

## Western Regional Homeland Security Advisory Council

### Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, February 18, 2025, 10:00 am

**Council members present:** Jeanne Galloway (West Springfield Public Health), Stephen Gaughan (EMS/Amherst Fire), Anthony Gentile (Wilbraham Dispatch; alternate for Nina Barszcz), Tom Grady (BCSO), Larry Holmberg (HREPC), Steve Kozloski (Monson PD/WMLEC), John Paciorek (Deerfield Police/Western Mass Police Chiefs), Benjamin St. Amand (PVTA), Thomas Sammons (Pittsfield Fire), Alan Sirois (Agawam Fire), Kristen Smidy (Gateway Regional), Don Willard (Chesterfield Selectboard)

**Non-members present:** C.J. Bartone (Hazmat/West Springfield Fire), Raine Brown (FRCOG), Nick Demettrion (Agawam Fire), Nick Licata (HMCC/FRCOG), Sandra Martin, Jeff McDonald (HCSO), Nina Miscioscia (MAPC), Brian Nichols (EOPSS), Chris Norris (Easthampton Fire), Alex Rock (EOPSS), Avery Serra (MAPC)

**Council members absent:** Nina Barszcz (Westfield Dispatch), Paul Burns (PVTA; alternate for Benjamin St. Amand), BJ Calvi (Springfield Fire), Bruce Cullett (Peru PD), Dave Desrosiers (Granby DPW), Jay Hastings (Westfield State PD), Sam Lemanski (Westfield State EMD; alternate for Jay Hastings), Hugh O'Callaghan (Baystate), Norene Pease (Shutesbury BOH/MAPHCO; alternate for Jeanne Galloway)

*This meeting was conducted on Zoom. The meeting was recorded.*

Chair Tom Grady called the meeting to order at 10:00 am.

#### Approval of Minutes

The Council considered the minutes from the January 21, 2025 meeting.

**Motion:** Larry Holmberg moved to approve the minutes from January 21, 2025 as submitted. John Paciorek seconded the motion. Larry Holmberg, John Paciorek, Tom Grady, Thomas Sammons, Jeanne Galloway, Alan Sirois, Steve Gaughan, Kristen Smidy, and Ben St. Amand voted in favor. Steve Kozloski abstained. The motion was approved.

#### Introductions

A round of introductions followed.

#### Updates from the Chair

Tom Grady had no updates to report.

#### Updates from EOPSS

Brian Nichols reported. They are busy with reporting and getting grant contracts rolled out. They interviewed for three new PC2 coordinators, but the selected candidates chose not to come on board, so they are conducting a second round of interviews.

#### Updates from Disciplines

- FIRE: Alan Sirois reported that WMFCA sent 10 representatives to DC for the Congressional Fire Services Institute. They met with legislators to try to advance legislative functions for fire service and emergency response, including keeping grant funding available and renewing First Net. Thomas Sammons had no additional updates.

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- **POLICE:** John Paciorek reported that there is ongoing legislative work on several issues. Recruit officer fees are not fully funded. Police have been paying \$3,200 for recruits to go to the Academy, but this year it is \$6,000, an increase of \$2,800 per recruit officer. That has a massive impact on communities. The co-responder program was funded with ARPA funds as part of community outreach. Police are looking for legislature to address that with DMH to see that the programs stay funded. They have seen a dramatic reduction in Section 12s and emergency transports to the ER. The program has been successful, but there is a shortfall of \$15 or \$16 million. The POST Commission continues to introduce new changes. Fitness for duty standards for recertification now requires mental health and psych evals as well as fitness exams. In the State Police, if someone doesn't pass a fitness test, they just reassign them to the Academy for 30 days, but that is impossible for small departments that are already understaffed. The goal post keeps moving every 3-6 month. The next Academy is scheduled for July; they have about 50 in there now. Steve Kozloski added that Police Chiefs have been getting reminders about paperwork they need to keep on individual officers. Reading between the lines, they are expecting some sort of audit process. Most Chiefs have received further guidance from the POST Commission on Constables.
- **EMS:** Steve Gaughan reported that the regional office had to restructure because of funding cuts. They are down to 50% of the funding of four years ago, and even less compared to previous years. They now have one full time staff and a 20 hour technical advisor. Lisa Harrington continues to move the office forward. The Annual Regional Meeting will be held April 10. OEMS is affected by trauma and MCIs. They have worked hard to get direction from the State MCI Committee and Trauma Committee, but these committees are not actually meeting. They are markedly behind previous years on new treatment protocols. Chris Norris had no additional updates.
- **EMD:** Larry Holmberg reported. A lot of EMDs are still dealing with aftermath of the weekend storm, including four towns in Franklin County that are still almost completely in the dark.
- **PUBLIC HEALTH:** Jeanne Galloway reported. Influenza is blossoming everywhere. Covid and RSV and norovirus also still circulating. There has been some movement at the State level re SAPHE 2.0, the Public Health improvement process, but it is unclear what is happening at the Federal level because some of the funding to help that process is diminishing. Everyone is still trying to dig out from the storm; they are getting a lot of complaints about driveways and sidewalks not cleared, and frozen pipes.
- **TRANSPORTATION:** Ben St. Amand reported. Poor road conditions can impact routes and cause delays, but operationally there have not been too many slowdowns. There has been an uptick in bias-related assaults towards drivers, including a sharp rise since the beginning of the year. There are almost never assaults on paratransit vans, but they had 3 in January alone. They seem to be racially motivated. They are fielding many reports and have to review video to issue suspensions for violating codes of conduct. They are also engaged in the Federal Triennial Review. The FTA is focused on trying to mitigate assaults towards transit workers.

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They are trying to do their best with de-escalation, but folks have a short fuse and take it out on drivers.

- DPW: No one was present to give an update.
- CORRECTIONS: Tom Grady reported that they are seeing an uptick in flu inside the jail and are trying to minimize the effects. It is mostly staff bringing it in. Tom has been part of a group for the last few weeks that is conducting interviews for a statewide Director of Training for the Mass Sheriffs Association. They are focused on trying to get someone to coordinate all of the training efforts for the 14 counties.
- COMMUNICATIONS: Anthony Gentile reported. The development grant is due on March 6, and the rest of the grants should be opening up in a month or so.
- HOSPITALS: No one was present to give an update.
- LOCAL GOVERNMENT: Don Willard reported. Municipalities are trying to support DPWs with overtime and supplies.
- K-12 EDUCATION: Kristen Smidy reported. Superintendents are thankful for school vacation because they are seeing an uptick in illnesses. They are also keeping a close eye on what happens at the Federal level with the Department of Ed, as that will affect their funding. At the State level, the Dept. of Ed is looking for a new Commissioner.
- HIGHER ED: No one was present to give an update.
- Massachusetts State Police (MSP): No one was present to give an update.
- MEMA: Jeff McDonald reported that region 3/4 is hosting a regional EOC tomorrow virtually and Thursday in person in Agawam.
- DHS/CISA: No one was present to give an update.

### **Updates from Subcommittees**

***All Hazards Planning and Equipment:*** Larry Holmberg reported that the election security project has wrapped up and the fairgrounds security project is running well. The facility managers have been happy with the response from the vendor. The cybersecurity project is underway as well.

***Interoperability/Information Sharing:*** Anthony Gentile had no updates to report.

***Training and Exercises:*** Tom Grady reported. A number of projects are in process. Raine will be pushing out the de-escalation training again. We have good responses so far. We have one motion for increasing the funding for the purchase of ASHER equipment. Chief Sirois had taken the lead on the [CBRNE] subcommittee and put together a process with Raine to solicit from

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communities what their needs were and then select through that. Alan Sirois explained that when they looked at the amount of money available for the project and the amount of equipment requested, it was not enough. They pared down some of the requests based off analysis of grant applications. There are now 227 sets of equipment requested, at an anticipated cost of about \$1,000 per set, which leaves a gap of about \$30,000. There was a surplus of funds in T&E, and the subcommittee voted to allocate an additional \$30,000 to this to make up the gap.

**Motion:** Tom Grady moved to approve \$30,000 to support the purchase of ASHER equipment. John Paciorek seconded the motion. John Paciorek, Larry Holmberg, Tom Grady, Jeanne Galloway, Steve Gaughan, Alan Sirois, Thomas Sammons, Steve Kozloski, Kristen Smidy, Ben St. Amand, and Don Willard voted in favor. The motion was approved.

Tom added that when the State adopted the NFPA 3000 standard, the purchase of ballistic equipment became an unfunded mandate because it is not a standard part of protective equipment for Fire or EMS. Tom noted that this equipment has a shelf life and there is no sustainable funding source to replace these items when they reach end-of-life. It is important for us to know as a Council and for EOPSS to be aware of as well.

**Equipment /PPE:** Raine Brown had no updates to report.

**CBRNE/IED:** Alan Sirois reported that CBRNE will be welcoming a few new members: Chief Bartone and Randy Quarles from West Springfield and Regional Hazmat will be joining the subcommittee to replace Chiefs Dearborn and Nelson, who have retired.

**Fiduciary Report:**

Raine reported that for FFY21 we have an end date of June 30. We have two remaining open projects in FFY21; Raine is feeling confident that they will be completed in time. FFY22 also has an end date of June 30, but we are seeking an extension to the end of December to accommodate the Greenfield Regional Prime Mover, which is moving along. In FFY22 we had a total of 23 projects, of which 20 are complete. In FFY23 we have a fair amount of money not yet allocated for projects, mostly in T&E and WMRIC. We will probably see some of the WMRIC funds allocated today. We will also need an extension on FFY23, which currently ends at the end of July, because of the challenges getting a quote for the Tech Rescue Team prime hauler. For FFY24, Raine has just received approval from EOPSS for several projects. The project justification for the Ludlow drone has been submitted as well, but drones take a long time to go through the proposal process.

Brian Nichols added that as of now we still do have funding. The concern now is that some of the organizations such as FEMA and DHS may be laying people off at the federal level. It is unclear how that will affect us.

**MAPC** – Avery Serra had no updates to report.

**Old Business:** None.

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**New Business:**

Raine reported that right now, virtual meetings are allowed through the end of March. The Open Meeting Law which allows fully virtual meetings goes away and reverts to the old law stating that hybrid meetings are allowed but a quorum must be present physically. There are efforts to extend the law, but no information yet if that will happen. Raine will start looking for locations in case we need to go back to in person meetings.

**Business Unforeseen by Chair:**

Tom congratulated Steve Gaughan on his promotion to Assistant Chief. He also reported that Berkshire County is going to be losing the location where they house the mobile command center and the field comm vehicle. He reached out to Rich Fiske to see if there is anyone else in the Commonwealth who would be interested in hosting the FC50 vehicle. Rich is actively looking for that; if anyone knows of communities looking for a comms vehicle, let him know.

**Next Steps/Future Meetings**

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 18, 2025 at 10:00 am, as a virtual meeting.

**Motion:** John Paciorek moved to adjourn. Larry Holmberg seconded the motion. John Paciorek, Larry Holmberg, Tom Grady, Jeanne Galloway, Steve Gaughan, Alan Sirois, Thomas Sammons, Steve Kozloski, Kristen Smidy, and Don Willard voted in favor. The motion was approved.

The meeting adjourned at 10:46 am.

List of Documents Reviewed at the Meeting

- WRHSAC Council Meeting Agenda for February 18, 2025
- WRHSAC Council Meeting Minutes from January 21, 2025 (draft)
- WRHSAC Fiduciary Report for FFY21 Homeland Security Grant, 2/18/2025
- WRHSAC Fiduciary Report for FFY22 Homeland Security Grant, 2/18/2025
- WRHSAC Fiduciary Report for FFY23 Homeland Security Grant, 2/18/2025
- WRHSAC FFY21 Budget Report through 12/12/24
- WRHSAC FFY22 Budget Report through 2/14/25
- WRHSAC FFY23 Budget Report through 2/14/25

Respectfully submitted by:

Rachel Mason, WRHSAC Program Assistant  
Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council  
Franklin Regional Council of Governments