

**MEDINA COUNTY EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY  
EXECUTIVE BOARD REGULAR MEETING MINUTES  
March 24, 2021  
Conducted remotely via Zoom, Meeting ID 962 1250 7447**

Members Present:		Personnel:	Guests:
Ralph Copley	Matt Hiscock	Christina Fozio	Josh Erskine
Carl Deforest	Bill Hutson	Ben Nau	Rob Haas
Brian Guccion	Larry Walters	Matt Sturgeon	
Conrad Sarnowski	Colleen Swedyk		

Conrad Sarnowski called the meeting to order at 8:33 AM.

**Carl Deforest motioned to approve the bills as Resolution 2021-006, as seconded by Ralph Copley, and approved by all.**

**Carl Deforest motioned to approve Resolution 2021-007 as presented, as seconded Colleen Swedyk, and approved by all.**

Ben Nau presented the annual contract between LEPC and EMA. The contract is unchanged from the prior year. **Carl Deforest motioned to approve 2021-004, as seconded by Ralph Copley, and approved by all.**

Josh Erskine presented two AHAC Recommendations to the EMA Executive Board including: 21 waterproof radio cases and floats for the water team for \$920.00, and an FPV Ground Control Station for the UAV team for \$749.00. **Carl Deforest motioned to approve both purchases as presented, as seconded by Ralph Copley, and approved by all.**

Rob Haas introduced a proposed donation of a 16' rigid hull inflatable boat with a 100 hp motor from Lafayette Township. He estimates the boat is valued around \$11,000.00 and needs about \$600.00 in repairs. The water team believes the boats will be useful on larger water bodies in the County. **Carl Deforest moved to approve the acceptance of the donation from Lafayette Township, as seconded by Brian Guccion.**

Directors Report:

The Mass Casualty/ Mass Fatality planning project is underway.

An architect visited Station One and believes a second floor is a viable option. Christina may call a special meeting soon if we need to take action for the building.

Christina provided an updated grant summary to the Board. She presented the same document at the Commissioners meeting on February 23, 2021. She would like to include amounts from 1999-2003, which she is searching for.

Christina presented an updated PPE summary. The State has ceased delivering protective equipment to Medina County. We still have a significant amount of PPE stored in Montville and a Station One. MCEMA is still distributing PPE weekly but the activity is winding down.



Commissioner Hutson mentioned that over the last couple of weeks he had some conversations with different police agencies and different fire departments about radios and about the radio system in particular. The county has deployed the Harris System, and he guesses that decision was made 5-6-7 years ago to go that direction. Many of the fire departments, he thinks maybe all of the fire departments in the county are now on the MARCS System. He is not a user, so he does not know all of the issues, but he is hearing a lot about concerns with interoperability and the ability with the two systems to communicate with one another. He is tossing it out there to see if EMA has experienced issues and if there is a concern. Christina said she thinks Rob [Sharon Fire Chief Rob Haas] can contribute and Larry [Medina City Fire Chief] and Josh [Brunswick City Fire Chief Josh Erskine], she thinks that from the EMA perspective, one of the things with having the multiple systems, is it is a challenge for us. No matter what public safety entity, no matter what they want to use, EMA is given the task of ensuring we have some sort of interoperability with the team [Medina County All-Hazards Team], with mobile command, with whatever mobile radios might be in our response vehicles. She believes maybe two weeks ago there was an article in the paper by Bob Finnan that said the fire chiefs have only received \$50,000.00 dollars. That is a far cry low of what they actually received. They had a significant [Ohio] Fire Marshal Grant for \$650,000.00. If she remembers right, Harris came into the county and the discussions with MARCS all happened around 2014. She believes that Harris was put in place [became live] January of 2016. It was operable, not that everybody was a user, but it was operable and trying to be up and running. The challenge is that all of our fire departments, all but Brunswick City, are not full-time fire departments. They are challenged to find the money that would help them be on the Harris system. Their radios [Harris] were very expensive. The idea that the Fire Marshall offered these MARCS grants, that would put end user equipment in the hands of the fire departments, was a logical thing for the fire departments to do because of the expense. The Fire Marshal grant not only provides for end user equipment. When they no longer need end user equipment, it then pays for any user fees thereafter. It seems that Harris will stay in the county because there are users on it that do not see an issue with it and the same holds true for MARCS. There are entities that are on it that want to be MARCS users, they don't see an issue with it and there is a lot of state funding that goes along with it. So, from EMA's perspective we are going to do what we need to do to ensure that we have interoperability for the sake of response, but somewhere along the line we need to figure out how to work well together. People are holding so strongly on the idea of Harris or holding so strongly on the idea of MARCS that there seems to be limited compromise, and maybe limited flexibility and we need to somehow take that away. There is angst that is going on currently and we need to just sit at the table and figure out how the dispatch centers and the Sheriffs dispatch center can utilize both systems as best as possible, so it services the residents well...whatever fire wants and whatever law enforcement wants. What she sees is that one entity wants to change the mind of the other entity and it's just not working. Other than that explanation from the EMA perspective maybe the other fire chiefs that are here can give their user perspective. Rob addressed Commissioner Hutson and explained that all of the fire departments on his side of the county use MARCS. The other day they had four people on duty, and they had a fire. They had other people coming in [mutual aid] from western Summit County, and they are on MARCS. They are their mutual aid partners and not being able to talk to them is flat out, a safety issue. He thinks three sides of the county are covered by MARCS with their mutual aid partners. The northern end is MARCS, and the Cleveland system and Lorain County is going somewhere, he thinks they'll probably go to Harris, but the other issue is grant eligibility. The state has a statewide interoperability plan. That plan is MARCS. We need the SIEC [The Ohio Statewide Interoperability

Executive Committee <sup>1]</sup>, to sign off when you apply for a federal grant. So, you need to be able to follow the interoperability plan, you need a connection to MARCS to get the grant dollars. Sharon, Granger and Hinckley [townships] were able to get a grant for \$660,000.00 a few years back for end user equipment because they were able to comply with the state interoperability grant. They had to go to MARCS to get their signature. The end user equipment, the equipment in our hands, can go on any system. They can go on MARCS or they can go on Harris if you have the right radio, but on the other side of the tower, the Harris, or the MARCS system, its proprietary so they can't talk and that is our problem. Christina said when Rob mentioned mutual aid; it is difficult as EMA to have a strong opinion because we are supposed to be an unbiased entity, we are supposed be here to support all of public safety with whatever their needs are. We try and do our best, but the truth is that, even if we were to call in a neighboring county, with us working on this mass casualty/mass fatality plan, if we had an incident that was large enough, we would be calling resources in from Summit County, Cuyahoga County, Portage County...a significant number of responders in those counties do operate on MARCS. It is difficult to wrap your head around, and we've heard it said since Harris has been here, we've invested a lot of money in Harris. I think everybody understands that, but to continue investing money, into essentially a private radio system, some people have a strong opinion that is not the way the county should be going because you are always at the whim of that private radio system and whatever that owner wants to do with that private radio system. So, you have those points of failure. Where, with MARCS, if they have failures within their radio system, they are state employees, their job is to service the users of Ohio who may or may not pay subscription fees. Then you hear their user fees are \$20 bucks, a lot of time in those conversations people are going back to old information because they have this mindset about MARCS and not educating themselves on what is going on with MARCS today. The state really is trying to figure out how to reduce any kind of cost, but truth be told, Ohio, in all the nation, Ohio has the largest push-to-talk public radio system in the nation. That is significant. For Ohio to have that and to have people who really want to grab hold to a private radio system, it is challenging to understand that. It is not my job to convince anybody otherwise, it is my job to try and figure out how to make it work with whatever everybody is using. Rob said there are ways to do that, and we just have to invest in different equipment to make everything talk together. It gets complicated but it can be done. Ralph said the more equipment that you create in this 'link' is more places for it to fail. Rob and Christina agreed with that statement. She said that in all the time that Harris has been in the county and MARCS has been in the county, we still aren't able to link. It has been five years now that Harris there have been conversations that Harris is able to integrate with MARCS and MARCS is able to integrate with Harris, and we haven't gotten there yet. Rob said there is an ISSI link that we applied for in the very early stages, but it hasn't gone anywhere. Christina said the county is paying rent [for Harris use] on the vita core in Parma, if anything, since people don't want to relinquish the radio system they have, the county should buy their own vita-core and not pay rent on equipment that is not even housed this county. Rob noted that the vita-core is the computer brains of the radio system. Christina said again, the county is at the whim of the owner of the vita-core, and other entities are renting space on that vita-core too. There's really are a lot of points of failure with the way it all works. Rob said the vita-core is a significant investment. Commissioner Hutson asked Christina a question and noted that he didn't want her to take a political stand on it given the explanation of the EMA role, is there an issue or concerns regarding the interoperability of the system that impacts the delivery of service to our residents. Christina said yes, there is no question. Brian address Commissioner Hutson and told him one of the concerns he had years back, he just took a hypothetical setting, say we had an active shooter at a

school, and you have officers in the foreground, and you have EMT's right behind them and they are all trying to talk to each other, they can't, 10 feet apart. That is the problem that he has with it all. Commissioner Hutson said to bring that situation to reality, from what he was told when there was the hoax at Medina Hospital about the active shooter a couple of years ago, we had person coming from Summit County, Cuyahoga County, various agencies all throughout Medina County and the way it was replayed to him, because he wasn't there, but the way it was relayed to him was that interoperability was an issue in coordinating all of those agencies. Part of the hurdle we have [the county] is that we, he doesn't know what the total investment was, but it something north of \$2 million dollars, the county still have a million and a half dollars in bonds that were floated to establish the system and they are going to have to figure out what to do with that. He is not 100% clear on the rationale on the decision that was made some years ago, but irrespective of that, what he is hearing more and more today is whatever that rationale was then, it is not applicable now. Christina said absolutely. She said the investment the county has made to date is not a bad investment because a lot of it is useable infrastructure. Some money that has been spent to operate Harris can still be used to operate MARCS. There are ways to use that investment in a bigger way, not in that private radio system way. One of the things too that is a concern, even though she wouldn't get backlash from it, but she can see where there would be backlash, is that the county is investing money into a private radio system when all of our tax dollars are helping to run MARCS. So, Medina County is spending their local tax dollars on a private radio system when our tax dollars are already being use in some way to help fund a statewide MARCS system. If that kind of stuff were common knowledge, she is thinking there would be a lot of people questioning why Medina County is investing good money into that private radio system to a for-profit vendor instead of investing into a state ran system. She would rather see a state ran system working on behalf of the residents of Ohio rather than the for-profit vendor, but that is just Christina talking. Commissioner Swedyk addressed Christina and said she agrees with everything she is saying, but then she gets different perspectives where, if that's the case, someone who is making the decision right now, Lorain County is making the decision right now, why are they picking Harris. Christina said she'll be blunt, and just say it, there are people who don't like Dick Miller or the staff with MARCS, that's the truth; Dick Miller can be an abrasive guy in a meeting, but he is insanely passionate. He is an in-your-face-guy when talking about MARCS and questioning why an entity would go to a private radio system. The Lorain County Commissioners paid Mission Critical \$20,000.00 for a 276-page document. They surveyed their entire county, all of their public safety services and interviewed all of their departments and they came up with this document that gave them options on what to do, and MARCS was an option, but that was probably 3 years ago. They are still doing the same things; you have some entities in Lorain County on MARCS and there are some entities that are on Harris. They are doing the exact same thing in their county that we are doing in our county. She thinks the shame of it is when 9-11 happened, this is going to be the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9-11, it's the case for any incident, communications is always the failure. You look at that catastrophic event, we hope we never experience that again, but 20 years later we still have communications decisions that aren't lending themselves towards interoperability. Where are our lessons learned, we should be better 20 years later. We shouldn't be having these same conversations of having to pick or choose and interoperability is still being compromised because of it. Commissioner Swedyk asked if they didn't put anything on the record on why they picked Harris is her question. Christina said she doesn't know that they picked Harris. Commissioner Hutson said the last he heard they are still debating the issue. He said irregardless of what they do we have some mutual aid issues over on the west side of the county because that's where Lorain County is. As we work through this,

he's had a couple conversations over the years with Tom Miller, and now conversations with Sheriff Grice, about the radios. He noted that Tom Miller hired Daryll Anderson, who was one of the 'fathers' of the MARCS system, to do an assessment. He and Daryll met individually, and he asked him the question of what system he prefers, and he said he isn't a user so he can't say which is better in terms of coverage or from a user standpoint, but he doesn't really care as long as we have something that is functional and allows us to deliver the services we need to deliver to the community. Christina said what's interesting about the assessment is that nobody ever got it, nobody knows that the assessment is. He went and talked to a lot of people and nobody that he sat and interviewed; she and Ben sat and talked with him; you don't know the end result of what he came up with during his contract time with that project; nobody ever got anything. Commissioner Hutson said he had insight into that; they had a wrap up that was him, Tom, and Darryl. He doesn't know if Darryl ever issued a formal written report on it, but he was somewhat disappointed because it was really non-conclusive; he was looking for an expert opinion on a direction that he would recommend if it were him, but he didn't give that to them. He gave them the pros and cons of Harris, the pros and cons of MARCS, here's some issues you have with your system and single points to failure, other vulnerabilities that exist in the system that you don't have with MARCS, but at the end of the day, Hutson doesn't even know that he wrote a written report. If he did, he gave it to Tom. He asked Terry and Terry can't find it. As a Commissioner he was personally disappointed that he didn't have an expert, independent guy he can count rely on to say here is the best direction and here is why that is. Be that as it may his perception is that we are struggling throughout the county with interoperability. He does not know what the best direction to go is, but we need to solve the interoperability issue. We maybe need to bite the bullet and go to MARCS. If it's the ISSI thing, let's get that and let's get it to work. Christina said she also thinks that a lot of the discussion lends itself only to law enforcement but look at how many fire departments we have in the county. Their budgets are so limited and having access to grant funds that allow them to be on MARCS, no matter what the county wants to do with their Sheriff's Office or the courthouse, there still needs to be sensitivity that these fire departments operate on a shoe-string budget. If they have grant funds that allow them to buy end-user equipment, and pay user fees, as leaders of this county we all need to make sure we are doing our best to try and help them serve their residents. If grant funds help them do that, we need to be aware of that and have that be a consideration when there are decisions that are being made that impact them. Hutson said there are more than fire departments, there are schools, hospitals and other governmental and semi-private industry that need to have interoperability as well. He understands that state grants right now pay 50% of MARCS monthly user fees, but there is no guarantee that those will go on. In the future if those go to \$20 a month per radio that could really put a burden on and from what he understands that was a significant driver on going with the Harris system; the local fire departments and the local small police departments weren't incurring that \$20 per month per radio fee. Christina said when the RFP went out originally, Harris was able to win the bid, and MARCS wasn't able to bid because part of that contract was the responsibility to also maintain the 400 system and MARCS isn't in the business of maintaining a 400 system. They were out right off the bat whether it was a subscription fee issue or not. Harris said they could maintain a 400 system, but the truth to that is it's an antiquated system, it's been down a number of times and they aren't able to find components but that is how they were able to get their foot in the door and become the chosen vendor. Hutson said his understanding is that MARCS did bid but they were DQ'ed. His understanding again is the reason for that requirement was that the fire departments and the smaller police departments were using the 400 system and couldn't afford to make the jump to the new system. Christina said the outdoor early

warning sirens are on the 400 system too which was a piece of that; to go to a digital system entirely something needs to happen there too. Hutson said he is going to have further conversations with the Sheriff and this and encourage him to put together a group of users from around the county to get together and talk to come up with recommendations. The county is looking to build a new tower in the Hinckley area, and investing a couple hundred thousand dollars in that and if we don't have the right system and it's impacting our residents negatively, we need to make a decision on what we should do. He hates to continue investing money into a system that may not be the right system for us. If we have to find the money to make a change then we need to start looking now to do that; more to follow on this. Conrad said he has been involved with EMA for over 30 years now and it's always been a problem for forever. Ralph said communications in this county has been a problem since 1982 when he first started with the fire department. There was low band, 400 and ultra-high, since 1982 it's been an issue. Hutson said he isn't going to say today its going to go away but we need to come together and get a consensus on which way we are going to go before we spend hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars into a system. Ralph said it makes sense and Christina said it's a good discussion to have. Matt said this is a unique time and the city is almost on an island themselves right now as a UHF user. Within the last two years they just went through the full process of evaluating the different systems and he would tell everyone with the many, many conversations with MARCS this is an excellent time to be Medina County. They have a real interest in our infrastructure, we can partner with them, he has heard the discussions and he believes they are ready, willing, and able to help us in a transition if we are willing to do that and he thinks at a fiscally beneficial standpoint for both entities at this point. If we are talking more towers, it's an even better situation from their perspective. From an interoperability standpoint and a cost standpoint he has talked to a lot of folks who have made the switch to MARCS in different areas of state, subscriber fees are always the issue and fiscally they say it's a big number they don't really have in budgets along with acquiring the radios. The issue he would throw out is for him, and the evaluation they did in the city is the discussion of whether they want to be in the radio business or get out of the radio business. At the end of the day your upfront costs may be high, and we have to learn to live with the fees as they exist, and they may change over time, but at the end of the day we won't have that replacement capital that is hundreds of thousands of dollars down the road, or like Christina said, be subject to some independent vendor that who knows when they want to make an upgrade that will be passed down to all of us that are on the system. The cost of it also comes into play that it is not a great situation at play that for their police department to talk to the sheriff's department for mutual aid they need to have a dual band radio that costs more. There are some moving parts, and the last thing is that CARE dollars are available for these type of projects for multiple different agencies. Larry said that Medina City and LST are also an island since they are new on Harris, and the county going to MARCS. When they are called for mutual aid or call for mutual aid there is an immediate communications barrier which is a real safety issue. Right now, they are trying to put together a MARCS bank of radios to alleviate that problem when doing mutual aid. It is a short-term solution but an important one.

Conrad said we really need this discussion. He asked for a motion to adjourn. Ralph made a motion to adjourn at 9:30 am, seconded by Carl and approved by all.

<sup>1</sup> *The Ohio Statewide Interoperability Executive Committee is created by Governor's executive order and is a stakeholder-driven, multi-jurisdictional, and multi-disciplinary statewide committee with the goal of enhancing interoperable and emergency communications.*