the formula.
- d. The CCC Governance method is not defined to demonstrate fair representation from each participant.
- e. No CCC strategic plan, goals or objectives.
- f. No established CCC performance standards or metrics to demonstrate the CCC will operate at maximum efficiency, effectiveness and capacity.
- g. No established policies, standard operating procedures or training protocols.
- h. No collaborative process to establish the foundation for all participants to move in the direction to enhance success for the CCC.
- f. The following components essential to success are vague, or do not exist:
  - No Program Management Plan
  - No Project Plan

- No Technology Master Plan
- No Financial, Administrative and Personnel Plan

The above issues, among others, must be viewed as contrary to the best interests of the County BOCC, County Sheriff, City of Lake City and, if applicable, privatized Emergency Ambulance Services under a CCC arrangement. This belief is based on the following theories and/or observations

- Consolidations require that a trusted and secure government structure be established. Successful consolidations usually have one trait in common, a well-respected champion to spearhead the process from beginning to end. Political leadership must collaboratively and objectively determine if consolidation can better serve the citizens and this is the "overriding" factor in the decision making process.
- CCC partner agencies must overcome the fear from loss of control and shared responsibility. All participants, regardless of size, must have a sense of "fair" status in both governance and service delivery. Honest and open communications must be applied to address and resolve unforeseen problems, resolve disagreement, and to ensure equal treatment of stakeholders. Partner agencies must be convinced that loss of any control is more than offset by the benefits of joining a consolidated system, such as access to enhanced technology, standardized procedures, cost efficiency, and service interoperability.
- Agreed upon legislation is necessary to create a sustainable funding mechanism and to codify the operational relationships between the parties. The agreement must be clear, with well defined major responsibilities, expectations and dispute resolutions procedures.
- Successful CCC implementation must be supported by a secure governance structure and is highly dependent on effective operational procedures and consistent training of practitioners. Consolidation is a complex, multi-dimensional issue that involves a technological, strategic, tactical, and cultural change.
- Standard operating procedures (SOPs) must be developed, reviewed and vetted by all affected operations personnel prior to consolidation to ensure they are consistent. Communication center and customer SOPs must not be in conflict and cause confusion for command and field personnel.
- Uniform training is required to ensure agencies coordinate training personnel, standards, policies, procedures and systems. A heavy burden is placed on the center operation if the operators are not trained in all disciplines prior to consolidation. Assigned CCC personnel do not have the luxury of learning from their mistakes, so all personnel must receive sufficient supervised training to insure that learning has occurred and that they have been responsibly prepared to perform their CCC assignments.
- The decision on where to locate a back-up PSAP should be based on a business case analysis to determine what 911 system and business processes will best serve public.

safety and the community. There was no business reason to support the decision to have the Columbia County Detention Center as a back-up location.

- j. The two primary Emergency Communication Center locations are the Columbia County PSAP and the Lake City Police Department PSAP. Since there are only two PSAP locations in Columbia County, the PSAPs should provide back-up services to each other. This could have been demonstrated by simply listing relevant and objective pros and cons of locating the back-up center at the Detention Center and Lake City Police Department PSAP side by side prior to a decision to relocate the back-up center from the LCPD to the Columbia County Detention Center. The decision as made excluded the Lake City Police Department PSAP from having a PSAP back-up location and the city was not furnished a completed Back-up Center Project Plan which should have included the following-
- Requirements for a PSAP Back-up center
  - Evaluation of options
  - Development of a final plan Infrastructure, equipment, consoles, etc
  - Business processes to make a back-up center operational
  - Governance, policies and procedures regarding PSAP back-up center operations
- k. Placing the backup at the Detention Center and delaying the decision to implement an effective PSAP backup center at LCPD does not serve the citizens of Columbia County and City of Lake City. If there is a belief the Detention Center will not be the "permanent" location of the backup center, then it would appear this is not an efficient use of tax revenue and grant funding
- l. To start and continue a meaningful dialog among CCC participants, the following issues must be formally addressed:
- 1) Governance of the Combined Communications Center - The interlocal agreement (ILA) must establish the legal and operation validity. The development of an Inter-local Agreement requires "what if" scenarios to address all issues. An ILA needs to be developed that is effective, provides value, and is binding.
  - 2) A Combined Communication Center requires teamwork. The County, Sheriff, EMS, and City should have clearly defined and equal representation in the administration of a Combined Communication Center.
  - 3) Where are the Goals and objectives of the Combined Communications Center?
  - 4) Where are the performance metrics to measure the efficiency and effectiveness of the Combined Communications Center?
  - 5) Where is the Combined Communications Center Technology Master Plan?
  - 6) Counties receive funding from wire line, wireless and Voice over IP (VoIP) 911 surcharge fees to maintain the 911 system infrastructure. Allocation of the 911



system and 911 surcharge revenue, where is the cost allocation and breakdown of the Combined Communications Center including operational costs?

- 7) Processes to be employed to enhance Combined Communications Center operations and problem resolution, dispute resolution.
- 8) Roles and responsibilities of all Combined Communications Center stakeholders.
- 9) Political relationship between the city and county, perception of the community, problem resolution.
- 10) A cost benefit/risk analysis was not conducted to ensure the creation of the CCC is fiscally responsible and in the best interest of public safety operations. This analysis should still be conducted.
- 11) Columbia County has stated it would have 100% control of 911 and public safety dispatching operations with the City.
- 12) The single most positive benefit of having one 911 Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) is the elimination of 911 transfers and thus improving the handling of 911 Calls for Service during life-critical incidents when seconds count. Columbia County has provided no information that the configuration, management and business processes of the proposed Combined Communications Center would actually benefit public safety work products and services. The County has provided no information that the proposed Combined Communications Center will enhance basic 911 services other than replacing the county's 911 system infrastructure.
- 13) Demonstrate how the Combined Communications Center will operate in a more efficient and effective manner. No policies, procedures and training curriculums have been developed for the Combined Communication Center.
- 14) Complete a Combined Communications Center initiative under the direction of a subject matter expert who has the professional credentials and has a proven work history.
- 15) It appears "cost" seems to be the issue the County is bringing forth to the City as a motivating factor to move forward without due diligence of the risk factors. Using cost benefit analysis and comparing operational services to the community are the key factors to making a decision that impacts the public safety operations of a CCC. The situation before is not unique to city government. It is imperative the best decisions are made in the framework of good information.