

PORTOLA VALLEY SPECIAL JOINT MEETING OF THE TOWN COUNCIL AND THE EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS COMMITTEE, APRIL 30, 2014

Mayor Wengert called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance. Ms. Hanlon called the roll.

Present: Councilmembers Maryann Moise Derwin, Craig Hughes and John Richards; Vice Mayor Jeff Aalfs, Mayor Ann Wengert

EPC Members John Boice, Dale Pfau and Stuart Young; Secretary Bud Trapp; Chair Ray Rothrock

Absent: EPC Members David Howes, Diana Koin, Chris Raanes and Craig Taylor; Vice Chair Anne Kopf-Sill

Others: Nick Pegueros, Town Manager
Brandi de Garmeaux, Sustainability and Special Projects Manager
Sharon Hanlon, Town Clerk

ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

None.

REGULAR AGENDA

(1) Medical Plan Update

Mr. Rothrock, noting recent disasters ranging from tornadoes in the south to landslides in the north to underscore the importance of emergency preparedness, reviewed the Town's three areas of operations that are separate from the Sheriff's Department, the Woodside Fire Protection District, Red Cross and other agencies:

- The old schoolhouse, where residents would be likely to gather
- The behind-the-scenes control point, the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) in Town Hall, a non-public facility that occupies a specially prepared room, and has 24/7 power backup
- Community Hall, which the EPC suggests using for first aid and assistance to citizens who come

He said part of the EPC charter is to ensure that those facilities are prepared, signage is posted, volunteers are available – and trained in advance. For medical services, he said the key things are to have a place, supplies and personnel. The Committee has gone through about eight scenarios, including some provided by the Citizens Emergency and Response Preparedness Program (CERPP) with wildfire having the highest probability. Other potential situations range from hazardous chemical spills, which professionals would come to deal with, to earthquakes, which can of course be devastating.

Mr. Rothrock explained that in an emergency, the EOC would probably have to operate 24 hours for three days, maybe seven days. He said the Red Cross would set up shelters, but the Town should be prepared to help ensure that all residents have a place to stay. He said there's a significant volume of emergency supplies, including water, cots and blankets in the emergency container adjacent Sheriff's Office, and although it's only about 500 feet from the Community Hall, in a crisis, that's a long walk with heavy things. The EPC wants to move some of the supplies needed to set up a first-aid station to a dedicated, secure closet in the Community Hall. In response to a question from Vice Mayor Aalfs, based on the Town population, Mr. Rothrock said the EPC would expect perhaps 50 people to come to Town Center for services in an emergency, unless it's a massive earthquake.

Mr. Young added that we just can't know the answer to that question, but they've been talking to emergency responders, the WFPD and Homeland Security in the Sheriff's Office, and came up with an outside approximation that in seven days, maybe 20 people would be triaged immediately or somewhat delayed. They anticipate a need for hotel services, and to address that are trying to assemble a first-response in the MUR that we can have access to very quickly. Mr. Young said that by the time residual supplies in the Sheriff's Office need to be mobilized, enough volunteers would be to help.

In terms of personnel, Mr. Rothrock said the keys are leadership, availability and medical volunteers. Some EPC members toured Palo Alto's EOC, which he said has an amazing system. They say the emergency is over before anybody knows it; it's the three or four days afterward that are so critical. The Palo Alto EOC's mission is to get businesses back online so rather than just wandering around, people have a place to go and something to occupy their minds during a crisis period.

Mayor Wengert said despite all the communication, a lot of people won't be prepared for a significant event, and under those circumstances, she asked whether the EPC has a plan for disbursing the limited amount of supplies available. In response, Mr. Rothrock said they'd respond more thoroughly to that question under Item 3 on the agenda, but basically it's a matter of having volunteers, particularly everyone in the chain of command, being as thoroughly trained and prepared as possible.

(2) Radio Update

Mr. Rothrock noted that the Town's low-power AM emergency radio station went on the air almost six months ago, and he thinks the word's gotten out to the community. Everyone seemed to agree that the radio station has an enormous range, and although some old radios don't go as high as 1680 on the spectrum, the station is widely available on vehicle radios.

Mr. Rothrock also said they're learning what to put on the continuous-loop messages being broadcast. One of the questions that's come up, he said, is what sort of event calls for a change in the recorded message listeners hear. It only takes a few minutes to change the message, but someone has to do it.

EPC members have developed a sheet that has separate definitions for disasters, emergencies, incidents and situations. In the case of emergencies, he said someone must decide that something is an emergency, and it can be a big question. An incident such as a vehicle accident would warrant a broadcast message if life, property and/or the environment is threatened. Information to broadcast also could come from the County Office of Emergency Services, the Sheriff's Office or other source.

Even if there's no particular triggering event, he added, something in the message, or the voice delivering it, ought to change every couple of weeks so that people who tune in will at least know that the announcements are being refreshed.

Mr. Pegueros underscored the importance of the judgment call whether to activate a broadcast – based on the potential threat to life, property and/or the environment – when there's a fine line between a situation and an incident.

However, he said, the initial steps to activating the EOC wouldn't change. First, you'd want to get to a safe location, notify the EOC director per the chain of command (Town Manager, Mayor, Vice Mayor) or call the Sheriff's Department to learn what's going on.

Mr. Pegueros said he raised these points because there will be a time delay between when we're made aware of a situation, when the information is confirmed, the message is drafted, and an appropriate method of communication is determined. He pointed out circumstances under which it would be appropriate to prioritize use of Reverse 9-1-1 services as the first line of communication, such as when there's a threat to a particular neighborhood. In that instance, getting the word out to the neighborhood would take precedence over updating the radio broadcast message.

Mr. Pegueros said Reverse 9-1-1 is limited to landlines at present, with voluntary entry of cell phone numbers and VOIP numbers. He said they'd be using Rapid Notify in the wildland fire drill that's coming up on May 7, 2014. They've already drawn the polygon of the affected area, which includes about 600 phones, some of which are probably fax lines, but it's still a great opportunity for the area in which those phone lines exist to check whether they received a Rapid Notify message, and if not, register a number. He cautioned that Rapid Notify is a tool to use sparingly, because people take umbrage at being called about something they think doesn't concern them, viewing it as "government intervention yet again."

Mayor Wengert, noting that timeliness would be really critical in the event of a wildfire, asked how quickly residents could expect to receive any official information. SMC Alerts is apparently the fastest, with PV Forum also pretty fast.

Mr. Pegueros said firefighters wouldn't be concerned about talking to the Town; they're focused on firefighting. Regardless, he said, whether an SMC Alert has gone out, he said, the Town needs to gather more information to share. WFPD also could be authorized and able to plug broadcast messages in to the Town's radio system.

Mr. Pegueros asked, too, if everyone at Town Center is mobilized doing one thing or another in the event of a wildfire, who would be at the old schoolhouse to meet residents who go there? The key is to be trained in the core, because we'll have to work on the fly, never able to anticipate precisely the circumstances that will be thrown at us.

In messaging to the community, Mr. Pegueros also emphasized the importance of consistency in messages. What's going out on PV Forum, on the radio, on Rapid Notify, on SMC Alerts can't be contradictory. He said a lot rides on what we do in the first couple of hours. We have to stop and take a deep breath, think about what's going on, rely on our training and the exercises we've gone through, and use the processes that have been established.

He said they're working on a proposal to handle the EOC information, uploading it on the internet, accessible even if the internet is down, that includes a series of checklists designed to help guide trained volunteers through what they need to do.

As Mr. Rothrock said, it's a "work in process, always is."

Mr. Rothrock said Armando Muela is now president of CERPP, and WFPD's Public Education Officer, Selena Brown, is now serving as CERPP Coordinator. He said coordination in the last six months has come up to a level higher than it's been in six years.

(3) Emergency Protocols

Mr. Pegueros, referring to issues that have arisen over the past few weeks as they've worked on the Town's Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) and how the systems are operating, addressed Portola Valley's emergency ordinance. This is the legislation that enables the Town to declare a disaster, and includes a prescribed process for who does what and how in the event of an emergency, and what powers those individuals have. The last ordinance updates were in 1997 and 1972, he said, and events since that time -- such as 9-11 and Katrina -- affected how emergency managers approach situations. He said we need to catch up with the significant changes. He said the Town has engaged Marsha Hovey to help with that process.

Mr. Pegueros said that establishment of a disaster council is current best practice in updating emergency ordinances. Even though our current ordinance has something akin to such a council, Mr. Pegueros said he expects to propose reorganizing it to address issues such as annual training requirements.

As he explained, the 1997 ordinance spells out the hierarchy of succession for EOC operations: the Town Manager, the Mayor or appointee, then Vice Mayor and most recent past Mayor and Councilmembers.

After the first three in the sequence, though, the ordinance and what our EOP sets differ, he said. Because he wasn't on staff when the EOC plan was assembled, Mr. Pegueros said he didn't know the history behind the discrepancy, but he identified a significant difference between what other cities do in terms of EOC operations and what makes sense for Portola Valley. Generally, the best practice assumes paid staff would be in Town around the clock, plus police officers and firefighters, but those assumptions don't apply in Portola Valley. He also noted that best practice encourages keeping elected officials' role in the EOC limited, due in part to the time burden of annual training requirements and in part due to potential conflicts of interest. Some discussion on what might constitute a conflict of interest followed a question posed by Councilmember Hughes.

Incorporating training requirements in the ordinance is important if we want any federal reimbursement for damage or assistance in the event of a nationally declared disaster, Mr. Pegueros said. Training for the EOC Director and the senior staff in the EOC is a significant time commitment, he acknowledged, estimating between 33 and 71 hours per year. Furthermore, training a core group of five or six people wouldn't be enough, because response and recovery activities grow in the days after an event. EOCs need trained personnel prepared to activate multiple layers, depending on the severity of the situation – whether it's necessary to set up a first-aid station and/or a medical center, to shelter people, to provide food and beverages to firefighters and staff. For the additional volunteers, he estimated roughly 17 hours of training per year.

Among training options, he mentioned online FEMA training and EOC training drills, both of which are mandatory to ensure eligibility for federal disaster relief funds. He also noted that Ms. Hanlon would be going to a week-long training on communications at the California Specialized Training Institute in San Luis Obispo. The facility contains a fully operational EOC and a room that simulates an earthquake.

Mr. Pegueros said he's proposing a hybrid system that applies workable best practices to the reality of the Town's situation. He showed a possible Portola Valley Disaster Council comprising a number of individuals, mostly staff positions on one side and mostly volunteer positions on the other. A key difference would be for the Council to designate two people – perhaps including a Councilmember but not necessarily – to commit to training, responding, etc. for the next two or three years. After the staff, that would be the next layer of the hierarchy.

Mr. Pegueros said a lot of people are doing a lot of different things in the emergency preparedness arena, and not always talking to each other. Attending five or six different meetings a month is a challenge made even more difficult without an overarching formal framework. The Disaster Council could fill this role. The Public Works Committee, EPC and CERPP would each have a liaison on the Disaster Council, also committed to serve for two or three years. Having these key players all in a room together will facilitate better communication and help everyone stay informed about relevant activities in the County, the WFPD, the Sheriff's Department, the schools, etc. Those individuals also would be in the hierarchy for EOC Director in the event that staff isn't available.

Summarizing, he said the duties of the Disaster Council would be responsible for:

- Preparing and maintaining the Town's EOP
- Ensuring that members have classroom and exercise training
- Monitoring Town readiness, communications and interagency coordination
- Manning the EOC in the absence of qualified staff

Mr. Pegueros outlined the EOC Director succession he's working on; if the first on the list is not available, the directorship goes to the second; if the second is not available to the third; and so on:

- Town Manager

- Trained staff designated by the Town Manager, with the Public Works Director first on the list
- Town Council designees to the EOC
- Disaster Council liaisons (one each from the Public Works Committee, EPC and CERPP)

On the administrative side, in addition to the emergency ordinance, Mr. Pegueros said that staff is working to complete the EOP by the end of FY 2013-2014, that training sessions (1.5 to 2.5 hours) are ongoing and being conducted weekly. They hope to roll out everything they've worked on, developed and refined beginning in July 2014; he said the EPC is "taking us 95% there with all of their preparation."

During the major exercise scheduled for May 7, 2014, trained staff will operate the EOC; it will be closed to those who have not yet been trained. With a 60% chance of an El Niño event in November 2014, which could create crises related to flooding, mudslides and fallen trees, Ms. Hovey is working on an El Niño drill, and an earthquake drill also is planned for the fall of 2014. Mr. Pegueros noted that the last time Portola Valley opened its EOC was in the 1998 El Niño.

Working on emergency preparedness issues, Mr. Pegueros said some significant gaps in readiness came to the fore, including areas of Town Center that do not currently have power access via the emergency generator. The EOC and the refrigerator draw power from the generator, he said, but not the offices, servers or Community Hall. Mr. Pegueros said Public Works Director Howard Young plans to address some of those gaps in his FY 2014-2015 budget.

Mr. Pegueros invited comment on the Disaster Council concept and the succession plan.

Mayor Wengert, saying she's slightly uncomfortable with some aspects of the Disaster Council concept, particularly in the event of a prolonged disaster period, asked whether the concept is state-of-the-art in other jurisdictions. Mr. Pegueros said Ms. Hovey could speak to this, but the best practice, which probably applies to 90% of other communities, could have volunteers who provide critical services serving on the Disaster Council along with staff members, but no elected officials.

Ms. Hovey, who described the Disaster Council as a coordinating body, said the lines of succession are spelled out in the emergency ordinance. She confirmed that in most communities, the line of succession stops at staff.

Councilmember Richards said the issue of conflict of interest being a potential problem seems odd, but otherwise the approach described seems logical. He said he sees no big holes in it and he's not uncomfortable with it.

Clearly, Councilmember Richards added, the issue is with training those in the line of succession. Councilmember Hughes agreed. In the short term, Mayor Wengert observed, it would seem logical that all Councilmembers would complete the FEMA online training, at the minimum.

Mayor Wengert outlined a potential scenario: It's 2:00 a.m. on a Sunday. No staff is in Town, so the first two in the line of succession are unavailable. Next in line are the Town Council's designees, who would have to be prioritized. She said meanwhile there's the current Mayor, Vice Mayor. All five Councilmembers are in Town.

Councilmember Hughes said his inclination would be to suggest that the Council designees be the current Mayor and Vice Mayor, unless for some reason either could not do the training. But, as Mayor Wengert pointed out, there's a disconnect in the timing: The Mayor and Vice Mayor serve at the end of their terms on the Council (one year and two years, respectively), while those in the line of succession have three-year commitments.

Councilmember Derwin said that she wouldn't be comfortable as the designee EOC Director, nor does she have (or want) the training. She said it's a huge responsibility.

Mayor Wengert said the best-trained person is the person who should make decisions related to the emergency side, but, she added, the community-related element should involve the Mayor or Vice Mayor as the decision-maker, and that element does not entail emergency training but calls for a different set of strengths Councilmember Richards agreed: Councilmembers are the face to the public, which is also a very important aspect of the whole thing, he said, and familiarity with the local scene is critical.

Ms. Hovey commented that the EOC Director wouldn't be making decisions in a vacuum, but being briefed by law enforcement, the fire department, the County Office of Emergency Services and Town Councilmembers. Because it's a small community where everyone works together closely, she said, the decisions would likely reflect a majority viewpoint.

Mayor Wengert said the type of emergency also enters the equation. She said that in a wildfire situation, clearly those best-trained in emergency protocol would absolutely be in charge. But with Portola Valley "off the grid" and residents pounding on the EOC door seeking help in a prolonged post-earthquake operation, the set of dynamics in the community would be completely different, she said. Decisions would be required as to who gets medical attention, food, water, clothing, etc.

Mr. Pegueros said perhaps more collaboration with Woodside staff would be appropriate. Clearly, mutual aid could come into play, and if a public information officer (PIO) is needed, he/she might come from another community, and work with the Mayor. Recalling the aftermath of the gas line explosion in San Bruno in September 2010, he said the Mayor was the face of the community. Occasionally the City Manager (as EOC Director) was on TV, he said, but it was usually the San Bruno Mayor and Fire Chief.

Councilmember Derwin pointed out that San Bruno city staff was in the EOC, but it was really important to the community to hear regularly from the Mayor and the Council. That's a big job, Mr. Pegueros noted, adding that although the fire was out within two days at the most, the EOC remained open, and they're still dealing with issues from that disaster.

He said it's important that the Council trusts in the individuals in the succession plan, and the confidence to work with the Council the same way we work together in non-emergency situations. If trust or confidence is lacking, he said it's an issue to address sooner rather than later. Part of the issue, Mayor Wengert added, is the significant training time commitment those in the line of succession would need. People who might be ideal candidates otherwise might not be prepared to make that commitment.

Mayor Wengert asked everyone to think of five potential Council designees, including whether they'd be willing to do it. (She said former Councilmember Steve Toben's name is already on the list.)

Mr. Pegueros said he'd send links to the FEMA training in the Weekly Digest.

ADJOURNMENT [8:25 p.m.]

Mayor

Town Clerk