



A conversation with . . . **Jim Mack**

**Shelburne PSAP Administrator**

Shelburne Public Safety Answering Point Administrator Jim Mack has more than 26 years of experience in the public safety field. He started as a fire and rescue volunteer in Charlotte and now serves on Shelburne Rescue and as the PSAP administrator. The Shelburne Communications Center is one of six PSAPs in Vermont and receives emergency 9-1-1 calls and provides dispatch services for communities in their region. This includes 18 towns, five ambulances, 28 fire departments, two police departments and several more first response agencies.

**Over your career, have you seen significant changes in communications?**

*“For PSAPS, we went from basic 911 to enhanced 911 in 1998. The old basic 911 was a caller ID and reverse index, now it’s all on my computer screen in front of me when I answer the call or receive text messages,” said Mack. He explains that the two-way radios used by first responders has changed drastically. Initially, simplex radio systems were the primary means of communication between the field and dispatch. These systems were then upgraded to repeater radio systems to enhance the radio coverage and to provide better situational awareness between practitioners in the field. Today, digital systems have become popular.*

*(Story continued pg. 2)*

[www.PSBC.vermont.gov](http://www.PSBC.vermont.gov)

**VERMONT SUPPORT TEAM**

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*“The promise of a national interoperability network dedicated to our first responders is a monumental undertaking. It is important for us to collectively participate in the planning of the network so that it meets the specific needs of Vermont’s first responder communities.”*

- Terry LaValley, Single Point of Contact for FirstNet in Vermont



**VERMONT UPDATE**

# FirstNet for First Responders

Department of Public Safety

May 2016

## Commercial Partner Selection Process Advances for FirstNet

In January, the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) released their final Request for Proposal (RFP) after a multi-year development process. The importance of this release and its associated award process cannot be understated. From now until May 2017, FirstNet will make significant progress toward building a National Public Safety Broadband Network. Due to this relatively short time frame, the Vermont Public Safety Broadband Commission team has dedicated a newsletter article to explaining the RFP release, the award process, and the scheduled timeline to help you understand what is happening in the upcoming year and why you should care.

*“We are here to advocate for Vermont’s first responders and promote their needs to FirstNet as they build the National Public Safety Broadband Network.”*

- Paco Aumand, Chair  
VT Public Safety Broadband Commission

## A Brief History

Congress passed the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act in 2012, which created FirstNet as an independent authority within the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration and gave it the



responsibility to build, operate, and maintain a nationwide wireless broadband network dedicated to first responders. The law also allocated portions of the nationwide 700 Mhz spectrum and \$7 billion for construction of the network. FirstNet is tasked with leveraging existing telecommunications infrastructure and assets to contain costs by exploring public/private partnerships. The law mandates FirstNet be self-sufficient and not require any additional government funding.

Over three years, FirstNet built an organization from

*(Story continued pg. 3)*

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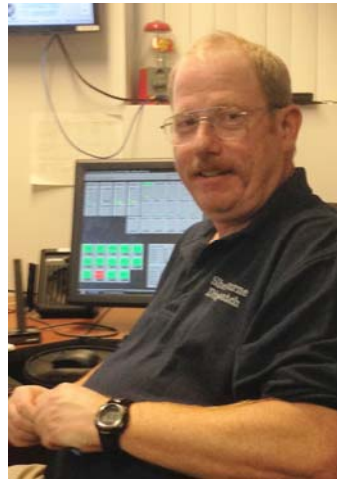


(Jim Mack continued, pg. 4)

How have applications being used in the field today changed?

*“Most of our agencies are now using smartphones with the Active 911 application, in addition to their radios. That’s something brand new to us. We just turned [Active 911] on in the last four months.*

*Some of our first responders are adapting well to the application and some are still getting used to it. They can now see everything that is going on in the call. They have the address and the nature of the call on their smartphone screen. They also have cross-streets on their screen, which sometimes we would have and sometimes we wouldn’t have in the past. The goal, from our standpoint, was to reduce the amount of unnecessary radio traffic. When the tones go off, fire and rescue people start racing for their vehicle and they don’t always listen to where they’re going or what they are going to. I’m as guilty as anybody. A responder might have asked for an address or nature of the call five or six times in the past. That information is now all on their cell phone,” Mack explained.*



Jim Mack, Shelburne PSAP Administrator

How have you managed constantly changing technology?

*“We just went online with the new enhanced 911 system this past year. Every time we go online with new systems there is a learning curve. We have to tweak the system to accommodate us and find all of the bugs that are still in it. Money and time are both issues in integrating systems,” said Mack. “Whatever systems we might have in the future, the biggest question is, can we integrate FirstNet effectively?”*

How do you foresee FirstNet helping first responders effectively respond to calls?

*“Being able to send and receive data using the FirstNet network, I think it could be beneficial. Right now we’re using Verizon for the air cards in our cruisers for our mobile data. Replacing that with whatever FirstNet provides, at or below what we currently pay, in order to be able to transmit more information, would help. We have air-cards and in-car cameras in some of our cruisers. Theoretically, I could stream the video from a cruiser to my screen. With the technology coming down the pipeline, the potential is getting that bank alarm and being able to see the cameras from the bank. Is it really a robbery or is it just a person who accidentally pushed a button? If I can see that on my screens when the call comes in, I can give that information to the officers for safety reasons. Traffic cameras - if you have a hotspot for accidents that you can view live - I can see what I’ve got for an accident there instead of getting vague information from people traveling past the accident at 50 miles per hour. The problem with transmitting that video onto my screen is the bandwidth and that’s something that FirstNet offers,” said Mack.*

## OUTREACH

April marked the one year anniversary of the start of our outreach efforts. We are proud to have met many of our initial goals. Here are just a few of the Vermont Public Safety Broadband Commission’s major accomplishments.

- Launched an outreach and education web site—almost 2,000 site visitors since the launch.
- Achieved a 70 percent survey response rate on a survey to help determine Vermont’s network capacity needs.
- Presented at each of the 13 local Emergency Planning Committees and Emergency Medical Service Districts in the state.
- Contacted every police, fire and EMS entity in Vermont to make them aware of FirstNet and encourage involvement in the national conversation. (email and direct mail)
- Presented to the Professional Firefighters of Vermont, the Vermont Police Association and the Vermont Ambulance Association.

We have formed a Consultation Task Team (CTT) to review the recommendations from FirstNet’s Public Safety Advisory Committee on preemption and priority access to the National Public Safety Broadband Network. We also aim to meet with as many first responder organizations as we can this summer to talk about how FirstNet will be used in Vermont and nationwide.



Terry LaValley, FirstNet Single Point of Contact for Vermont

If you would like to attend one of the CTT meetings or schedule a presentation, please contact us. Our contact information is found on the last page of this newsletter.



## Key Highlights of the RFP

After responding to comments on the draft RFP, FirstNet spent the next six months refining the RFP and released the final version on January 13, 2016. The RFP clarified several key aspects of the partnership between FirstNet and a commercial partner.

- FirstNet’s selected contractor will gain access to 20 MHz of spectrum and receive as much as \$6.5 billion to support the build-out and operation of the proposed public-safety broadband network. The contractor must pay FirstNet a minimum of \$5.625 billion over the life of the 25-year deal to help fund FirstNet’s continued oversight of the network and operation.
- The selected contractor is allowed to sell wireless services to traditional consumer customers—on a secondary basis, behind public-safety prioritized traffic—while utilizing FirstNet spectrum.
- To ensure that the contractor does not use the FirstNet spectrum simply to pursue commercial subscribers, the FirstNet contractor could pay more than \$100 million in financial penalties and risk losing control of certain business functions if at least 70 percent of the targeted public-safety users do not subscribe to the FirstNet system in a given year upon its operational completion.
- Public safety users will receive the most favored customer pricing on the network and have a uniform customer experience throughout the FirstNet system.
- Public safety users are not required to adopt the FirstNet system. The FirstNet offering needs to be attractive enough based on performance and user cost to convince public safety users to subscribe to the network.

Contact the Vermont PSBC team if you have any questions.



Executive Director of Essex Rescue, Dan Manz, characterizes the FirstNet wireless data network as a tool that future generations of Vermont’s emergency responders will use.

Photo above: Manz also serves as the EMS representative on the Vermont Public Safety Broadband Commission. He made his remarks at a May 12 meeting of the Vermont Ambulance Association where the PSBC team provided members with a project update.

(Commercial Carrier continued, pg. 1)

the ground up— hiring staff, interpreting their legal status as a quasi-governmental organization, getting input from the public safety community about what they would want from the network (partially by creating a public safety expert-filled Public Safety Advisory Committee), and working on a draft request for proposal to attract a commercial partner. The draft RFP was finally released on April 27, 2015 and contained the proposed design and operation of the National Public Safety Broadband Network. (See story at left.)

## The Governor’s Decision

The deadline for commercial partners to respond to the RFP is May 31, 2016. FirstNet will spend the next few months evaluating the proposals before awarding a contract to a commercial partner by November 1, 2016. FirstNet and their commercial partner will then work on State Plans for each state that will outline how the Radio Access Network would be built out in every state and territory in the U.S. The draft state plan will be given to the Vermont Public Safety Broadband Commission to review and give feedback to FirstNet. Vermont’s Governor will then receive the final state plan. He/she will have 90 days to review the state plan and decide whether to opt-in or opt-out of the network. For states that choose to opt-in, FirstNet and its commercial partners will build, market and maintain the network. States that choose to opt-out must take on the responsibility of establishing and maintaining the network themselves. Opt-out states will have 180 days to complete a State RFP and develop an alternative plan. The opt-out plan must comply with Federal Communications Commission and National Environmental Policy Act guidelines.