

# MARIN EMERGENCY RADIO AUTHORITY

c/o Novato Fire Protection District  
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**DRAFT: 3/8/12**

## **STRATEGIC PLAN: OUTREACH SUBCOMMITTEE**

### **MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 7, 2012**

#### A. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chair Kreins at 1:05 p.m. on February 7, 2012, in the Cavallero Conference Room at the Novato Fire Protection District's Administration Office, 95 Rowland Way, Novato, CA. Kreins requested the reordering of Agenda Item G as the first item of business. The Committee concurred. Presentation of the minutes for this meeting reflects the original order of the agenda.

#### Committee Members Present:

City of Novato	Joe Kreins
City of Larkspur	Robert Sinnott
City of Sausalito	Jennifer Tejada
Twin Cities Police Authority	Todd Cusimano

#### Committee Members Absent:

County of Marin Sheriff	Robert Doyle
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#### Staff Present:

MERA Executive Officer	Maureen Cassingham
MERA Operations Officer	Craig Tackabery

#### Guests Present:

MERA President	Marc Revere, NFPD
Indie Politics	Dan Mullen, Terry Price

#### B. Approval of Minutes from October 27, 2011, Meeting

*M/S/P Cusimano/Kreins to approve the minutes from the October 27, 2011, meeting with a correction suggested by Tejada on Page Two, third paragraph, after "\$10,000" from "was" to "has."*

AYES: Cusimano, Kreins  
ABSTENTIONS: Sinnott, Tejada  
NAYS: None  
Motion carried.

C. Draft Fact Sheet and FAQs – Indie Politics (Mullen and Price) and EC Subcommittee

Kreins said we need to get going with urgency to improve our internal communications. Armed with a Fact Sheet and FAQs, we can also get moving with various groups to inform them sooner versus later.

Mullen confirmed the Executive Committee Subcommittee to review the Fact Sheet and FAQs. Kreins noted they have not yet met. Members are Revere, Kreins and Rodericks. Mullen said minor changes to the drafts were made last October and they were looking for Outreach input. Kreins suggested that the current drafts be sent to all Board Members for comment before March 1. Before this is done, Price asked to incorporate information in the Fact Sheet about the life of the equipment and current equipment failure. Tejada suggested dates be included about when the System might fail. Kreins said we are not having capacity problems right now even with the additional radios. However, in any event, this could happen. Kreins clarified that the System could fail due to outdated parts and equipment. Tackabery said in his study we occasionally experience component malfunctions and System reliability is decreasing over time. Cassingham will forward Tackabery's draft Feasibility Study to Mullen and Price for use with the Fact Sheet. Price confirmed that the next draft would be fact-checked before further distribution. He confirmed with Kreins that too great a use of the System could overwhelm it. Even with the additional frequencies, capacity could still be an issue.

Cassingham noted the number of MERA members is 25 and she will send along updated Operating Budget numbers.

Kreins said these documents will be important, straightforward educational pieces, particularly for elected officials unfamiliar with MERA. They are an easy way to educate without having to go before every Board or Council. Price asked if under "Solution" we could include a list of technology features, like instantaneous notification to multiple agencies, GPS and GIS. Revere clarified that GPS is street mapping and GIS are layers of infrastructure like electrical, water and gas lines. Price asked if we could reference response time reduction with the new system. Kreins noted this is very likely possible with a CAD system that can recognize and dispatch the closest unit to respond. Price said the Corte Madera Paramedic tax he worked on really emphasized response time. Cusimano said elected officials may have trouble getting past the overlap of the Bonds. The first technology was estimated to have a 20-year life and the new will have a 12-year life. So, not only do they overlap up front but the replacement has an even shorter life. Revere said most people understand the ramp-up to a new product line especially with replacement technology. Mullen noted as a positive that we are not over-investing in technology even with the shorter life of the new system. Price said we would be installing brand new equipment during 5-year construction, not 5-year-old equipment. He said they need to be talking with people on the technology side to help present this information. Mullen asked about the status of the Technology Committee noted in the Strategic Plan. Tackabery clarified that he meets monthly with the Operations Group and he is MERA's Operations Officer. Kreins explained the Technology Committee of Chiefs and Assistant Chiefs met and disbanded after reviewing 700 MHz vendor proposals.

Price re-reviewed the possible ballot timeline of November 2014 which, if passed, the resulting revenue would start in 2015 followed by the levy of the bond in mid-to-late 2015.

We have 6 years to pay off the original Bonds in 2020-21. Tackabery clarified new bonds would be paid from a parcel tax while existing bonds are paid from general funds of all the member agencies. Price said we will need to explain this. Mullen asked if the current bonds could be paid ahead of time. Cassingham said the resources are not likely there to pre-pay, plus a separate Project Note for additional funds which coincides with the life of the Bonds must also be paid off. Cusimano said the need for additional towers could support the need for up-front funding. Cassingham said Tackabery had developed a cash flow timeline for when funds will be needed, which will be forwarded to Mullen and Price.

Tejada asked how we know we need 3 more towers. Tackabery said an RFP was developed and bids received, which noted additional sites. Revere clarified that we do not know for sure, should other technology be considered. Tejada said the type of technology could change the need for more sites. Tackabery said satellites could change this picture so the future is difficult to predict.

Price confirmed with Tackabery that given a 5-year construction timeline, there might be only 1-year overlap with the current system financing and some parallel operations of systems is necessary. He also confirmed that purchase of radios would be at the end of construction. Kreins noted the radio training timeline was significant with the current system and is unknown with the new one.

Tejada asked when we will know which agencies will be a part of this, which could affect the sites. Revere said there may be no other options for many agencies. Cassingham said Marin Transit's use of MDTs might affect their participation in the new system. Kreins said while this could happen, public safety would still need the system. Tejada asked where this would leave MERA if others opted out and how that would affect costs and the timeline. Her point is how do we confirm who is on board. Price said part of the campaign would be to get these decisions by a time certain. Kreins said we have to know every agency that is going to be involved, which will affect costs and system design.

Tejada confirmed the internal use of the Fact Sheet and FAQs and that they be targeted at that audience. "Solutions" should be your options including "do nothing and crisis"; extend the life of this system to see what else is available in 2017 or 2019; look at what other counties have done; narrow it to law enforcement; or, expand to include school districts. In essence, we would be responding to "what else did you look at". Price said a Q&A format could pose these other options versus placing them under "Solutions".

Cassingham suggested we define system failure and note the strategies in place like the VHF overlay to deal with capacity overloads or equipment failures. She said a third-party review of the current and proposed technology is needed. Price said this is a good idea and that it not be a vendor but like a Price-Waterhouse.

Price posed additional questions to be addressed in the FAQs, like the need for more towers; why the need, and where; timing of the tax measure on the ballot; will the tax be the same for residences and business; will there be fixed income or age exemptions; and, what is the involvement of the school districts. He said some of these items will be included in the polling. Kreins noted the schools' participation poses other issues and whether they use the new system has yet to be determined. Price said they will revise the Fact Sheet and FAQs accordingly. Revere said that in the next 18 months or so, CAD technology updates for

\$3-4M will be implemented. Cassingham noted the reference in the FAQs to 42 agencies needs revision. Price clarified with Kreins that Outreach needs to see both draft updates along with Revere and Rodericks before sending them to the Board. Revisions will be done by the end of February so they can be sent on to the Executive Committee in their March 7 packet for their March 14 meeting. Cassingham requested that all iterations be dated and numbered.

D. MERA Strategic Plan Tag-line

Cassingham recommended to the Subcommittee that all input on the Strategic Plan tag-line, including what has been received to-date, be forwarded to Mullen and Price for further review and work including Price's latest suggestion "When Seconds Matter".

E. Proposal for Additional Work – Indie Politics

Mullen summarized what was accomplished in 2011 including interviews of key members, a Strategic Plan assessment, recommended revisions to the Plan Outreach Sections, recommended improvements to MERA's internal communications and the decision-making process in the areas of restructuring governance, development of a sign-off process, identification of organizational fragmentation and production of a draft Fact Sheet and FAQs. 2012 is seen as a transition period into the public affairs portion. Likely there will be fewer written reports, more meetings, more ad hoc and verbal consulting and some deliverables. General scope of consulting will include attending and advising Finance, Governance, Outreach and any Joint Meetings; Executive Committee documents review; and, advising MERA's Executive Officer and other consultants to ensure achievement of goals in a coordinated manner.

Mullen reviewed the proposed deliverables and timeline beginning with the first 6-9 months including (1) actions resolving governance, understanding equipment needs and financing; (2) proceeding with internal communications like the Fact Sheet, FAQs, messaging and more; (3) developing workable long-term funding options; (4) creating materials and presentations for use with MERA members and MCCMC, along with developing the website for outreach; and (5) creation of a detailed external education and outreach plan for a possible ballot measure. The public education campaign in the succeeding 8-12 months would consist of: messaging; presentation materials and presentations; education materials and visual media; media relations with newspapers, radio, TV, training and coaching presenters; community presentations, direct mail, social media and other methods; community awareness polling of MERA and the project; and, on-going consultation with the funding plan. Their experience with Twin Cities and Sausalito is that the funding plan can change from year-to-year as can public views about a project which will need monitoring.

Mullen said the final 6-12 months of their work of preparing for a ballot measure would include: working with financial/bond advisors and election attorneys early on since this would be a county-wide measure, laying the groundwork with MERA members and getting their support and preparing ballot measure language which is critical to campaign success up to the point where a citizens committee would undertake the campaign. If we proceed with a 2014 ballot measure, we will need all our ducks in a row by May or June to prep MERA's Board. Revere asked about a special study session to prepare elected officials. Mullen said they would go through MERA to develop allies in member agency governing bodies and rely

on their input as to when to present to their Councils. Price said the challenge will be to tailor the presentations for each member agency. Cusimano noted there are many new Councilmembers, Chiefs and City Managers. Mullen said it is a balancing act of trying to move forward as quickly as possible with the institutional knowledge that we have versus not rushing it through such that it fails at the end. Price noted that they have been, for the most part, inactive since the end of last year awaiting action on their latest proposal.

Kreins clarified that final action on the Indie Politics proposal can be taken by the Executive Committee on March 14 versus waiting for the Board. Cassingham said she has approval authority up to \$10,000 to continue the consultants' work. Tackabery added that identifying the best presenters is hard because they need to field financial and technical questions. Mullen said you probably need a local representative accompanied by several experts. Tackabery said potentially hundreds of presentations may be needed and everyone is busy, so who will do all this. Price said we will need to prioritize who we speak with since we can't get to every group. Kreins said, amongst us, we will have to develop a core group to do these presentations with the same message and level of expertise.

*M/S/P Kreins/Cusimano to authorize up to \$10,000 for Indie Politics to continue their work per the timeline in their proposal dated January 12, 2012 until Executive Committee consideration of the Outreach Subcommittee's recommendation of their proposal as a whole, on March 14, 2012.*

AYES: ALL

NAYS: NONE

Motion carried.

F. Next Steps and Timeline

Price inquired about the next quarterly Joint Meeting. Cassingham said the meeting would be in March on a date to be determined, possibly March 1.

G. Updated on 700 MHz System Feasibility Study

President Revere was in attendance to share information from a January 20 conference call between him, Hymel, Tackabery and Cassingham regarding the timing and cost of a ballot measure for a replacement system and urgency of accelerating the process. Of great concern is determining when the current System could fail and what failure looks like. He said we also need to determine the useful life of a new system and how the financing of the two systems could overlap. Cost of the new system has been currently estimated at \$50M which could increase or decrease based on the technology. He said the timeline milestones were discussed in light of a potential 2013 ballot measure and all that would need to happen from the committees, elected officials and member agencies to meet that deadline. While we still need many answers, the conversation clearly highlighted the need to move more quickly.

Revere said another part of the discussion focused on succession management and who will be around to lead and support the various Committees over the next 5-6 years. He and Kreins spoke several days later about this call and the need for involvement of representatives who can provide 7-10 years on the leadership horizon. A lot of institutional memory could be lost

in the not-too-distant future, so subordinate staff needs to be involved in these meetings and this needs to happen soon.

Tackabery said the draft Feasibility Study raising some of these issues has yet to be presented to the full Finance Committee. Several members have provided comments and asked questions which have been addressed in up-dated drafts. Key concerns are the capacity and useful life of the existing System. The current System was designed in 1998 to accommodate 1,580 radios. Today it has 2,875 radios and the MERA Executive Committee continues to approve additional radio requests. The current technology is also becoming obsolete and it is difficult getting replacement parts. DPW is maintaining a good relationship with other agencies that have this system, and as they upgrade, we have developed a considerable cache of parts that will not last forever. DPW is recommending that we start construction on a new system in 2014, which will require a ballot measure to fund it in 2013. This will permit 4-5 years to build a replacement system and bring the old one down.

Kreins clarified what was being stated, is that we think the current system will last another 5-6 years. Tackabery said if MERA keeps adding another 5-6 radios at every meeting and this continues over the next 5-6 years, this has a significant impact on capacity. Kreins said if capacity became an issue, we could facilitate deleting radios to address it. So if this could be overcome, what would we be looking at in terms of System useful life and getting parts to keep it operating. Tackabery said, during the conference call, replacement was recommended in 2017 but after that call, they recognize the need to push it out to 2019. It is hard to estimate the technical lifespan. Cassingham confirmed for Kreins that the current bonds are retired in 2020-21.

Revere noted that this is an issue because we would be financing two systems for an overlapping period. He had asked Mansourian about the additional frequencies project and the 700 MHz replacement technology. Mansourian noted the biggest concern will be the additional sites required for 700 MHz. Potential legal and environmental issues associated with the new sites could extend the timeline for the project by 3-4 years. So if we do not move forward soon, we will be 3-4 years further behind. Kreins said, knowing the current system will need to be replaced while we are still paying for it, will create a public outreach issue. A follow-on question will be, how long will the new system last. Revere said the lifespan for the new system is estimated at 12 years, even shorter than the current System's useful life. Tackabery said Hymel noted we should be timing the bond schedule longer than system life, which would drive the price up. He said a parcel tax could be the revenue for the bonds which would be pledged for the life of the issuance. Kreins clarified that no decision has been made about the funding mechanism, but once determined, bonds will be issued to pay for the system.

Mullen asked if bond counsel had been consulted regarding a shorter-than 30-year usual bond. Cassingham said the Finance Committee has not yet discussed this level of detail. Price said what we are talking about at this point is a timing issue. Tackabery reiterated that a replacement project, starting with the environmental and leasing process in 2014, would require a ballot measure to fund it in 2013. Price confirmed with Tackabery that the new system would be operational within 5 years of the ballot measure. Thus it takes about half the time to install it relative to its projected useful life.

Mullen said there are about 4 time windows in any given year when you can go to voters for a ballot measure. November 2013 seemed premature to him. January 2014 seems easier given a few more months probably having little effect on the project. Tackabery said what is being discussed is an engineering schedule which does not take into account polling or ballot strategies. Revere said discussion of the timeline was intended to accelerate our efforts. Kreins said all things considered, 2013 is way too fast. He understands the need to get started but he felt 2014 would be the earliest we could get on the ballot. Price said usually a campaign starts 1 year out from the date of an election. Kreins noted there are many unknowns at this point including costs, number of new towers, environmental issues and more. This all has to be answered before a campaign. Price and Mullen agreed.

Tackabery said he wants to deliver the program MERA wants. It was agreed that a detailed schedule was needed. Mullen said their proposed consulting schedule can go from 20 to 33 months and all this is before a measure gets handed off to a citizens commission to run the campaign, which would take another 3 to 6 months. The earliest would be 2014. There are also mail ballot election possibilities which occur over a 4-week period. Their downsides are not getting a full pulse of the electorate and turn-out might be less than 50%, which could negatively affect MERA and its branding. Price said 20 months plus is needed for a successful campaign predicated on what Kreins has said and knowing what is being sold presented. Mullen said opposition could easily be mounted over the location of the tower sites by MERA members or area residents. Price noted whatever can be done to keep the current system going to permit all these issues to be addressed and to mount the campaign needs to be done. Mullen said turning in radios would have symbolic value. Revere said, if needed, the number of radios on the System could be reduced to public safety only. His great concern is the failure of dispatch centers, which could be catastrophic and you don't know when that could occur.

Price inquired about discussions to-date on technology. Revere said the focus was on 700 MHz technology and 700 MHz requires more sites, which could result in legal challenges. Mullen asked how much of the 5-year project timeline included time in court. Revere said that was unknown. Tackabery said DPW assumed a reasonable schedule to build a new system with 3 new sites in Northern Marin, Southern Marin and West Marin. Location of the site in Northern Marin has not been determined; however, the Southern Marin site is located on property to be developed on the Tiburon peninsula and the West Marin site is in Tomales. Price asked if there was money now to construct new towers. Tackabery said those costs were under development for the Finance Committee. Mullen asked if the 3 sites could be constructed in 3 years if no litigation. He said he would need information to explain to voters why it would take up to 5 years to put up 3 towers. Kreins said it is critical to know where the towers would be located. Tackabery noted that 5 years is not unusual for a project of this nature. Mullen said it would need to be explained to voters. Price asked if there was any possibility to get started on the sites any sooner or do we have to wait to get past the voters. Tackabery said we are actively pursuing the permitting and environmental process for the Tomales site and are in the environmental process for the Southern Marin site. Price said ideally these efforts could help identify any issues or problems associated with these sites sooner versus later. Cassingham noted MERA's total reserves are about \$1.8M. Estimate for development of the Tomales site above is \$1.5-\$2M.

Price said the proposed new cycle on their consulting agreement with MERA has the campaign consultants involved with project planning from the beginning to frame it and

weigh in on timing issues, costs and technology. He said the technology issues concern him after learning of some digital radio failures that have rank-and-file in opposition to this equipment. Revere asked if this was local. Price said these were jurisdictions on the East Coast where digital radios failed and firefighters' lives were lost. The last thing MERA would need is rank-and-file opposition to its proposed technology. Revere asked if there was a back story to this, such as labor issues. Price will send information on this to Revere. Price said one of their jobs is to anticipate worst-case scenarios, such as this incident. An internal campaign is necessary to insure rank-and-file support for the new system.

Another aspect of the new technology Price and Mullen will need to understand is if it will reduce response times, such as including GPS information. This information would be invaluable in developing support for a ballot measure that would fund a failing system and improve emergency response. The public would feel like they are really getting something for their money. Price and Kreins stated that this is why Outreach needs to and has to be involved with the other Committee meetings, be it technology, finance or other related exchanges. Kreins said this is a critical juncture where we all need to know what everyone is doing and to be present to ask questions.

Mullen asked Tackabery if the County had another project they could compare this to. He responded with the County-wide sales tax in 2004 for transportation in which every city was involved. Also, the County has managed local initiatives like the Ross Valley flood fee. Tejada inquired whether we are looking at what other agencies are doing who are facing the same issues. Tackabery said San Francisco City and County had completed a 700 MHz P25 system along with East Bay Regional. San Mateo County is underway, as well as the Golden Gate Bridge District. However, none of these agencies have gone to the voters, so we are breaking new ground. They have either funded their projects internally or through grants. Mullen asked if this could be done in Marin. Kreins said there could be some UASI funds available to the County but such a project could not be funded from within.

Kreins said we still need to tie down the governance issue with regard to who the MERA members are. It may not be the current 25 agencies. Some may be added such as schools. We need a discussion as to who all the players are going to be and who will sign on to finance the new system. Tackabery noted that the more the costs are spread, the lower the cost per user. Potential users could be sewer districts, water districts and SMART, which are more aligned with current users than schools. Sinnott asked if there will be capacity issues with the new system. Tackabery said the new system will be bigger, plus users like sewer districts will likely not be responding when public safety is having a crisis. Sinnott said storm-related events are typically everyone's event.

Tejada asked about the Tiburon site. Kreins said MERA's current site there was fought by the Town. Kreins said the current Tiburon site was not the ideal location. Cassingham said the proposed Martha property site is under review to enhance coverage in that area. Revere noted MERA has also looked at Sutro Tower and Angel Island to improve coverage in Southern Marin.

Mullen asked for projections, charts or graphs on radio usage that indicate increased demand over the next 5 years as we move to the next generation. Kreins said we have current and historical usage data. Mullen asked if we could project a certain failure date. Revere said we could project a maxed-out point when everyone is on the radio at the same time, which is one

type of failure. The other is when parts fail. He said we have a “work-around” protocol to switch over to another system if high radio usage maxes the system out for short durations. We don’t know what it looks like if the whole system fails. Kreins said MERA is experiencing the need for increased system maintenance due to equipment deterioration. Kreins confirmed that maintenance is being logged. Mullen asked if we had a failure rate that is increasing year-to-year. Tackabery said system failures have been reduced since 2005 due to more user training. Mullen said they are seeking data to support the need for the project. Tackabery noted DPW has information on replacement parts which Sinnott confirmed were increasingly hard to get. Revere said this is important to look at from an officer-safety standpoint, which is even more critical when public safety is working alone. Price confirmed we can show that maintenance costs have increased over the last 5 years, which Tackabery added are accelerating.

Price inquired if the ballot date is driving the project timeline. If so, they could put together a timeline for the second half of 2014 and what information was needed by dates certain to have a successful measure. Kreins agreed that this should be done. Price said Outreach would need review of the timeline by the other Committees to confirm its feasibility. Revere suggested merging of the Committees may be needed to move this forward. Price said inter-committee communications and joint meetings are critical.

Kreins inquired about Hymel’s focus on a 2013 ballot measure date and if it was based on other ballot measures or competing issues in the County. Revere responded that the timing of statewide issues could also be a factor. He said he felt the driving issue is if we don’t start now, we will not have a new system for the 3-to-5-year construction period. Price added that the potential for failure of the current system keeps increasing. Mullen said if we could mitigate the legal challenge time, it could reduce the construction timeline from 5 to 3 years which would be easier to explain to the voters. Price also noted the technology could change in 5 years which could affect costs and timelines. Revere said 2 plans are needed, one for crises or failures of the System and one for replacement. Price said it would be helpful to have experts determine: say if 3 years out, there is 20% chance of system failure to 10 years out, there is 89% chance of failure. This would ramp up the urgency for everyone internally and externally. Mullen added if you could include the mounting costs of maintenance, this would add to the urgency of the ballot measure being passed sooner. Price said this matter is off the radar of public officials, many of them who are new to their positions and have many other problems to address. Kreins agreed, saying we need to ramp up with MCCMC and the Marin Managers, talk to them sooner than later for a better understanding even if we don’t know all the answers. Price said we need to generate the interest and urgency from the top down and thereafter begin to educate the public. Cusimano and Kreins discussed the need to have more managers back at the table, not necessarily dealing with the day-to-day but the future of MERA and where the System is going. Tejada asked about the local internal messaging timeline which Kreins said would be covered by Item C – Fact Sheet and FAQs.

Revere summarized that acceleration of the timeline and urgency of the project are what he, Hymel, Tackabery and Cassingham wanted to achieve with their meeting. Tejada inquired about the San Francisco and San Mateo timelines. Tackabery said it makes a big difference if you are adding new sites. If a public agency owns the sites, which tends to be the case, less time is involved. If you are leasing sites, environmental reviews and lease negotiations are triggered with new equipment and other issues, along with potential legal challenges.

H. Other Information Items

Cassingham said she is working with MERA members to link meraonline.org to their websites. 6 of 25 members have done so or are in progress. The goal is to complete this by April 1.

I. Next Meeting

Kreins stated the next meeting of the Subcommittee will occur at the Joint Meeting. He confirmed he will attend, on behalf of the Outreach Subcommittee, the next Governance Work Group meeting on February 8. He requested that the Outreach timeline be discussed at the Joint Meeting along with how we go about establishing who will be member agencies with the next system. Kreins will also attend the March 1 Finance Committee meeting. Price wanted to make sure all the Committees are informed Indie Politics advisory role going forward.

J. Open Time for Items Not on Agenda

None.

K. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 2:43 p.m.