



To: Mayor and City Council
From: Dylan Mulfinger
Subject: Dispatch
Date: 5/8/2023

In April, the City of Oelwein was provided a letter from the Fayette County Supervisors advising the city that the Supervisors were no longer interested in discussing the rate for dispatching and that the county will do a one-year contract for \$104,000. This is a substantial increase from \$25,000 but lower than the original contract proposal of \$140,000. The entire time the city has attempted to work with the county they have refused to answer our questions.

The following questions were asked in February of 2023:

- The dispatch budget prior to the merger
- The dispatch budget after the merger
- Wage increases provided to dispatchers due to cost of living and competition increases to improve hiring efforts
- A dispatch staffing comparison for similar counties
- The impact that funding the dispatch center on a levy would have on the levy
- The impact that funding just the increase in costs to dispatch would have on the levy
- A description of what qualifies as a “calls for service” for them, as we have had concerns over inflated numbers
- Provide the base number of calls for service with emergency calls extracted from that total

The county supervisors either do not know how to get these questions answered or do not know how to ask questions to their own departments. It is obvious the county is reducing their dispatch cost and forcing it onto the Oelwein community essentially through double taxation.

The city has three options at this time:

1. Do nothing
2. Pay the county and negotiate in the future
3. Create a dispatch department at the police department

Do Nothing

This plan poses the greatest risk as it will most likely result in Fayette County stopping all dispatch service July 1, 2023. The city’s public safety departments will be put at risk, and community members will not receive a high level of public safety. Fayette County is required to provide 911 services, but after providing information on the emergency call, Fayette County would be done working with our public safety. This option is not recommended as counties across the state have forced their authority on cities and shut off their dispatch services. This option is not recommended by the City Administrator.

Pay the County



Finding funds for this will be difficult as the city budgeted \$25,000 because two supervisors verbally indicated they were working on an extension of the current contract. This also leads the city to pay for a service that the city has no control over or input on current operations. The current operations of the dispatch center are not meeting the expectations of the city's public safety. The current service levels do not appear to be a concern for the Sheriff or the supervisors. The current fee will most likely go up without the city having any recourse to dispute or negotiate. In the most recent negotiations, the supervisors formed a committee that heavily favored the county. This may become the only option and the supervisors are aware of this predicament. The County citing one county as an example is a weak argument. Oelwein provided three like counties in the state that charge zero dollars to their cities. This payment would be made monthly to the county.

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The city could start their own dispatch, but it would take some considerable changes to the current operations. Both the Clerical and Administrative Assistant would have to accept a dispatch position, and the city would need to bring on two new members. The two new positions would come at a potential cost of \$45,000 each for salaries and another \$25,000 each for benefits. The police department would need to set up their room to handle dispatching and make some minor radio changes. This would be a step back as the city was hopeful the county would work with the city during this transition. The changes needed in the dispatch center would not be overly significant as the 911 calls, paging, and emergency dispatching items would still be the responsibility of the county, in which Oelwein fairly contributes to through 911 surcharges and property taxes. The city would need to acquire a base radio, with accessories, and potentially a stand-alone computer system for records entry. By having our dispatch center become a non-emergency dispatch center, this lessens the technology, software, and training needs of this center, therefore lowering the operational expenses.

No matter the outcome, these expenses will place a significant burden on the general fund.