



# WASHOE COUNTY

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## STAFF REPORT

BOARD MEETING DATE: June 9, 2015

**DATE:** April 8, 2015  
**TO:** Board of County Commissioners  
**FROM:** Alison A. Gordon, CPA, CFE   
Washoe County Internal Audit Manager  
328-2064, [agordon@washoecounty.us](mailto:agordon@washoecounty.us)  
**THROUGH:** John Slaughter, County Manager  
**SUBJECT:** Acknowledge Receipt of Sheriff's Office Forensics Lab/City of Reno Dispatch Agreement Review from the Internal Audit Division; with Possible Direction to Staff for Implementing the Audit Report Recommendations.

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### SUMMARY

The Board of County Commissioners' approved schedule of audits for FY15 included a review of the 1990 Forensics Lab/Dispatch Agreement entered into between Washoe County and the City of Reno.

The review showed the following:

The 1990 Agreement included the provisions that the County Sheriff's Office would provide Forensic Science Investigation Services to the City of Reno Police Department and the City of Reno would provide dispatch Services to the County Sheriff's Office, at no charge to either agency.

Even though the agreement included services at no cost, we performed analysis to estimate the value of services exchanged since FY2007. The estimate showed the value of Forensic Science Investigation Services exceeded the dollar value of dispatch services in each of the fiscal years reviewed. However, both the Forensic Science Division of the Sheriff's Office and the City of Reno Communications Center are both providing critical and necessary law enforcement services.

Various attempts have been made over the years to amend the 1990 Agreement with no success. At this time, the County has the options of continuing to work with the City to revise this agreement, negotiating a new agreement or terminating the agreement, which requires 90 days written notice. Should the County decide to terminate the agreement, prior to taking this step, analysis should be performed to identify the costs associated with taking back 911 call taking and dispatching. For example, an estimate of the additional annual salary costs for the communications staff required totals about \$1.5M.

Another option would involve regionalizing dispatch services and addressing forensic services separately. Several studies have been performed where dispatch services were

reviewed. Both of the studies recommended regionalizing dispatch services. A first step at regionalization was taken in July 2012 by co-locating the County public safety answering point with Reno E-Comm. To date, efforts to regionalize dispatch services are still in process.

County Priority/Goal supported by this item: Government Efficiency and Financial Stability

### **PREVIOUS ACTION**

No previous action has been taken on this Board item.

### **BACKGROUND**

The Sheriff's Office provision of forensic services included forensic services personnel dispatched to a crime scene in those cases where the collection and preservation of evidence was critical to the preparation of the case and when a City Crime Scene Investigation Officer was unable to process the scene. Additionally, the Sheriff's Office forensic services included providing the City with photographic support services, latent fingerprint processing and comparisons and full forensic analysis within the existing capabilities of the forensics laboratory.

In exchange for forensic services, the City of Reno communications personnel would provide services including receiving, processing, and dispatching 911 calls and emergency and non-emergency requests for service other than 911 calls on behalf of the Washoe County Sheriff's Office. In addition, communications personnel would be providing, receiving, processing and dispatching requests for the services of the other auxiliary support functions to the Sheriff's Office, e.g., Search and Rescue; receiving and responding to radio transmissions from Sheriff's Office members; processing and relaying inquiry requests from and to all authorized Sheriff's Office personnel; and maintaining and providing daily activity reports.

### **SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY**

The scope of the review included evaluating the value of the services provided by Washoe County Sheriff's Office for full forensic services to the City of Reno Police Department, and the value of services provided by the City of Reno's Communications Division for emergency 911 call services. The scope also included estimating the communications staffing requirements and cost should the County decide to terminate the agreement as well as analyzing the current status of efforts to regionalize emergency communications.

This audit was conducted in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards, and covered the period of September 1990 through March 2015. Fieldwork was conducted between February 2015 and March 2015.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

This report has no fiscal impact.

**RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended the Board of County Commissioners acknowledge receipt of the Sheriff's Office Forensics Lab/City of Reno Dispatch Agreement Review with possible direction to staff for implementing the audit report recommendations.

**POSSIBLE MOTION**

Should the Board of Fire Commissioners acknowledge receipt of this audit report, a possible motion would be:

*Move to acknowledge receipt of the Sheriff's Office Forensics Lab/City of Reno Dispatch Agreement Review from the Washoe County Internal Audit Division with possible direction to staff for implementing the audit report recommendations.*

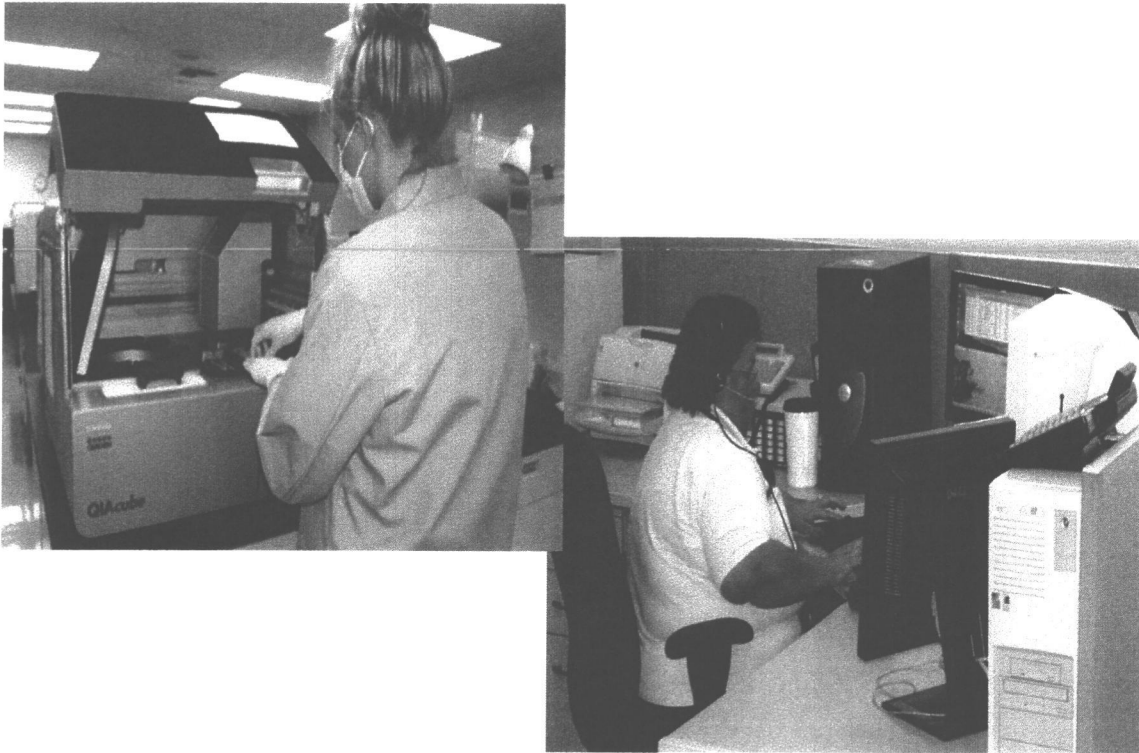
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Attachments



# Washoe County Forensics Lab/Dispatch Agreement Review

March 30, 2015



Alison A. Gordon, CPA, CFE  
Internal Audit Manager

## Executive Summary

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An Agreement was made between Washoe County and the City of Reno in 1990 whereby the Sheriff's Office and the City of Reno would exchange certain services.

The Agreement included the provisions of the Sheriff's Office providing Forensic Science Investigation Services with the City of Reno providing dispatch services at no charge to either agency. (Page 3)

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Over the years, several attempts have been made to revise the 1990 Agreement.

The County and the City have been unable to reach agreement on the proposed revisions to the existing agreement. (Page 4)

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An analysis was performed to estimate the value of services exchanged since FY2007.

The value of forensic services provided to the City exceeds the value of the dispatch services provided to the County. (Page 4)

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To date, efforts to regionalize dispatch services have not been finalized.

A first step was taken in July 2012 by co-locating the County PSAP with Reno E-Comm and as recently as July 2014 County and City staff were working on a draft inter-local agreement and plan of action. (Page 4 and 5)

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Two studies performed have been performed each analyzing dispatch services.

Both of the two studies recommended regionalizing dispatch services. (Page 5)

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Regionalizing dispatch services could benefit citizens and first responders.

The benefits include but are not limited to elimination of duplicate costs, increased response times, enhanced communication between emergency responders, standardized dispatch protocols, and standard operating procedures. (Pages 5)

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## Observations

### **Agreement for Dispatch and Forensic Services between Washoe County and the City of Reno**

On September 25, 1990, Washoe County and the City of Reno entered into an agreement on behalf of the Washoe County Sheriff's Office and the City of Reno Police Department. In this agreement, the Sheriff's Office agreed provide Forensic Science Investigation services to the Reno Police Department, and the Reno Police Department agreed to provide Communication and Dispatch Services to the Sheriff's Office at no charge to either agency.

Technology has changed over the years and the Sheriff's Office has improved and added forensic services provided to the City. Forensic services in the exchange for services agreement includes crime scene investigation, latent print processing and comparisons, photo laboratory services, controlled substances analysis, firearms examinations, DNA testing, and stain identification.

Currently, County Dispatch and the Reno E-Comm dispatch center are co-located in the same room at the County Regional Dispatch and Emergency Operations Center and operate using a shared radio system and shared computer aided dispatch system. The City's communication services include receiving 911 calls within the Truckee Meadows area, excluding those areas identified below as being handled by the Sheriff's Office, and re-assigning the calls pertaining to the County to the Sheriff's Office dispatch staff. The City also receives and reassigns 911 calls that come in for the Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District to the Sheriff's Office dispatch staff. Since 911 is a "universal" number in the United States, all cell towers are programmed to route any 911 calls that hit them to a specific 911 Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP), i.e. Reno E-Comm, Sparks, and the Carson Sheriff's Office. Since the caller is dialing the generic "911" number and not a specific 7-digit number assigned to an agency, the tower can only route the call to the pre-programmed 911 PSAP based on the geographic location of the tower.

The Sheriff's Office performs call taking and dispatch for:

- 911 landline and cell phone calls for Incline Village;
- 911 landline calls for the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony and the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe;
- Non-911 calls to a Sheriff's Office seven-digit phone number including alarm companies, surrounding law enforcement agencies and the public;
- Non-911 calls to seven-digit phone number for Sheriff's Office deputies only;
- Non-911 Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District calls to a seven digit phone number including alarm companies, surrounding agencies and the public; and,
- Non-911 calls to a seven-digit number for fire staff only

We estimated the value of providing forensic services in exchange for dispatch services. Dispatch data was obtained from several different sources and in certain instances, this

data was inconsistent as to the number of calls. The most consistent data was obtained from the CAD (Tiburon) system used by both the City and County Sheriff's Office dispatch staff. Even though this data did not match calls numbers from other sources and was only available from FY2007 forward, it was the most consistent and was therefore used to compute the value of dispatch services provided to the County Sheriff's Office. To compute the value of dispatch services, the annual percentage of Sheriff's Office calls was multiplied by the annual dispatch expenditures reported by the City of Reno.

The value of forensic services provided to the City of Reno was estimated using expenditure data obtained from the County's financial system, SAP and percentages identified by the Sheriff's Office Forensic Division of the work attributable to the City of Reno. Note: The value of services computed does not match those computed by the Sheriff's Office Forensic Division. The Forensic Division computes the value of forensic services attributable to the City using budget numbers.

As previously discussed, the County and City agreed to exchange County forensic services for City dispatch services at no cost. However, using the data available, the estimated the value of services for each entity over the period of FY07 through FY14 is shown in Exhibit I.

**Exhibit I**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Est. Value of Forensic Services</b>	<b>Est. Value of Communication Services <sup>(1)</sup></b>
2007	\$1,549,258	\$ 717,285
2008	\$1,478,485	\$ 811,172
2009	\$1,496,355	\$ 754,354
2010	\$1,459,339	\$ 829,286
2011	\$1,429,499	\$ 714,434
2012	\$1,458,414	\$ 596,594
2013	\$1,348,081	\$ 574,815
2014	\$1,385,142	\$ 631,300

<sup>(1)</sup> Portion of City of Reno's cost attributable to Sheriff's Office dispatch services. Should the County decide to terminate the agreement and take back dispatch services, the additional annual salary costs for the communications staff required would total about \$1.5M.

Over the years, County and City staff tried to amend the 1990 Inter-Local Agreement several times but none of these attempts were finalized. At this time, the County has the options of working with the City to revise this agreement, negotiating a new agreement or terminating the agreement, which requires 90 days written notice. Should County management decide to terminate the agreement, prior to taking this step, analysis should be performed to identify the costs associated with taking back 911 call taking and dispatching for the County, e.g. trained staff and technology.

Another option would involve regionalizing dispatch services and addressing forensic services separately. In FY11, at the direction of the Reno-Washoe Shared Services Elected Officials Committee, a working group, comprised of first responders within the

region, was tasked to determine the feasibility of consolidating dispatch centers and developing a proposed plan that would contain or reduce operating costs and to improve operational efficiencies for the public and first responders. In July 2012, the Washoe County dispatch PSAP was co-located with the Reno E-Comm dispatch center as a first step in regionalizing emergency communications.

Over the years, various studies have been performed and reports issued recommending regionalization of dispatch services including:

- The 2012 TriData report requested by the County, which recommended “combine 911 dispatch centers into one county-wide resource”,
- A 2007 report by the Matrix Consulting Group to the Regional 911 Advisory Committee which included a goal of “facilitate discussion for development of a centralized regional dispatch center serving as the public safety answering point (PSAP) for Reno, Sparks and Washoe County”, and,
- IBM issued the 2010 Smarter Cities report that states “smarter public safety systems can provide centralized and integrated emergency response systems...”.

Various attempts have been made as recently as July 2014 by both County and City of Reno staff to develop an inter-local agreement to regionalize dispatch services. However, at this time discussions regarding regionalization have not concluded.

Other local jurisdictions have regionalized their 911 dispatch services over the last 5 years, Holbrook, MA, Danbury, Connecticut, and Charleston County, S. Carolina. The Charleston County Consolidated 911 Center planned consolidation was completed in FY12 and the Center now provides 911 dispatch for 20 local jurisdictions. According to the Communications Regionalization Program Manager in Charleston County, their County Council made funding decisions, which were key to the inter-agency agreement as well as implementing a governing board, which consists of members from each participating jurisdiction on a rotational basis who control the operational matters of the communications center. Charleston County found the benefits of consolidation included:

- Improved response times,
- Elimination of duplicate services within the region,
- Increased communication and cooperation among emergency response agencies,
- Utilized grant funding to improved coordination with local agencies,
- Implemented technology advances which have improved situational awareness for the community, improved coordinated responses to emergency scenes, and increased responder safety, and
- Improved training and certification opportunities for dispatchers.

Additionally, regionalization provides opportunities for standardized dispatch protocols and standard operating procedures, as well as reducing or eliminating duplicate costs in the eventual upgrading of current 911 technologies to the Next Generation 911 (NG911). NG911 enables citizens to transmit text, data, images and video, which are increasingly common in personal communications, to the 911 dispatch center.



Should County management decide implementing a regionalized dispatch center is still reasonable, County staff would need to renew discussions with the City of Reno and other first responders in the area. Working together, these first responders should re-evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of regionalization; and review communication services regionalization models that have recently occurred in other county, city, and state law enforcement jurisdictions to identify best practices. Then planning and analysis would be necessary to develop a regionalization model that would work best for the first responders in the area.

***Recommendations:***

*The Sheriff's Office in coordination with County management should determine whether:*

- 1.1 To work with the City of Reno to update 1990 Agreement, develop a new agreement or terminate the 1990 Agreement, and,*
- 1.2 Regionalizing communication services is still feasible, and if so, move forward in coordination with the City of Reno and other first responder agencies in the region.*