**STAFF REPORT**

**Mount Dora Police Department**

**Police Communication Services**

May 7, 2012

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

There are four options for communications centers. They are:

1. Maintain current services
2. Outsource to a third party
3. Consolidate among municipalities
4. Consolidate as a region

**Option 1: Maintain**

The Mount Dora Police Department Communications Center is a well-established, efficient, and effective operation. The staff is stable, well trained, experienced, and provides excellent service. The facility is modern and well designed for form and function. The technology is complete, nearly new, and up-to-date. The range of services provided is comprehensive. The budget of approximately $400,000 is *low* to *within range* of other comparable communication centers. There are no known deficits or large budget expenditures anticipated for the near future.

**Option 2: Outsource**

The staff has identified several options for outsourcing with examples of each. Three cities in Orange County have contracted with the City of Apopka for communication services. In other counties, some cities contract with their Sheriff’s Office. The Orange County Sheriff’s Office provides contracted communication services for four cities. The Lake County Sheriff’s Office (LCSO) provides seven cities communication services. Only Clermont pays for the service, the other six pay nothing.

The Lake County Sheriff’s Office submitted a bid and a proposal for scope of services to provide Mount Dora communication services. The proposal submitted is for $360,283 annually and $102,713 as a one-time expense. In return, they will provide traditional police dispatch services typically provided by a Public Safety Access Point (PSAP). However, there are many services, some critical, that the current MDPD Communications Center performs that the LCSO proposal does not address. Moreover, the first year transition costs for outsourcing are very substantial. They range from a minimum of $543,000 up to $767,000.

If the Mount Dora Communications Center is outsourced, the loss of services they perform will be substantial and felt across the city. Several cities that outsourced their communication centers have reported a dramatic loss of services and regretted their decisions. For Mount Dora, the resulting options will be to simply no longer provide those services and live with the consequences or hire new staff to compensate for the loss of services formerly perform by the dispatchers.

**Option 3 and 4: Consolidate**

Consolidating communication services among cities or on a larger regional scale could provide important advantages over outsourcing. Outsourcing is contracting for service with a provider. Consolidation is joining different agencies into a single entity. The most important advantage of consolidation vs. outsourcing is maintaining self-determination over management, standards, quality, responsiveness, policy and procedures, and budget.

Agencies that have outsourced their communications function have little to no influence on crucial issues. The host agency can arbitrarily change management, staffing, procedures, technology, and software; all issues that have significant operational and budgetary impact on the end users.

The initial cost to consolidate would be very large. Organizational costs, facilities, equipment, software, training, and personnel will all entail substantial investment. However, economy of scale may provide long-range operating budget savings.

The remaining weakness of consolidation is the same for outsourcing: loss of services performed by each agencies’ communications staff. Hiring new staff to compensate for the loss of services provided by our own communication officers compromises, if not eliminates, any budget savings from outsourcing and/or consolidation.

Finally, research has shown that because of the scale and complexity of public safety communications, outsourcing and consolidation is a nearly irrevocable decision. Once a communications center is eliminated, it cannot be rebuilt without an enormous investment of time, effort, and money.

**Staff Recommendation:**

The Mount Dora Police Department Communications Center provides the citizens of Mount Dora an exceptional value for the money spent. It provides our residents, businesses, and visitors a level of service that cannot be replicated by an outside provider. The staff recommends that Mount Dora maintains its current communications center without change.