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Glendale Dispatch Center Study

In an article published in the Post Dispatch on Sunday, November 12, 2017 titled “Study says Glendale should ditch dispatch center; but board is holding on”, it is claimed that a recent study concluded that Glendale should outsource its police and fire dispatching operations.

The City is currently assessing the pros and cons of outsourcing fire and/or police dispatching to a neighboring agency as many other cities have done. This is not the first time the City has considered this issue; however, it is the first time the City has conducted a professional study. Emergency Services Consulting International (ESCI) provided a report to the City in October 2017 stating that moving both police and fire dispatching has the “potential to be the best fiscal option”, but the report stops short of a recommendation, concluding only that additional research would be needed if Glendale were to choose to outsource both police and fire dispatching. The report assessed other options as well, including continuing to keep fire and police dispatching in Glendale and outsourcing fire dispatching only with police dispatching remaining in Glendale; however, each of these options was concluded to have its own strengths and weaknesses.

The City is currently conducting the additional research as recommended in order to make an educated decision. For example, anecdotal instances have been raised in which Glendale’s call processing times were outside of standard guidelines. Dispatch centers can be affected by a number of variables that can sometimes slow the processing time of a particular call. The City is currently working to collect and analyze a statistically valid sample of 911 calls to objectively determine if the anecdotal instances are part of a systemic issue or if they only represent isolated aberrations. Given Glendale’s relatively low call volume, it does not automatically reason that Glendale’s average call processing time would be slower than a busier dispatch center, even if that dispatch center has more than one dispatcher on duty to assist with the substantially higher call volume.

While it is the fire fighter union that has advocated for outsourcing both fire and police dispatching, police calls make up approximately 90% of the total call volume of Glendale’s dispatch center, and the police must therefore not be overlooked in the process. How police officers may be affected as a result of sharing one radio channel among multiple police departments is relevant to what is being considered.

Additionally, Glendale dispatchers handle other functions including serving as police records clerks and administrative assistants, staffing the police public counter, and monitoring prisoners. Determining how these functions would be best handled, should Glendale outsource dispatching, is part of the process.

Work on Glendale's new fire station and police department renovations are currently underway. The majority of the police administration and dispatch renovation work, which began over five months ago, has already been completed. If Glendale does determine to outsource dispatch services, dispatcher workspace would be converted to space for personnel who would replace the dispatchers and handle records clerk, administrative duties, and other functions currently done by dispatchers. Changes to this work space would be minimal. The City's dispatch decision process is not bound to an artificial timeline tied to the police department renovation as has been suggested.

Glendale is committed to see its process through to gather the relevant information and make an informed decision to best meet the City's dispatching needs and provide outstanding service to citizens well into the future.