

# **MARIN EMERGENCY RADIO AUTHORITY**

c/o Novato Fire Protection District  
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**APPROVED 5/11/11**

## **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

### **MINUTES OF MARCH 9, 2011, REGULAR MEETING**

#### **Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order by Chair Pro Tem Doyle on March 9, 2011, at 3:02 p.m. at the Novato Fire Protection District's Administration Office, Heritage Conference Room, 95 Rowland Way, Novato, CA.

#### **Committee Members (or Alternates) Present:**

County of Marin	Matthew Hymel
County of Marin Sheriff	Robert Doyle
City of Novato	Joe Kreins
Novato Fire Protection District	Eric Nickel (Alternate)
Fire Districts: At-Large	Jim Irving
Ross Valley Agencies	Michael Rock
Southern Marin Cities/Towns	Jim McCann

#### **Committee Members Absent:**

City of San Rafael	Chris Gray
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#### **Nonvoting Members Present:**

Marin County Police Chiefs' Association	John Rohrbacher
Marin County Fire Chiefs' Association	Richard Pearce

#### **Nonvoting Members Absent:**

Marin County Public Works Association	Nader Mansourian
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#### **Staff Present:**

MERA Executive Officer	Maureen Cassingham
County Public Works Director	Farhad Mansourian
County Communications Engineer	Richard Chuck
Recording Secretary	Denise Wade

#### **A. Consent Calendar**

All matters on the Consent Calendar are to be approved with one motion unless a member of the Committee or the public requests that a separate action be taken on a specific item.

- 1) Minutes from January 12, 2011, Executive Committee Regular Meeting
- 2) MERA Strategic Plan Implementation Update
- 3) Report on Annual MCCMC Joint Powers Authority Oversight Committee Meeting

Cassingham requested separate action on Item 2 so she can provide an update on matters discussed at the March 2, 2011, Sustainability Subcommittee meeting.

*M/S/P Kreins/Hymel to approve Consent Calendar Items 1 and 3 as presented.*

AYES: All  
NAYS: None  
Motion carried.

Cassingham reported that in discussing their charge on March 2, the Sustainability Subcommittee concurred with the Governance Work Group that the Subcommittee be merged with the Finance Committee for greater efficiency and effectiveness and to minimize the redundancy of their efforts to produce funding plans for current system needs and replacement technology. Given Gaffney and Rzepinski's membership on both the Finance Committee and Sustainability Subcommittee, it would be more productive to combine them with Subcommittee member Rodericks and the balance of the Finance Committee (Hymel and Kreins). These funding plans are required to be completed within 12 to 18 months of Strategic Plan adoption.

*M/S/P Hymel/Rock to accept the Update as presented and approve the recommended merger of the Sustainability Subcommittee with the Finance Committee to work on short and long-term funding plans for current and system replacement projects.*

AYES: All  
NAYS: None  
Motion carried.

B. Executive Officer's Report (Cassingham)

- 1) Other Information Items

Cassingham noted that one of her 2011 Work Plan goals was to conduct an orientation session for new Board Members and Alternates and other member agency elected officials and appointed officials. She said the session would likely be scheduled in April to provide sufficient notice to those wishing to attend. Cassingham will enlist Board members to help get the word out about the orientation within their respective agencies. She will work with Mansourian on the timing to assure his availability to provide an operations briefing as part of the orientation.

C. Operations Report (Mansourian)

- 1) Proposed External Funding Grant Applications for Enhancements to Current MERA System and Next Gen System Development.

Mansourian provided a short powerpoint presentation which follows up on previous reports to the Committee and Board on MERA system options. This presentation was discussed at a Public Works Directors' meeting, not quite in this focused detail. This level of detail was discussed with the Fire Chiefs at their monthly meeting and they are in full support of what DPW is recommending. This was discussed in concept at the Police Chiefs' meeting by Chief Cronin and the Chiefs deferred to Kreins and Doyle to represent them. They agree with where we are heading in concept.

Mansourian said the purpose of this presentation is to describe where we are now, where we are heading, what our options are and get some direction from the Committee to take to the Board of Supervisors. He reminded the Committee that MERA is 12 years old. For a 20-year system, we are already having difficulty in replacing some of the parts. He has provided a list of all the various departments who cannot find parts. If you can no longer repair the devices, you must be prepared to buy new ones at up to \$14,000 per device. On behalf of MERA, they are replacing system site controllers. In theory, the system has eight years left, but in reality it's not eight years.

Mansourian recapped the capacity project as 100% complete. With added channels, there has been very good results. While there have been no events to really test the system, we are well below our capacity needs, and the system is working very well. We have resolved all our coverage problems except Tomales. He reported last month that we have lined up the neighborhood and location and resolved everything else. We are waiting for \$1.5M to build the site. As for Southern Marin, we have a date before the Tiburon City Council in April. Mansourian and Pearce met recently with the Tiburon Police Chief and City Manager and Mansourian feels we are all on the right track. He will report back on the status of this matter.

As for MERA's future, five options have been studied. Option 1 adds basic 700 MHz conventional interoperability to the present MERA system. 700MHz allows us to talk to other agencies surrounding us when they come to Marin County for mutual aid. Option 2 upgrades the existing MERA system into a single cell, instead of having East and West, to improve capacity and add 700 MHz conventional interoperability. Option 3 upgrades the MERA system into a single cell to improve capacity, adds 5 additional sites to improve all our coverage problems and adds 700 MHz conventional interoperability. Option 4 replaces the current system with a new County-wide 700 MHz system. MERA is being phased out by the manufacturer. The new system would be built parallel to it. In the Strategic Plan, we estimated system replacement costs at \$50-\$100M. Option 5 is to maintain the status quo, which is not an option.

Mansourian said the question before us is what option we choose and what criteria do we use from a technology and financial standpoint. DPW assembled a team who

were at a high enough level to think strategy yet not be at the chief level with the exception of one, who could also talk to DPW about operations. They run day-to-day operations and understand the strategy. Team members included Chief Jim Irving, Southern Marin Fire; Captain Jeff Franzini, San Rafael Police; Captain Mike Ridgeway, County Sheriff; Deputy Chief Jason Weber, County Fire; Captain Jim Berg, Novato Police; Deputy Chief Erik Nickel, Novato Fire; Deputy Director Michael Frost, County DPW; and, Communications Engineer Richard Chuck, County DPW; Communications Manager Shelly Nelson, County DPW.

The job of the team was to evaluate MERA's options. From the law side, three major agencies were represented. Fire and Public Works were also represented. Mansourian reported that the team unanimously recommended Option 4, which is a new 700 MHz system replacement. DPW now has an idea about cost, \$50-\$100M, but does not know what 700 MHz means. It could require double the sites and possibly triple the number of antennas. DPW issued a 700 MHz RFP and six vendors attended a pre-bid conference. DPW received two bids, from Harris and Motorola. RFP proposals included a conventional interoperability solution and a complete 700 MHz replacement solution.

Mansourian asked the team to review the proposals. The team received presentations from both firms. On the basis, if money was no object, the team recommended Motorola to replace the current system with a 700 MHz system. The \$50M estimate for the replacement system has been confirmed as good and that a few more sites would be needed. Mansourian said we also want 700 MHz interoperability to be able to communicate with other systems currently on 700 MHz including San Francisco Police and Fire, San Mateo Fire and Police, Alameda Fire and Police and Contra Costa Police and Fire.

Mansourian reiterated that MERA has not made a policy decision to date to go with 700 MHz. He said the risk of implementing the 700 MHz conventional interoperable system does not obligate Marin County or MERA members to a 700 MHz trunked solution. It is implementing one more piece to improve communications with our mutual aid partners. There is no risk financially or legally to add the 700 MHz conventional overlay. This, however, constitutes a step towards a 700 MHz system. Mansourian said at some point we will need to replace the current system because we can't find parts and other users are moving to newer technology. We will need interface equipment to connect to any new technology.

Mansourian said thanks to the work of Nelson, Chuck, Brown and Navarro. There is an opportunity to apply for and receive grant funding for this interface to start interoperability with other 700 MHz systems. Proposals are due late this month.

With MERA's support, Mansourian will go to the County Board of Supervisors to apply for this funding as UASI does not recognize JPAs as governmental entities. All the efforts to get us to this point, including consultants, were funded by UASI grants. Mansourian reiterated that the receipt of grant funded equipment and services at this time is non-binding and does not obligate Marin County to any future commitment. Likewise, receipt of the grant for a 700 MHz conventional interoperable system does not obligate Marin County or MERA members to a 700 MHz trunked solution. The

Federal government wants public safety agencies to move to 700 MHz and that is where the funding appears to be.

Mansourian summarized that MERA also has a choice of doing nothing and continue operating the current system. We do need to begin planning soon and recommends seeking risk-free grants to improve the current system and prepare it for the future.

Kreins said it appeared that the decision to support the grant application was an obvious "yes." Mansourian responded that while money and risk were not issues, we are taking steps toward a 700 MHz system which is where everyone is heading. Rock asked if this was a competitive grant. Mansourian said this would be a very competitive process but MERA is so far ahead of any other applicants with planning, consultant grants, cost estimates and system details. When the economy improves, we will be well-positioned for the future. Doyle confirmed that the application is due the end of March. Pearce inquired if the planned obsolescence for the 700 MHz system is another 20 years. Mansourian said manufacturers project 20 years but stop providing parts after about 12 years. This is how they force you to new replacement technology. McCann inquired if 700 MHz conventional interoperability improves our system or does it just allow us to have interoperability with the outside. Mansourian said it only allows us to have outside communications. Hymel confirmed that there are no internal benefits to us. McCann said this does not address any of our current day-to-day deficiencies and confirmed that the technology would basically convert one frequency to another. Nickel felt there are internal benefits if we need multi-county mutual aid for a large-scale incident. We would then have the ability to more effectively communicate, especially with multiple disciplines.

*M/S/P Kreins/Irving to support the County of Marin's UASI grant application for 700 MHz conventional interoperable system equipment and services.*

AYES: All  
NAYS: None  
Motion carried.

2) Other Information Items

Mansourian distributed a MERA System Operations Update dated March 2, 2011. He encouraged the Committee to share with their governing bodies all the DPW work done to date on MERA projects and related grant applications and funding. Marin County is far ahead of everyone else. He also referenced the pie chart noting what has been done for Marin County Transit. District usage, which used to be equal to the Sheriff and San Rafael Fire, is down to 5% consistently due to the use of MDTs. The District will have to think through whether they will need the next MERA, given their considerable share of MERA costs and reduced usage. Other consistently small users may also start thinking similarly.

Regarding system operations, Mansourian said everything is working well and we have had no crises. Pearce applauded all the fine work Mansourian and his team have done.

D. Open Time for Items NOT on Agenda (*limited to two minutes per speaker*)

None to report.

E. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

**NEXT:REGULAR MEETING of MERA Executive Committee  
Wednesday – May 11, 2011 – 3:30 p.m.**