

**Public Safety Committee
March 20, 2003
2 p.m.
Scott Heyman Conference Room**

Present: M. Robertson, B. Blanchard, K. Herrera, G. Totman, L. McBean
Staff: S. Whicher, P. Meskill, A. Lemaro, L. Shurtleff, W. Skinner
Guests: O. Mack, OAR; Dave Buck, Scott Ferris, P. Myers, citizen; T. Bassoni, WHCU
Board Members: T. Joseph, T. Todd

Call to Order

Ms. Blanchard called the meeting to order at 2:03 p.m.

Changes to the Agenda

A report on emergency preparedness by Sheriff Meskill and Lee Shurtleff, Director of Emergency Response, was added to the agenda.

Chair's Report

Ms. Blanchard said she will be using a template of a yearly committee calendar, prepared by Ms. Robertson, to prepare a schedule for this Committee. She said she would like this Committee to spend time on becoming familiarized with public safety programs and asked Committee members to let her know if there are specific items they would to see placed on this schedule. Ms. Blanchard said Kathy Schlather of the Department of Social Services will be bringing to the Committee information to be used in the evaluation of alternative to incarceration programs. Ms. Blanchard distributed information and asked for members to provide input on the document before the first Committee meeting in May. *Ms. Robertson asked if there would be a joint meeting of both the Health and Human Services and Public Safety Committees. Ms. Blanchard and Ms. Robertson agreed to coordinate this after the meeting. Mr. Whicher suggested that when this review is done, that it also include the budgeting for these programs as well.*

Ms. Herrera spoke of efforts by the Health and Human Services Committee that are underway to better educate the public. She suggested members of this Committee also prepare editorial pieces for the Ithaca Journal and other newspapers. *It was agreed that the next agenda would include a reminder for all members to come prepared to discuss this further.*

Ms. Blanchard said it appears all of the meetings that were scheduled for the year will not be necessary to devote to the Public Safety Building as originally intended. She asked if the Committee wanted to still have these meetings and find alternative topics. It was the consensus of the Committee to cancel meetings that are unnecessary.

Project Scope

Mr. LeMaro distributed a revised Scope of Work from Jacobs Facilities dated March 20, 2003. Ms. Blanchard spoke of budgetary constraints and said she, Mr. Whicher, and Mr. LeMaro made a cautioned decision that it would be a good idea if the County could get through the portion of the Scope where the Community Charette Item was complete by the end of 2003. She said they conducted a conference call with Jacobs and asked how they would reorganize the work that was presented to the

Committee to get to this result and they have been working on that since. Ms. Blanchard said this would mean a slower project and doing certain things a little differently. She asked Mr. LeMaro to explain the response from Jacobs.

Mr. LeMaro has demonstrated in the revised Scope how they would break out the project into two steps; step one would be accomplished this year (\$90,000) and step two would be the completion of the schematic design that would be done in 2004. For each phase they have described what will happen in each step.

Mr. LeMaro said as a result of breaking the project up into two steps and relaxing the schedule, it will increase the cost of the original fee proposal by \$15,000. Ms. Robertson asked why there would be an increase in cost. He stated the cost would be increased because of additional travel time, more overall trips Jacobs would be required to make, and reimburseables.

It was the consensus of the Committee that more time was needed to review the proposed Scope before taking action to approve it. There was discussion as to whether a meeting before the Board meeting would provide adequate time to review the Scope and resolution. A special meeting was scheduled at 4:30 p.m. on April 1st to take action on a resolution approving the revised Scope of Work.

Sheriff's Office: Service and Safety for Large Public Events

Sheriff Meskill said the one major event that is held in the County that drains the resources of the Department is the Grassroots Festival that is held in July. He said this event has placed a financial burden on the Department over the last four to five years. He stated he has received communication from Captain Jackman of the New York State Police indicating the State Police will not be able to provide the same level of service as they have in past years. Mr. Meskill said this the biggest single event that is held in the County. It takes place during a four-day period and requires resources of the Sheriff's Department to address alcohol and drug involvement. Sheriff Meskill said there are laws that exist in New York State that address mass gatherings and said in the past the organizers of the event have not been made to comply with those laws.

Ms. Robertson said this issue was brought up at the Health and Human Services Committee this morning. She said the Health Department has undercharged in the past for permits and both the Department and the Committee will be addressing that.

Mr. Meskill said discussions have been held in the past to try to resolve these issues, however, they have not produced a solution. A question was raised as to whether this event has been treated as a mass gathering in the past by the Health Department.

At the Committees direction, Mr. Whicher was directed to schedule a meeting with both internal and external involved parties, and report back to the Committee on those discussions.

Emergency Response and Local Preparedness

Ms. Blanchard said as a result of world events and local concern and interests, she asked Mr. Shurtleff, Director of Emergency Response, and Sheriff Meskill to attend this meeting. The purpose of their briefing is to explain what kind of things are currently taking place in County emergency and public safety services as they relate to the war with Iraq.

Mr. Shurtleff stated there are many scenarios that could occur as a reaction to what is presently taking place in the Middle East. He said part of his job and the Sheriff's job is to determine what areas or events could pose a risk to Tompkins County.

Mr. Shurtleff spoke of hazardous materials and said there is information about facilities in Tompkins County that store chemicals; annual reports are filed under the Community Right to Know Act.

He addressed evacuation plans for Tompkins County and said there are certain areas that responders would be concerned about in the event of chemical release. He said the facilities located in those areas have filed risk management plans with the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency). Mr. Shurtleff said under the worse case scenario, in Tompkins County there is no more than a mile evacuation that would be required in any circumstance. He stated Tompkins County is very fortunate in this respect.

Mr. Shurtleff said the County's ability to deal with any type of terrorist incident falls within the following areas of concern and response:

- Ability to detect a problem immediately and take action;
- Remove the public from harm;
- To make sure responders have the training and equipment available to handle the problem and the ability to have responders able to decontaminate themselves to avoid a spread of the substance; and
- Ability to isolate and control the situation and restore the community to normal

Mr. Shurtleff said Tompkins County is in pretty good shape in terms of the above. He said this community is blessed with a great amount of knowledge because of the educational institutions located here and the type of people it has working in public safety agencies. He said in the last two years the County has formally recognized the Hazardous Materials Response Team, coordinated through the City of Ithaca, and has begun to promote further training in hazardous materials handling in other departments. Decontamination of victims has been a major emphasis of health care providers in Tompkins County and Cayuga Medical Center has put a tremendous amount of effort into upgrading their ability to handle those types of cases.

Mr. Shurtleff said this morning the County received its first shipment of material from the State Emergency Management Office and included protective suits, gear, and detection equipment. This is the first round of funding that the federal government has brought down to the smaller counties. He said approximately a year and a half ago the County underwent a vulnerability assessment that was performed by the Weapons of Mass Destruction Task Force. That study rated Tompkins County very low compared to other areas in New York State. Mr. Shurtleff said facilities have been identified and law enforcement has taken steps to provide added protection and patrols if a need should occur.

Tompkins County has a Fire and EMS Mutual Aid Plan that tells how responders will access outside help if forces in Tompkins County are unable to fully handle an emergency. Agreements are in place with all adjoining counties, as well as a Statewide Mutual Aid Plan that would activate specialized help and bring resources to come to Tompkins County to assist. Mr. Shurtleff said the Local Emergency Planning Committee specifically deals with planning for hazardous material sites. In addition, there is a Hazardous Materials Plan that tells how the County will respond and handle hazardous material incidents. That Plan also addresses materials that are being transported through Tompkins County.

Mr. Shurtleff credited Alice Cole, Public Health Director, for her work on the Public Health Response Plan which addresses handling a large number of people exposed to a chemical or substance. He said two areas where help is needed from the public is in self-sufficiency and public information. If there were to be a large-scale event, the public should be prepared to be self-sufficient in their homes for 72 hours. This is because it takes approximately that long to bring in help from the outside. The other

area of importance is public information and the need for people to rely on the radio for the transmission of information.

A question was raised about the terror alert system that is used by the federal government and what the threat levels actually mean. Mr. Shutleff said a threat level of red means there is an imminent threat. He said should they receive a warning that the national threat level is moving to red they would activate the Crisis Action Team which is part of the Emergency Response Plan. This team includes representatives of key agencies that have contact throughout the State and federal governments to gather information, bring it to a central point, and work towards developing a local strategy.

Mr. Shurleff reported on a program he recently attended. It was stressed there are three necessary components to a good emergency management system: good coordination, good cooperation, and good communication. He said Tompkins County's communication system is unreliable and in dire need of repair. He stated it is a challenge to maintain the flow of information because of the present system.

Sheriff Meskill said as a result of the current "orange level" terror alert, patrols have been increased and the Sheriff's Department is taking additional precautions as well. He spoke of the recent protests against the war and said those that are not peaceful drain the Department's resources at a time that is already difficult.

A question was raised about activities at the Airport. Sheriff Meskill responded that there is nothing significant to report. He said there are a large number of officers assigned to the Airport and they continue to perform their duties.

Sheriff Meskill stated he has been in contact with officials from Cornell University and said they are very well prepared for an emergency. He said the University has a very good communication system and has been a valuable resource to the County.

Approval of Minutes of February 20 and March 6, 2003

It was MOVED by Mr. Totman, seconded by Ms. Robertson, to approve the minutes of February 20 and March 6, 2003. Ms. McBean requested permission to abstain from voting, as she was not in attendance at those meetings. A voice vote resulted as follows: Ayes - 4, Noes - 0, Abstentions - 1 (McBean). MINUTES APPROVED.

Appointment(s)

It was MOVED by Ms. McBean, seconded by Ms. Herrera, and unanimously adopted by voice vote, to approve the following appointment(s):

Criminal Justice Advisory/Alternatives to Incarceration Board

Patricia Buechel - At-large representative; term expires December 31, 2005
Christine Morris - At-large representative; term expires December 31, 2005

Report on the Local Conditional Release Program

Mr. Whicher provided an update on the membership of the Local Conditional Release Program and stated there are currently three members and one application in the process.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 3:22 p.m.

Public Safety Committee
March 20, 2003

Respectfully submitted by Michelle Pottorff, Board of Representatives' Office