Zion, Gurnee move forward with plan to consolidate 911 dispatch service

The Zion Police Department on Salem Boulevard. (Dan Moran / News-Sun)

By **Mary McIntyre**

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A developing plan to merge the Gurnee and Zion 911 dispatch centers may be better for Zion in the long run, according to Zion Police Chief Steve Dumyahn.

The consolidation, prompted by a 2015 state law, will provide better technology for emergency response and will free Zion from having to supervise its own center, he said.

"In the long run, I think it could be beneficial," Dumyahn said. "We won't have to supervise the 911 center anymore."

Dumyahn added, "I think we'll see an improvement in our technology merging with Gurnee."

The consolidated dispatch center is expected to open in 2017 in Gurnee.

Dumyahn said that although Zion's nine full-time dispatchers will be terminated when the new center opens, they will have better opportunities for advancement if they are hired in Gurnee than they currently have.

Zion's Fire Chief John Lewis said he is not concerned that the merge will cause a decline in 911 response.

"You probably won't see any change in the impact of service," he said.

The consolidation is required because in 2015, the Illinois General Assembly voted to require any dispatch center serving less than 25,000 residents to consolidate with another center.

"We're mandated by state act to merge with another dispatch center," he said. "It wasn't something that was originally in our mindset."

Going forward, Lewis said, Zion will contract with Gurnee to pay for the services. He does not know if Zion will save money long-term.

There will be transition costs in creating the merged center, he said. Lewis added that after the merger, he does not know if the costs of the contract will exceed Zion's current expense in having its own dispatch center.

"Really hard to tell if there would be a cost savings for the city of Zion," Lewis said.

Jack Linehan, assistant to the village administrator for Gurnee, said the merger will help both communities to better respond in case of a large-scale catastrophe.

"There will be more individuals on call at any given time," Linehan said. "Instead of each doing their own thing, we're going to be doing it together."

"A lot of communities have already consolidated," he added. Linehan said Gurnee will interview former Zion dispatchers for employment.

"They'll definitely be interviewed and considered for the positions," he said. Linehan does not know how many dispatchers will be employed in the merged center. Currently, Gurnee employs about 14 dispatchers, he said, who will remain village employees.

"This is not a privatization of 911," Linehan said.

The Gurnee Village Board voted Monday night to pay $97,730 to IXP Corporation to consult on the consolidation.

"They're an expert at evaluating communication systems," Linehan said.

Mary McIntyre is a freelance reporter for the News-Sun.

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