

Regional dispatch idea is off the table in Weston

Written by Patricia Gay

Wednesday, 16 November 2011 12:09

Weston is no longer going to pursue regionalizing its 911 communications center.

A subcommittee of the Weston Police Commission determined it would cost approximately \$100,000 more a year for Weston to regionalize after figuring in the costs to man the current center overnight for emergencies.

Last month, First Selectman Gayle Weinstein asked the commission to explore the costs of regionalization.

"I'm concerned if we don't do something, the state will. The state has indicated it will cut funding if the town doesn't take action and we may have to regionalize with towns we don't want to," she said at a commission meeting in October.

The regionalization proposal would have called for Weston to combine its 911 dispatch services with Easton and Redding at a facility in Redding.

It would cost the town approximately \$318,000 a year for combined dispatch services. The town currently spends about \$507,000 a year to staff a 24/7 full-time dispatch center.

Additional costs

For an accurate analysis, Ms. Weinstein asked the commission to look into the cost of keeping a staff member on duty in Weston overnight in case residents need help during that time. "I don't want a dark police station," Ms. Weinstein said.

Commissioners Beth Gralnick, Hal Shupack and Bill Brady volunteered for the subcommittee and discussed costs with Weston Police Chief John Troxell and Finance Director Rick Darling.

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“We looked at the cost of staffing the center overnight with either a police officer, town hall employee, or entry-level dispatcher,” Ms. Gralnick said.

The subcommittee determined that in all instances it would cost the town more to change to regionalization and add an employee, and it was cheaper to keep the existing center operating in Weston.

Under regionalization, the dispatch center/police station in Weston would still need coverage every evening, seven days a week, 365 days a year. The committee determined that four employees would be needed for total continuous coverage.

Staffing with police officers was the most expensive option, and would cost approximately \$100,000 per officer for salary and benefits. A town hall employee would cost around \$77,000, and an entry-level dispatcher would cost around \$75,000.

Going with the cheapest option, four dispatchers would cost \$300,000. When added to the \$318,000 regional cost, the total cost would be \$618,000 per year.

The town currently spends \$508,000 per year for dispatch, so regionalization and additional staff would cost approximately \$110,000 more than what the town now pays for dispatch services.

After getting the figures from the subcommittee, Ms. Weinstein rejected regionalization as an option. “If it doesn’t make sense financially, why even have the discussion,” she said.

At the commission’s meeting in October, Weston Police Chief John Troxell and members of the Weston Volunteer Fire Department and EMS were opposed to regionalization based on public safety concerns.

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Mr. Shupack, a former first selectman, said the town had considered regionalization 12 years ago and rejected it.

Nonetheless, Ms. Weinstein believed the town needed to consider regionalization again in case there were cost savings to be had.

“The options had to be considered so the town can now have the discussion about the communications center. With all these ‘regionalization’ topics, there can be no sacred cows. We need to explore all the options that could potentially save us money,” Ms. Weinstein said.

With a new budget imminent, the town will now look into renovating its current dispatch center facility, which is in poor condition.

“We’re going to have to have some painful conversations as a community,” Ms. Weinstein said.