Frequently Asked Questions
Regional Emergency Communications Centers
As Of February 3, 2023

What is a "RECC"?

A "RECC" is a Regional Emergency Communications Center. This is a term that has been adopted by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to identify a center which processes incoming 9-1-1 and non-emergency calls from more than one community.

What does a RECC do?

A "RECC" provides several services to its member communities, departments, and residents. A RECC will serve as the primary PSAP (Public Safety Answering Point) to which landline 9-1-1 calls are routed and answered. It may also serve as the PSAP for mobile phones (the Commonwealth operates the North Shore Regional Communications Center which serves as the primary PSAP for more than 70 communities' cellphone 9-1-1 traffic). A RECC can also provide dispatch services for police, fire, EMS, public works, and other municipal services (this can vary widely depending on the specific arrangements). Staff in a RECC will also provide pre-arrival instructions in medical emergencies, provide officers with information during traffic stops, and work with other nearby centers when mutual aid is needed.

How common are regional communications centers?

The correct percentage of communities in the Commonwealth that are part of Regional Centers is 48%. 170 communities make up 31 Regional Centers located across the Commonwealth. There are seven communities that are in the process of joining or starting a Regional Center and once they go live, 50% of communities in the Commonwealth will be part of a Regional Center.

Outside the Commonwealth, regionalization of emergency communications is a very common practice. Examples include: Maine (24 PSAP's for 457 towns and cities – 57,000 people per center on average); Maryland (24 centers for the 23 counties and the City of Baltimore – 256,000 people served per center on average – some actually serve populations of well over 1 million). There are examples in every state of regional centers providing effective and efficient services to residents and first responders.

How are RECC centers formed?
The Act that created the General Laws that authorize the creation of emergency service districts via an IMA signed by the Select Board was signed into law in January 2015 as part of Chapter 500 of the acts of 2014, and inserted into MGL Chapter 6a Sections 18O-18V. For your reference, the RECC legislation is here:
https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2014/Chapter500

Before that, districts were formed either by way of MGL Chapter 40 Section 4a, which allows the Chief Executive Officer of a city or town to enter into agreements with other towns to perform joint services or special legislation filed on behalf of the district.

Nothing in the 2015 emergency legislation would prohibit towns or cities from creating districts via MGL Chapter 40 Section 4a.

Here are the Regional Centers that were formed before Chapter 6a Sections 18O-18V, and how they formed:

- South Shore Regional Emergency Communications Center: MGL Chapter 40 Section 4a
- Metro North Regional Emergency Communications Center: Chapter 171 of the acts of 2014
- Metacomet Regional Emergency Communications Center: Chapter 39 of the acts of 2013
- Essex County Regional Emergency Communications Center (Now North Shore 911): MGL Chapter 40 Section 4a
- Nashoba Valley Regional Emergency Communications Center: MGL Chapter 40 Section 4a

What is an IMA and what is the timing for Hopkinton to sign it?

An IMA is an Inter-Municipal Agreement. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts strongly encourages the use of these IMA's as a way of formalizing existing relationships and as a way of defining new cooperative relationships between and among local governments. These IMA's are used for a wide variety of purposes including: regional emergency communication, water sharing, sewer services, capital purchase and sharing, regional procurement, regional school systems, and many other purposes. The participating Town's have until February 14, 2023 to choose whether or not to sign the IMA.

What are the next steps and estimated timelines or schedules after signing the IMA?

After signing an IMA the timetable of a Regional Project varies. A lot of the timeline depends on if the project is a "startup" and there is a need for extensive construction or renovation, the amount of equipment needed, the number of communities joining, etc. or if the project is a community joining an already existing Regional Center. Obviously, startups are going to take longer to get going. Typically we see startup regional centers go live roughly anywhere between 1-4 years after an IMA has been signed, and Development Grant Funds have been awarded, and it all depends on what is needed to start. Communities joining an already existing Regional Center can do so anywhere between 6 months - 2 years. This is also dependent on several factors such as where in the grant cycle the community signs an IMA, what technology is needed to connect the community to the Regional Center, etc.

How will the 911 operator know what town I am in?

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts supports enhanced 9-1-1 (E-911) which provides call takers with information about your phone number (automatic number identifications or ANI) and about your location (automatic locations information of ALI). Location information is obtained from several sources including the Master Street Address Guide (which is correlated to the appropriate unique emergency services providers for each type of emergency) for landline phones, and triangulation and GPS signal pass-through for mobile phones. Even when your location sharing is turned off, the carrier will automatically turn it on when you place an emergency call!

Who will be paying for the regional center to be constructed and operated?

The initial set up of the RECC will be funded through the state 911 grant program. The specifics of how a RECC involving Hopkinton will be funded on an annual basis after the first 5 years will be a result of negotiation between the participating communities, with funding from the Commonwealth also a possible source of revenue.

What services will be provided in RECC?

The RECC will focus on providing the following services: answering 9-1-1 calls, answering non-emergency calls for service, dispatching both emergent and non-emergent calls to police, fire, EMS, DPW, Animal Control, and other agencies as needed.

What services currently provided by Hopkinton Communications will not be provided by the RECC? What will happen to those services?

Access to records, prisoner watching, accident reports, permits, animal control and DPW after hours phone support.

Will the RECC support DPW and Animal Control calls?

This is an area yet to be determined. Hopkinton will propose that the RECC will handle these calls as they are handled today. Where these functions handle their own workload during regular business hours, they will continue to do so. Where the single-town dispatch centers handle this workload after hours and in emergencies, the RECC will do so.

Can I still go to the Police Department for accident reports, firearms licenses, and other matters? Can I still go to the Fire Department in my town for burn permits and other issues?

Yes, you will still be able to go into your first responder departments and get copies of reports, obtain permits, and conduct other official business.

What are the KPIs of established RECCs? How do they compare with the KPIs of Dispatch Centers before regionalization?

This is data that the State 911 Department does not collect; however, the State 911 Department can request the data from the current regional centers and provide it to Hopkinton. The State 911 Department has told us that it plans to begin collecting; this data. However, it does not have a system in place at this time.

How have RECCs addressed staffing transitions? How do RECCs address seniority, layoffs, and earned pensions? Please provide staffing levels for some of the established RECCs.

This is also data the Department does not collect. However, the state provided the following anecdotal response; "I can speak from experience as my time as the Deputy Director of the Regional Old Colony in Duxbury. When a new community joined, Dispatchers who were working in the center joining were afforded the first right to interview. We did this to ensure that those wishing to join the staff were capable, but also really understood the demands of being a Regional Dispatcher. Seniority was never taken into consideration as it would be a labor relations issue, so staff joining were not given seniority over the current staff regardless of years of service. I can say that in my 7 years at the ROCCC every community we took in (4 in total) every staff member who interviewed for a position was given the job, those who did not interview either took positions at single PSAPs, retired, or remained as a civilian clerk in the department. Pensions all carried over to the town's pension system. As for staffing levels, this is also information the department does not collect. I will reach out to the current Regional Directors to obtain that for you. I can tell you at the ROCC we ran 1 Supervisor and 6 Dispatcher/Call takers 24/7. There was also an Administrative Supervisor on the floor from 8a-12a Monday-Friday, and an Impact person from 12p-8p everyday."

What are the pros of RECCs?

I want to be clear that we cannot compare regional projects apples-to-apples as every project is unique. For example those centers that started prior to the Development Grant updates made in 2018 saw less of a savings as the Assessments for each community was not covered under the grant until 2018.
- There are many pros to joining a regional, let's take cost savings out of it as it is an obvious one, there will be some cost savings as the community will not have to budget for dispatch equipment, OPEB, etc.
- The biggest pro to joining a regional center surrounds service level improvements. 911 Call takers and dispatchers are truly the "first responder on the scene" and can substantially affect the outcome of an incident. Service level improvements typically seen in PSAP Regionalization include a reduction or elimination of transferring calls between PSAPs which in turn equates to faster response times, and lowers the potential for human or technological errors.

- Quicker call processing times are anticipated. If the center is large enough, being able to have dedicated call takers and dispatchers allows for call takers to focus solely on the caller. In centers where there is only one dispatcher/call taker, the challenge of "what delay are you willing to accept" occurs. Are you willing to accept delaying lifesaving CPR to start units, or delay units to start lifesaving CPR. Dispatchers are high quality multi taskers; however, we only have 2 ears and one mouth so there will be a delay no matter how good of a multi tasker you are.
- The model also allows for dispatchers to focus solely on the field units which will allow for improved responder safety.
- Another service level improvement is the standardized training provided to regional center staff which equates to consistency across the center.
- A Regionalized environment allows for communities to benefit from state-of-the-art technology, improved training, and expanded career opportunities that would not be otherwise financially or organically feasible.
- Another Pro is the ability to help alleviate staffing issues, including mandatory holdovers and forced-ins.
- Individual agencies are struggling to support the training and technology needed to handle the personnel issues for PSAP staff. Reassigning sworn personnel to support the PSAP is not a long-term solution for communities like it was 20-30 years ago due to the minimum training requirements mandated by the State 911 Department.

What are the cons of RECCs?

- First and foremost it is the control adjustment that comes with joining a regional center. The change of direct control of PSAP staff and operations is one of the largest roadblocks for regionalization. Historically, PSAPS are often under Law Enforcement or Fire control and the changing of SOPs or personnel decisions were easily made; however in a regional environment there is a more formal process that must be followed. Most of the regional centers (both hosted and district models) have committees in place that allow some channel of control for participating agencies.
- Another con is what to do with the Police or Fire station that was once staffed 24/7/365 with dispatchers? Do you go "dark" and use technology to combat this, or do you eat into your potential cost savings by hiring a desk officer or civilian clerk? Unfortunately there is no best practice on how to handle this con.
- Lastly, the loss of local knowledge is a con that is brought up at every prospective regional meeting. Hiring every dispatcher from participating towns might mitigate this con. Thankfully this Con can be combated in several ways outside of personnel. There is technology, ride along programs, study guides, CAD notes, etc. that can all be used to reduce the local knowledge loss that comes with joining a regional center.

What are the advantages of founding a RECC versus joining after the RECC is formed?

The advantages of starting up a RECC vs joining an already established one really come down to operational adjustments. Starting a RECC means you can work with the other communities to develop policies and procedures that best fit the needs of your

departments, rather than having to conform to the already established policies and procedures of an already established RECC. Additionally, founding members may require that existing staff be given preference in hiring. Joining after the RECC is formed reduces the probability of the hiring of staff from the joining town.

Do Towns that leave a RECC lose money? What are the penalties for leaving a RECC?

Everything is driven by the Regional Center's IMA. Some IMAs have language pertaining to fines if the community wants to leave before the agreement is up, while others simply state a date range needed to terminate the agreement. In terms of towns losing money if they leave, the State 911 Department does not have any data on file to give a solid answer.

Communities that had to pay substantial fees to get back their 911 equipment

It was discussed during a previous meeting that the City of Beverly had to pay over two million dollars to get their 911 equipment back. The state 911 Department has clarified that this information is incorrect as Beverly never had their 911 equipment removed. The city signed an IMA to join the Essex County Sheriff's Regional Center; however, it later decided not to join the Center. There was litigation over the termination of the IMA and the City settled the case by paying $220,000 in termination fees, all that had nothing to do with their 911 equipment.

What is the Deadline for the Regional PSAP/RECC development Grant?

The Deadline for the FY2024 Development Grant is *Thursday* March 2, 2023*, by 5:00pm.* No applications received after this date will be considered. Applicants who submit their grant via the COMMBUYS system can mail their wet signature pages to the Department which is the only item that will be accepted after the deadline.

There is no cost savings to Regionalization
The participating communities will see cost savings through the State 911 Department's grant programs

What is the frequency of 2nd and 3rd Fire Department calls in Hopkinton?
- Number of instances of 2 calls within 30 minute window: 431 (which is avg. of 36 times per month, or more then once per day)
- Number of instances of 2 calls within 12 minutes window: 176 (which is avg. of 15 times per month, or 3+ times per week
- Number of instances of 3 calls within 60 minute window: 148 (which is avg. of 12 times per month, or almost 3 times per week.
- Number of instances of 4 calls within 60 minute windows: 14

When joining a RECC, do the participating communities receive all new communication infrastructure (i.e., base radios, portables, mobiles, repeaters, and tablets). If not, what is provided

This is all dependent on what the community needs when joining a regional center. Normally these items are identified during the feasibility study and then when applying for the Development Grant the RECC will apply for funding to make the needed upgrades for the community. Communities are not automatically given upgrades or "new" infrastructure just because they join or start a RECC.

In terms of what is covered, allowable items that can be funded through the Development grant include, but are not limited to:

- Radio Systems (which include Radio Consoles, base station, portable and mobile radios including related components which include but are not limited to antennas, antenna towers, amplifiers, receivers, and repeaters.)
- Radio Consoles
- CAD
- Records Management Systems
- Fire alarm receiving and alerting equipment
- Consultant services in support of equipment

After a community joins a RECC, who is responsible for the communities radio system?

Unfortunately, the Department does not keep any data related to this topic; however, what the State 911 Department told us is that equipment that is purchased via the Development Grant or from capital expenses from the RECC, falls on the RECC to support and maintain. Equipment that was purchased by the community prior to starting or joining a RECC remains the property of the community and thus it is the community's responsibility to support and maintain.

Does the state pay for all communication fiber lines from a RECC back to the community? If yes, who is responsible for maintaining these fiber lines?
Fiber Lines are an allowable expense to be included in a RECC's Development Grant application. The maintenance of the lines would be the responsibility of the RECC, unless otherwise stated in governance or IMA form.

If portable and mobile radios are provided to a community when joining a RECC, who is responsible for maintenance and repair?

This would be determined by the community and the RECC.