

City, County, Explore Dispatch Change

(KNZA)--The Horton City Commission held a special joint meeting Tuesday evening with the Brown County Commission to discuss a proposal for the county to provide emergency dispatch services for the city.

Also on hand was Brown County Sheriff John Merchant and representatives of emergency service agencies from the Horton area.

Brown County Commission Chairman Steve Roberts says he made the “one-time offer” to save the city money, which could be used to address the city’s infrastructure needs. Roberts noted the county has been providing dispatch services for the city of Hiawatha for some time and he felt it was only fair to make the same offer to Horton.

Of concern is what will would happen with Horton’s current four full-time, and one part-time, dispatchers. Merchant said he would like to see the dispatchers come on aboard at the sheriff’s department.

Merchant said if the consolidated countywide dispatch proposal is approved by the Horton City Commission, he will need to add a third dispatcher position. That would require the purchase of an estimated \$137,000 in additional equipment, and the Horton dispatch center would continue to serve as a back-up.

Each of the emergency service agency representatives along with a representative of Horton dispatchers were given an opportunity to comment on the proposal and ask questions.

Several local residents voiced their support for keeping the Horton dispatch operations, noting the personal knowledge the dispatchers have of the community and additional services they provide.

Horton Police Chief John Calhoon estimated the city would save around \$120,000 by having the county provide the service, adding that he would still have someone at the Horton office from 8 to 5 to handle services.

Horton Police Commissioner Bryan Stirton says he continues to oppose the proposal, and would instead like to see the Commission explore other avenues of savings.

Although the Horton City Commission has not set a date for making a decision, Calhoon told Commissioners he would like to see that happen sooner than later so his dispatchers aren’t left in limbo

If the change is approved, Merchant said it would take 2 to 3 months for implementation.

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