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Future Dispatching Discussed by Richardson Co and Falls City Officials

(KLZA)-- The Richardson County Commissioners met in special session Monday evening in the Council Chambers at City Hall in Falls City to discuss the past, present and future of dispatching services and 9-1-1 in Richardson County.

Richardson County Sheriff Don Pounds attended. Also present was Falls City Mayor Jerry Oliver, Council President Judy Murphy, Police Chief Duane Armbruster, City Administrator Gary Jorn and Police Dispatcher Sherry Aitken.

Earlier this month Sheriff Pounds asked Commissioners to discuss the 9-1-1 dispatching agreement with the City since the new law enforcement center is under construction, he needs to know what needs to be built for dispatching. The Sheriff said he feels the city and the county both doing dispatching is a duplication of services that is burdening taxpayers.

9-1-1 was first applied for by Falls City in 1991 covering the 245-prefix, then 883- phone numbers joined the system and about six years ago with the start of enhanced 9-1-1, the 862-prefixes in the Humboldt area joined. At that point the County began paying the City approximately \$125,000 annually to help pay the costs of the dispatching.

Over the past several years 9-1-1 upgrades have come into play, called Next Generation 9-1-1. City Administrator Gary Jorn said the City has been involved in the process of updating to Next Generation 9-1-1, and that contracts have been signed, including 17 Southeast Nebraska counties.

The new system is very expensive with costs of up to \$250,000 per answering point. With the new group, there will only be two locations emergency calls will go and they will then be relayed to the appropriate Public Service Answering Point serving individual counties or cities.

Sheriff Don Pounds told MSC News that he believes it would be best if the County were to take over as the Public Service Answering Point, citing safety, since he would have two dispatchers on duty at all times, and cutting out a need for both the Sheriff's Office and Police Department having round-the-clock dispatchers on duty.

Questions have come up concerning if the County or City is responsible for 9-1-1, and why the City has moved forward with the Next Generation 9-1-1 decisions. Sheriff Pounds also inquired about the 5-member committee that is supposed to be in charge of dispatching. Currently the committee has two city representatives and two county representatives and an at-large representative.

Falls City Mayor Jerry Oliver said he does not see a reason to change now. Oliver said the City has spent money when the Police Station moved and moving it would seem to be an extreme duplication of spending.

Jorn said it appears the City and the County each need to decide how they want the system to work.

Commission Chairman David Sickel said he feels he has a better understanding of how dispatching is being handled, but he feels it would be best for taxpayers to have just one dispatching service.

Emergency Management Director Brian Dixon requested that whoever handles the dispatching, be the answering point for Cooper Nuclear Stations and NAWATS, the national warning system.

Dixon also said he feels Emergency Management should have a bigger role in the communications decisions in the County.

Most in attendance agreed that in the future the dispatching would likely become a multi-county operation. Longtime Falls City Dispatcher Sherry Aitken said experience and continuity are vital for the safety of the public

The City and County are to discuss what direction they want to go and then will get back together for another meeting to determine possible changes to be made, or whether or not to expand the committee on dispatching so it is not two county reps, two city reps and just one at-large representative who ends up casting the single vote to make a final decision. The Committee could also be disbanded.

Many Signals Communications