



**WORK SESSION OF THE GREENBELT CITY COUNCIL held Wednesday, March 26, 2003, for the purpose of receiving a briefing from representatives of Mitretek on plans for a joint police communications dispatch system.**

Mayor Davis started the meeting at 8:05 p.m. It was held in the Multipurpose Room of the Community Center.

PRESENT WERE: Council members Edward V.J. Putens, Rodney M. Roberts, Alan Turnbull, Thomas X. White, and Mayor Judith F. Davis.

STAFF PRESENT WERE: Michael P. McLaughlin, City Manager; Chief Jim Craze, Lts. Dan O'Neil, Tom Kemp, and Mike Craddock, Police Department; and Kathleen Gallagher, City Clerk.

ALSO PRESENT WERE: Chief Doug Holland, City of Hyattsville Police Department; Carol Harris, Project Manager, and Craig Janus, Vice President, Mitretek Center for Information and Telecommunications Technologies; and Maniko Barthelemy, the Gazette.

Following introductions, Mayor Davis turned the meeting over to Chief Craze to explain the background on this project. He said that he and Chief Holland began to discuss combining communications functions about three years ago as a way to increase the two departments' cost-efficiency and stop competing for staff. Following September 11, 2001, however, the idea of wider communications compatibilities among emergency services took on entirely new meaning. Eventually several of the municipalities with shared borders published a joint Request for Proposals to design a pilot program. At this point, he said, there are 27 municipalities in the county communicating on 27 different frequencies.

Mr. Janus said the Mitretek Center for Criminal [Justice](#) Technology is a 501(c)(3) organization, and he described the center and its mission. They have funding from the Department of [Justice](#) via the National Institute of [Justice](#) to identify problems in local law enforcement that could be addressed by technology. The difficulties of communication among jurisdictions struck them as a prototype of the kind of problem they wish to address, and the Department of Justice is interested in this pilot project as a national model.

Mr. White asked about privacy issues. Mr. Janus responded that information security insurance is integrated into the design of the system through encryption. He added that existing systems are not all that secure and that this system would actually increase overall security. In response to a question from Chief Craze, Mr. White explained that Mr. Janus had answered his concerns about whether there would be new data collection but that his other concern was where accountability would lie with a multi-jurisdictional system. Ms. Harris responded that the question of governance was one that would be specifically addressed as part of the pilot project. Mr. Putens commented that this was

a major concern of his, too, and that he wanted responsibilities clearly defined so there would be no "finger-pointing" later.

Ms. Harris said the software is quite sophisticated in terms of prompting users for information, doing automatic checks of information, validating addresses and so forth, which should increase overall reliability and accuracy of data.

Mr. Roberts asked what about this system would actually improve the dispatch process, which he said was the impetus for doing this. Mr. Janus and Ms. Harris said the technology would be better, more qualified people could be hired for higher pay, and turnover could be reduced. In addition, it might be possible to structure the architecture of the process to be more efficient: for example, restructuring the ways in which calls are directed.

Chief Holland said joining the county's dispatch system would be an option, but the chiefs of the municipalities do not want to do that for the very reason that they wish to retain closer contact with their own residents. Joining the county would mean losing that control. Chief Craze added that the board of directors of this joint project would be the chiefs of police of the participating communities. "We'll be accountable," he said. Mr. Putens said that was exactly what Council wanted, since if there were problems, Council would hear about it from the residents, and it was essential that the lines of accountability be clear.

In terms of quality control, Chief Holland added that the Hyattsville Police Department is accredited, and Greenbelt's wishes to pursue accreditation. He said there is an accrediting program for police communications centers that is very strict, and it is a priority of his that if this center is established, the cities should pursue accreditation for it as soon as practicable.

Mayor Davis asked how many cities would join together. Chief Craze said those with their own communications centers, and that would include Riverdale Park, Bladensburg, and Mt. Ranier, together with Hyattsville and Greenbelt.

There was discussion of grant funding and the potential availability of federal surplus equipment to benefit the project. Chief Holland pointed out that without question this alliance would be much more competitive for grant funding working together than competing against one another; in addition, having the experience of conducting this pilot would place the group in a more competitive position to acquire funding to build on that experience.

Mr. Turnbull expressed concern that in combining this function, there would be a temptation to try to achieve greater efficiency from the staff by, in effect, increasing their workloads, thus potentially adding to the stress and turnover, rather than vice versa. Chief Holland said that their belief was that it would be possible to improve efficiency by hiring more qualified staff, training them better, and increasing retention. Chief Craze added that the departments would always continue to have people in-house to deal with walk-ins.

In response to the Mayor's question about front-end costs for the program, the Chiefs agreed that they did not see many costs, since any new costs would be balanced by

savings. Mr. Janus added that because of the availability of equipment and grant funding to produce this pilot project, it would not involve typical project start-up costs.

Council thanked the Chiefs, Ms. Harris, and Mr. Janus for the presentation and said they looked forward to hearing more when the plans were further developed.

The meeting ended at about 9:35 p.m.  
Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen Gallagher  
City Clerk