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Town continues long-standing dispatch services with county sheriff's office

By Vera Kochan



Photo Vera Kochan

When the Moraga Police Department was established in 1979, the East Bay Regional Park District Police Department was contracted for dispatching services, which also included 911 and non-emergency services.

In 1987, the Contra Costa County Office of the Sheriff was contracted by the town to perform police dispatching services above and beyond what EBRPD provided. A main benefit was that both Lafayette and Orinda police departments were on the same radio frequency and channel as MPD, often times providing a tri-city assist in emergencies. Additionally, the sheriff's office constantly upgrades its technology and is known for its excellent service to Moraga.

"The Office of the Sheriff maintains a professional dispatch center at their headquarters in Martinez," stated MPD Chief Jon King in his staff report during the May 26 town council meeting. "The center is staffed 24/7 with trained dispatchers and overseen by a sheriff's lieutenant. The dispatch center is also directly connected with the county's Community Warning System (CWS) to expedite emergency community messaging during a disaster or other type of emergency." King also said that the county keeps MPD connected with statewide law

enforcement telecommunication networks.

To cast an even wider net of communications, the sheriff's office also provides dispatch services for Pittsburgh, Oakley, Danville and Blackhawk. Other beneficiaries of their services are Animal Control, the Probation Department, and the District Attorney's Office.

During orientation training for new dispatchers, trainees are mandated to pay a visit to the various areas that they serve. King has been informed that the dispatch staff loves providing service to Moraga.

The town council approved a new four-year agreement contract with a vote of 4 in favor and 1 absent (Mayor Mike McCluer). The new agreement is not to exceed \$1 million. Currently the rate is approximately \$174,000 annually, but could potentially rise to \$250,000 depending on Dispatch Center costs or town activity. "Historically, these costs have increased at a reasonable rate and have actually decreased in some years due to changes in the level of use," King explained. "If the town were to establish its own dispatch center and bring these services in-house, the costs would far exceed the current expenditure. If the town were to seek services from another agency, MPD officers would not be on the same radio channel as officers from the adjoining agencies, losing critical operational advantage and potentially decreasing the safety of our community and level of service to residents." The Fiscal Year 2021-22 Proposed Budget includes \$184,000 toward Contract Services - Dispatch Services for police.

Town Manager Cynthia Battenberg informed the council, "One thing the chief doesn't tell you is, he does a lot of behind-the-scenes work with donuts and other visits to the dispatchers, so we're on really good terms with the dispatch service."

King replied, "Anything I can do, to ensure the very best service to our town."

Reach the reporter at: vera@lamorindaweekly.com

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