

**MINUTES OF REGULAR SESSION
HIGHLAND CITY COUNCIL
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2021**

Mayor Hemann called the Regular Session to order at 7:00pm. Council members Sloan, Frey, Bellm, and Hipskind were present. Others in attendance were City Manager Conrad, City Attorney Michael McGinley, Directors Cook and Gillespie, Police Chief Becherer, Coordinator Hubbard, Treasurer Nicolaides, Deputy City Clerks Hediger and Von Hatten, City Clerk Bellm, 52 citizens and one member of the news media.

MINUTES

Councilman Frey made a motion to approve the minutes of the September 7, 2021 Regular Session as attached; seconded by Councilwoman Bellm. Roll Call Vote: Councilmembers Sloan, Frey, Bellm and Hipskind voted aye, none nay. Motion carried.

PROCLAMATION

Marilyn McCall, Chaplain and Constitution Week Chairperson for the Silver Creek Chapter of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution was present as Mayor Hemann read a document proclaiming September 17 – 23, 2021 as United States Constitution Week, and was presented with the signed proclamation. Mrs. McCall stated there is a display at the Louis Latzer Library; this proclamation will be displayed as part of that, along with others from surrounding communities.

PUBLIC FORUM

Citizens' Requests and Comments:

Highland High School Homecoming Parade – Special Event Application – Amy Boscolo Assistant Principal /Athletic Director stated we request to utilize the city streets for a homecoming parade and then use of the Square, on Wednesday, October 6. The application has the closure times. Councilwoman Bellm made a motion to approve the Highland High School Homecoming Parade request for Wednesday, October 6, 2021 at 6:00pm as attached; seconded by Councilman Frey. Roll Call Vote: Councilmembers Sloan, Frey, Bellm and Hipskind voted aye, none nay. Motion carried.

Mayor Hemann asked anyone wanting to speak on anything else to come forward at this time.

Deputy City Clerk Hediger reported there were some emails that were sent in with a request to be put into public record.

From: Regina Gruenfelder. Subject: Local Dispatch

‘As a member of this community for my entire 41 years, I am very familiar with how special our community is. I have seen for myself the change in diversity and growth this community has displayed over the last four decades and I am proud to be a resident of Highland. Over the years, I have had the opportunity to interact with our local police on several, dare I say many, occasions

for various reasons. I have contacted the police department for everything from troubling problems with my teenager to unruly neighbors blocking my driveway at 5 am. I have used both the 911 services as well as the non-emergency line and even on occasion had the necessity of walking into the station for different issues. This community depends on not only the 911 services but also the essential non-emergency line and that human contact that is found by walking into the station when assistance is needed.

A couple of notable examples from my personal experience. After years of abuse, when I finally had the courage to leave my husband, I was forced to share custody with him. In order to safely exchange custody of my daughter, I asked the court to order the exchange to take place at our local police station so I never had to fear what he might do to me if we were alone elsewhere. I know we were not the only ones as I watched many parents make the same exchange in the parking lot in front of the cameras, manned by an actual person just inside those glass doors. If you have never had this type of fear, you cannot understand the peace of mind knowing someone is watching provides. Without the human presence in our station, future parents will not have that piece of mind and will have to find alternate safe locations and may not have the same security the police station provides.

In 2010 I was the victim of a heinous crime. The kind that 'doesn't happen here.' It was an attempt on my life by an ex-domestic partner that left me broken, bruised and bloody. The perpetrator had been living in my walls without my knowledge. He brought with him a knife and a crowbar and fully intended to end our existence that night. A 911 call to our station resulted in officers arriving before he was able to finalize his plans and ultimately saved my life. They were on scene in under 5 minutes. When you are staring down a knife blade wielded by a homicidal narcissist, 5 minutes feels like an eternity. If that call had been routed through Madison County it likely would have ended very differently for me.

Aside from my own life events that are marked by the quick responsiveness and dedication of our officers and staff at the police department there are other issues at hand. The new public safety building was designed and built with a brand new state of the art dispatch center in it. I work in IT and I know what some of that equipment costs to install and maintain. That would be a huge waste to us, the taxpayers, of this town. I also wonder who will take up the gauntlet of assisting officers in their investigations by searching through video footage, records, and media to find information so that officers are able to spend more time actually investigating and patrolling the streets? What is the justification for moving our dispatch services out of the local community when so much has already been spent to provide the best top of the line services to our citizens? I've also seen information that moving could potentially end up costing more money than we are currently spending because we will no longer have any negotiating power against the unions that will determine the cost of these services through Madison County. How can that be justified?

In closing I would like to ask that at the very least, the city council consider a local vote by the taxpayers of this town to decide if these services should be consolidated to Madison County. Provide all the facts to the people of the community the current dispatch center services without bias so an informed decision can be made by the people who are paying for it.

I vote no to 911 Dispatch consolidation. Thank you for your consideration in this matter.
Respectfully, Regina Gruenefelder'

Email From: Jay Czar, Subject: Oppose the Elimination of Dispatchers

‘Just want to make clear that as a citizen of Highland community that I oppose the elimination of dispatchers. Keep these positions local within our community. Jay Czar’

Mayor Hemann stated this item is just up for comment; it is not on the agenda tonight. We probably will not be responding. We will be listening. Under Staff Report, City Manager Conrad will be giving an update on this. We appreciate your comments.

Courtney Yearian, Pike Dr. West, stated I am not here as a disgruntled employee. I am here as a member of the community. I am here to provide information, for everyone to be fully informed. Using 2019 call volume, as the 2020 COVID pandemic, which was an off year, the data shows 9,619 calls. In past years, it has been over 12,000. Total call volume is 30,280 contacts with walk-ins, officers, and non-emergency. Not accidental calls are 2.6% of call volume. Total 1,495 9-1-1 calls. Since the reasoning for eliminating local dispatch has not been made abundantly clear, it appears as a budget matter. For the county to take it over saves very little. The cost of services would be out of control of the city. ETS does not regulate non-emergency dispatch and many communities still operate this way. Why is dispatch being removed when 91% of workload will remain? Why is the community not be told about this? Over \$250,000, being spent on communication equipment, while this is still happening? If this is not happening, then why are two open positions remaining unfilled? Will the calls be answered? Yes. At what point do we realize that it is more than a dispatch of police, fire, or EMS, which makes a community?

Brenda Winter, resident of Highland for over 20 years, stated I am a responder to crisis in Highland and surrounding area. I want to commend all the officers and dispatchers, for the services they provide to these families. I have had extremely well accommodations by Highland dispatch and first responders. I also get called to Madison County and have gotten sent to the wrong place. For me, these are not life and death situations; however, making sure we service them as soon as possible is very important. I believe the officers need that backup. At Madison County, they will not always remember that there are family issues at those locations; however, local dispatchers know their community.

Tara Rottmann, stated that as a part-time telecommunicator for eighteen years, I find this very disheartening. It is difficult to hear that no decision has been made on this. It is a misrepresentation to tell residents it is not a done deal, when we have been told otherwise is very disheartening. We have the officers back. These officers are family to us. We do not just dispatch. We investigate who lives there, who owns the vehicles, and we try to paint a picture for our officer who are out there on the scene. Dispatchers at Madison County are not that invested. Yes, I live outside city limits, but Highland-Pierron is part of the service area that we serve. It is interesting to hear it is being considered when we are being told it is a done deal.

Becky Walter, a citizen for forty years, stated I am really disappointed to hear you guys say this is being considered when these guys have been told it is a done deal. I really hope you do something about it.

Mayor Hemann responded the council does not know what the decision is going to be. The staff report we receive has summarized the history of the State of Illinois mandate. To what extend we are going to do local dispatch has not been determined. Ultimately, we have to abide by the law. It is not that we do not appreciate what the officers and telecommunicators do for the community. It is not a

decision that is going to make any of us happy to have to make. This council has NOT made a decision about what is going to happen.

Nick, a resident, new to this situation, stated it is my understanding the staff have been told their positions are being eliminated. There are talks being done with Madison County and there are open positions that are not being filled. I hope that no more decisions made before we are fully informed. Fill those dispatcher positions, so they just don't fade away. I hope you are smarter than that.

Requests & Comments of Council:

Councilwoman Sloan stated to Officer Rob Horner, whom is present, a thank you for your arrest duty, last week.

Staff Reports:

City Manager Chris Conrad reported the two firemen returned with our fire truck from Louisiana. They were featured on the Illinois Emergency Management Agency's Facebook page today.

Regarding the 911 Consolidation, City Manager Conrad reported the history of this is the State legislature passed the 911 consolidation bill in 2015 that required consolidation of 911 centers (aka PSAPS) across the state. The requirement for Madison County was to go from 16 to 8. At the time of the legislation, then Chief Bell was serving on the local Emergency Telephone System Board and he and I, in my role as lieutenant, at the time, spent time both locally and at the State level lobbying against the bill. We soon found that consolidation was the only thing legislators on both sides of the aisle agreed upon. After the law was passed, we continued to lobby for a trailer bill and even testified at a hearing on behalf of Madison County trying to get an exemption. We lost, and Chief Bell was removed from the local ETSB by Chairman Prenzler. At that point, Highland no longer had a voice at the table concerning the eventual consolidations. I will tell you from having attended many of the meetings that the talks were highly emotional and political. Madison County has been working with the State to submit an approved plan ever since with the plans being rejected and challenged in court. It appeared that consolidation was on an indefinite hold while things played out in the court. In the meantime, most other counties that were required to consolidate did so. Madison County is one of the last to take action on the consolidation mandate. In February, we found out that Bethalto was voluntarily consolidating with the Wood River PSAP for both 911 and dispatch. I spoke to their Chief about his discussions and the ultimate decision and started calling current ETSB board members to get an update on consolidation timelines as the two court cases concerning our plan were coming to resolution. We realized we needed to take a step back, take a hard look at our operations, and run the numbers on what it would look like for Highland once consolidation happens. So, that brings us to where we are now.

Research: I started by looking at our current operations. Fortunately, we have good data. We answer about 10,000-11,000 incidents a year and this is combined police, fire, and EMS. We also dispatch for Highland-Pierron Fire Department and our EMS serves Highland-Pierron, St. Jacob, Marine, Grantfork, and St. Rose Fire Districts. So a little over 2,000 of those 10,000-11,000 incidents handled by dispatch are EMS calls. As far as actual telephone calls into HPD Dispatch, we get about 15,000 calls a year; this includes non-emergency calls, calls for electric department outages and other after-hours city related calls. This comes out to about two calls per hour, with our heaviest call volume between 2pm and 5pm, and our lightest call volume between 10pm-6am.

I then looked at costing, I pulled data from finance on payroll, insurance, miscellaneous benefits and pension costs for the six current dispatchers who answer and manage those 15,000 phone calls. We currently spend \$476,000 on those six employees with average growth of salary and benefits right around 4% annually. We are reimbursed about \$40,000 per year from ETSB for answering 911 calls for Highland, right now. That money goes away once consolidation happens. We will also have to start

paying for our own connection to Madison County that serves our current records management and CAD system (which currently also provides our 911 service that the ETSB pays for now), which will be an additional \$8,000-\$10,000 per year post-consolidation. So to maintain the status quo, Year 1 post-consolidation, we would need to find about \$50,000 in new Highland money in addition to any new increases of owed salary, pension and insurance costs. To put that into perspective, during my tenure as chief, I could not fill the lieutenant position due to budget restrictions and I had to say no to a proposal from one of the officers for a K-9 program because the first-year cost was roughly \$40,000 and I didn't have the money for it.

I then started calling agencies that have already been through consolidation: Swansea, Shiloh, Fairview Heights, O'Fallon, Bethalto, and Maryville. We discussed their research, decisions, and implementation of their consolidations. None of these agencies kept a dispatch presence post-consolidation citing concerns about long-term financial viability and operational concerns about having officers serve two separate dispatch centers. The primary operational concern is that having separate centers for emergency and non-emergency calls and/or officers that could be forgotten or missed due to having two different centers responsible for dispatching the same officers/resources. Having two centers creates an additional point of failure in our emergency response system. This issue was highlighted in an Illinois Supreme Court case that was decided in 2016 (Coleman v East Joilet FPD) where there was confusion and miscommunication between two separate dispatch centers that served the same area. The Supreme Court struck down the Public Duty Rule with this decision. It is the single biggest operational factor against having two separate centers because of the liability knowingly created by having two centers.

City Manager Conrad reported I then called the Statewide 911 coordinator trying to locate an agency that had consolidated and actually kept their dispatch center, and the only one I found was outside of Chicagoland area was Chatham, Illinois. I called Chief Foli, from Chatham, and discussed their situation. Chatham actually consolidated prior to the State law taking effect, so they are not subject to the restrictions of the State law like we are, so how they do their procedures for calls, we are not allowed to do, but that is a much more in depth conversation into the nuances of the actual state law concerning consolidation than what we will get into tonight. Chief Foli was very blunt that the decision to keep their dispatch center was an emotional one and not backed by research or data. He also pointed out that as of April, when we spoke, it had been approximately seven years since they consolidated and they had downsized their police officers by three due to budget constraints, although he was hoping to get two officers back this year. I then asked about his staffing. Chatham is approximately 12,500 population; answer about 15,000 incidents per year; and offers all the same services we do in Highland (electric, water, sewer, fire/EMS). At the time, they were staffed at 15 officers and hoping to get back to 17. Highland is 10,000 population, and we are staffed at 20 officers, including the chief and a school resource officer. This was eye opening to hear him say they had lost three officers in seven years, following consolidation. This account was confirmed by the Highland Dispatchers Union Rep, who happens to live in Chatham and confirmed Chief Foli's version of events. A 24/7 dispatch center requires six employees minimum to cover time off, and is a fixed cost with legacy cost increases. Chatham staffs their current dispatch center identically to how we have historically staffed our center.

At this point, I started looking at our operations and options. The current Madison County consolidation plan has our 911 calls going to Collinsville police department. Operationally, this doesn't make sense with Madison County already dispatching all the departments around us both fire and police post-consolidation. So if we do nothing and just allow this to be imposed on us, our 911 calls go to Collinsville, this is not ideal. So I opened a dialog with the Sheriff's Department about their taking over our dispatch operations. The county has a policy that requires an impact study for any new services, so we commissioned a study to determine the financial impact of the county taking on our dispatch responsibilities in addition to taking our 911 calls. We got that study back about a month ago. I shared it

with both the union and a few of the officers who had requested the information as well. That study found that the county would take on about \$240,000 in both direct and indirect costs to take on our dispatch operations. In the discussions with the county, we think that because of how some calls are currently documented, there are potentially, some double-counted calls (calls that currently go into County as 911, but we end up dispatching EMS or Fire, so the calls are documented both at the County and in Highland), but the numbers are not significant so we are considering setting a rate based on the study and then reevaluating the numbers after one full year, once all ops are under one center, and then would be more accurate.

When I provided those numbers to the union and the officers who requested it, I also worked out the compounding interest impact for them. If the starting line is \$250,000 (remember we will have to pay for our connection post-consolidation) and \$500,000 to maintain the status quo, over ten years that difference is almost \$400,000 using the federal rate of costing of a service of 4.2% per year to cover increases in all costs associated with a service. To put that into perspective, three years ago, when I cut the lieutenant position at the police department, the cost was going to be \$117,000 the first year and I didn't have the money. Over ten years, that comes out to three lieutenants' positions.

So the questions became clear to me as it did with every other Chief who had to examine this issue. Do we want to spend our limited resources on local people answering phone calls? Or with officers with guns, badges and radios physically answering calls? I think we can agree we want the badges and guns answering calls and responding when needed.

Operationally, we are looking to mirror what a few of the other communities are already doing. The benefit we have in going last is we get to learn from everyone else's mistakes. We are putting processes in place to make sure that when your power goes out, you can report it to the electric department on-call (actually quicker by taking out the middle man), we already share a records management and computer aided dispatch system with the county to track our officers and their safety. We designed the front reception area of the new public safety building knowing that consolidation would come during the life of the building, so we designed it to be able to offer access to all citywide systems and services in one location that is both safe and secured both for the citizens and the workers. We are working through these processes with our directors and staff now in preparation for the consolidation. We are also in discussions with the County on potentially hiring two of our dispatchers, if they desire to continue dispatching. I can assure the public that post-consolidation whether you call 911 or our non-emergency number, you will speak directly to a trained dispatch professional who will have the same direct radio contact with our officers, fire department, and EMS, and all the same access to the mapping technology our current dispatchers have.

City Manager Conrad pointed out none of this takes into consideration the increased costs associated with law enforcement that will be coming as a result of the new criminal justice reform legislation. This will increase costs for both operations, salary as we try to recruit qualified people, body cameras, and the substantial increase in insurance costs if the legislature decides to end qualified immunity for police this fall. Consolidation is a complex issue with a lot of moving parts and is quite distressing for all concerned. I can assure you that nobody – from me, the council, or any of the directors – like where this law has led us, but I hope our citizens understand that I can't make a recommendation to the council that the data tells me will result in fewer cops on the streets in the future.

Mayor Hemann asked the 911 consolidation is a state law. We have to abide by it. City Attorney Mike McGinley replied you are correct. They are going to consolidate us into very specific areas. It is out of our control. Councilwoman Bellm clarified, if we do nothing, they would put us in Collinsville's dispatch. If we take action then we can arrange to go to Madison County, which would be better for us. City Manager Conrad replied yes. Mayor Hemann pointed out 911 consolidation has to happen. What

has not been decided is how we are going to do that. City Manager Conrad reported we are working on an intergovernmental agreement with Madison County. With the consolidation bill and with court case ruling, they have made it impractical and a liability to have a separate non-emergency dispatch center. Having talked to other chiefs that have gone thru consolidation, that case has had a huge impact on not having non-emergency dispatch center. We are also working on a non-attended call system. We do have the technology available. When calling 9-1-1 people would be talking to a dispatcher that would have the authority to dispatch police, fire and EMS. When the power is out, we can streamline how people can report that. With the system we have, we don't need 100 calls, but one call to pinpoint where the outage is at. Likewise, afterhours calls for Street & Alley, Water, and Sewer Departments would be similarly routed. City Manager Conrad acknowledge there will be some growing pains. It will be different than what we are used to. Mayor Hemann summarized the council will be making a decision on an intergovernmental agreement with Madison County for 9-1-1 consolidation as mandated by the State of Illinois. An additional decision will need to be made on how to handle other dispatching calls. He thanked everyone for coming this evening. I wish we would not have to make this decision, but is coming in the future.

NEW BUSINESS

Bill #21-153/ORDINANCE Approving and Authorizing Execution of a Development Agreement for a Project in TIF #2 Project Area with Highland Autowash, LLC, and Other Actions Related Thereto - Councilman Frey made a motion to approve Bill #21-153/Ordinance #3131 approving and authorizing execution of a development agreement for a project in TIF #2 Project Area with Highland Autowash, LLC, and other actions related thereto as attached; seconded by Councilwoman Bellm. Roll Call Vote: Councilmembers Sloan, Frey, Bellm and Hipskind voted aye, none nay. Motion carried.

Bill #21-154/ORDINANCE Declaring One 1996 Chevrolet Pickup Truck Surplus and Authorizing Its Sale or Disposal – Councilwoman Bellm made a motion to approve Bill #21-154/ Ordinance #3132 declaring one 1996 Chevrolet Pickup Truck surplus and authorizing its sale or disposal as attached; seconded by Councilman Frey. Roll Call Vote: Councilmembers Sloan, Frey, Bellm and Hipskind voted aye, none nay. Motion carried.

Bill #21-155/RESOLUTION Authorizing and Directing Application to the 2021 Safe Routes to School Program for Assistance, for the Purpose of Construction a Sidewalk Along IL Route 160 to Connect Existing Pedestrian Accommodations at the Intersection of IL Route 160 and Troxler Avenue to Existing Pedestrian Accommodations at Flax Drive - Councilman Frey made a motion to approve Bill #21-155/Resolution #21-09-2873 authorizing and directing application to the 2021 Safe Routes to School Program for Assistance, for the purpose of construction a sidewalk along IL Route 160 to connect existing pedestrian accommodations at the intersection of IL Route 160 and Troxler Avenue to existing pedestrian accommodations at Flax Drive as attached; seconded by Councilwoman Bellm. Roll Call Vote: Councilmembers Sloan, Frey, Bellm and Hipskind voted aye, none nay. Motion carried.

Bill #21-156/RESOLUTION Approving and Authorizing Execution of an Inter-Governmental Grant Agreement for Reconstruction of Matter Drive and Executive Drive, Between the State of Illinois, Illinois Department of Transportation and the City of Highland – Councilwoman Bellm made a motion to approve Bill #21-156/Resolution #21-09-2874 approving and authorizing execution of an inter-governmental grant agreement for reconstruction of Matter Drive and Executive Drive, between the State of Illinois, Illinois Department of Transportation and the City of Highland as attached; seconded by Councilman Frey. Roll Call Vote: Councilmembers Sloan, Frey, Bellm and Hipskind voted aye, none nay. Motion carried.

Award Bid #PW-07-21, for the Silver Lake Spillway Retaining Wall Replacement 2021, Project – Councilman Frey made a motion to award Bid #PW-07-21, for the Silver Lake Spillway Retaining Wall Replacement 2021 Project to Korte & Luitjohan Contractors, Inc., in the amount of \$245,940.00 as attached; seconded by Councilwoman Bellm. Roll Call Vote: Councilmembers Sloan, Frey, Bellm and Hipskind voted aye, none nay. Motion carried.

Approve a Notice of Municipal Letting, Bid #E-08-21, for Purchase of a Capacitor Bank for the Substation at the Power Plant – Councilwoman Bellm made a motion to approve Notice of Municipal Letting, Bid #E-08-21, for purchase of a capacitor bank for the substation at the power plant as attached; seconded by Councilman Frey. Roll Call Vote: Councilmembers Sloan, Frey, Bellm and Hipskind voted aye, none nay. Motion carried.

REPORT

Accepting Expenditures Report #1203 for September 4, 2021 through September 13, 2021 – Councilman Frey made a motion to accept Expenditures Report #1203 for September 4, 2021 through September 13, 2021 as attached; seconded by Councilwoman Bellm. Roll Call Vote: Councilmembers Sloan, Frey, Bellm and Hipskind voted aye, none nay. Motion carried.

Councilwoman Bellm made a motion to adjourn; seconded by Councilman Frey. Roll Call Vote: Councilmembers Frey, Bellm and Hipskind voted aye, none nay. Motion carried and meeting adjourned at 7:59pm.

Kevin B. Hemann, Mayor

Barbara Bellm, City Clerk