

COUNCIL MEMBERS' MOTION

6. Ensuring the Health of E-Comm and the Stable Delivery of Emergency Services for the Public and Residents

Submitted by: Councillor Kirby-Yung

WHEREAS

1. E-Comm (Emergency Communications for British Columbia Incorporated) is a non-profit corporation governed under the *Emergency Communications Corporations Act*. It was established in 1999 and is owned and governed by various municipal, regional, and provincial emergency services including the City of Vancouver;
2. The City of Vancouver is currently represented on the E-Comm Board of Directors by City Manager Paul Mochrie. The Vancouver Police Board is represented on the E-Comm Board of Directors by former Vancouver Police Department Deputy Chief Warren Lemcke;
3. E-Comm owns and maintains the emergency radio system used by police, fire, and ambulance services within Metro Vancouver and parts of the Fraser Valley;
4. E-Comm is the first point of contact for 99 percent of callers who dial 9-1-1 in B.C. and it provides call-taking and dispatch services for 33 police agencies and 40 fire departments across the province. E-Comm has approximately 422 full-time and 94 part-time employees (based on a 12-month average), many of whom are represented by CUPE Local 8911;
5. E-Comm provides an essential public service to millions of British Columbians, but ongoing challenges have reportedly put this vital service at risk of catastrophic failure for the public who rely upon it. CUPE 8911 cites various challenges to the system, including understaffing in a high-stress environment that has led to severe burnout, poor working conditions, high staff turnover, and ongoing challenges with recruitment and the training of new staff;
6. CUPE 8911 points to “a reactive funding formula, based on cost recovery” in an issue backgrounder as the main impediment to meaningfully improving the services it provides and “getting ahead of existing problems” (see: *E-COMM 9-1-1: Fixing A Broken Service – A Guide For B.C. Municipalities – by The Emergency Communications Professionals of BC (CUPE LOCAL 8911)* https://www.ecpbc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/CUPE8911_Backgrounder_FNL.pdf);
7. The CRTC has mandated modernization to move from 9-1-1 voice calls to digital or IP-based infrastructure, which is to be completed by March 1, 2022;
8. E-Comm is preparing for the transition from 9-1-1 voice calls to digital or IP-based infrastructure in accordance with direction from the CRTC and has communicated the need for a significant additional funding commitment from

each 9-1-1 service partner in 2022 and beyond. Digital or IP-based 9-1-1 services will reportedly revolutionize the 9-1-1 service and will ultimately enable 9-1-1 operators to respond to video, photo, and text calls for service through 9-1-1;

9. As the media have widely reported, during a crisis such as extreme weather events seen during this past summer's heatwave, E-Comm is simply unable to handle call volumes. A recent report from Price Waterhouse Cooper – commissioned by E-Comm – concluded that the company cannot be successful with an understaffed system that relies so heavily “on overtime and staff missing breaks” or that simply abandons efforts to meet its service levels;ⁱ
10. Reports of inadequate staffing levels amid the high-stress working environment at E-Comm which have reportedly led to severe burnout, poor working conditions, high staff turnover, and ongoing challenges with recruitment and training of new staff, point to the need for better health and mental health supports for E-Comm staff and a commensurate level of funding, to ensure the stability and effectiveness of our emergency response systems and the vitally important role of E-Comm staff in our emergency response system;
11. In 2021, the President and CEO of E-Comm, Oliver Grüter-Andrew, made two presentations to the provincial legislature's Special Committee on Reforming the Police Act (October 15, 2021 and February 26, 2021) in which the CEHO elaborated on many of the challenges faced by E-Comm and its staff – these were generally consistent with the challenges cited by CUPE 8911;
13. The need for operational change and infrastructure investment in E-Comm to ensure the stable delivery of appropriate levels of day-to-day and emergency level services expected by the public and Vancouver residents, is readily apparent and inherently in the public interest and the interest of public safety.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

- A. THAT Council direct staff to report back with an assessment and report by the end of April, 2022 on the E-Comm situation (as outlined and identified by CUPE Local 8911 and other stakeholders), with information and options the City of Vancouver could support, advocate for and/or endorse, in order to enable the stable delivery of Emergency Services for the public and to address the range of identified issues faced by E-Comm such as but not limited to an equitable and evolved E-Comm funding model, the mandated CRTC modernization requirements, E-Comm governance and operational models, and various E-Comm capital investment needs.
- B. FURTHER THAT Council request the Mayor on behalf of Council to write to the relevant Federal and Provincial Ministers (such as BC's Ministers of Health and Public Safety and the Federal Ministers responsible for the CRTC and Public Safety) to advocate for capital funding to support and assist with the technology modernization and transformation mandated by the CRTC, to move away from 9-1-1 voice calls in favour of digital or IP-based infrastructure, in order to help close an identified E-Comm capital funding gap and to ensure the improvement of crucial emergency services for the public.

- C. THAT copies of this motion, together with the letters requested in resolution B above, be sent to the Union of BC Municipalities and the Lower Mainland Local Government Association for their information and consideration.

ⁱ See: *E-COMM 9-1-1: Fixing A Broken Service – A Guide For B.C. Municipalities* – by The Emergency Communications Professionals of BC (CUPE LOCAL 8911) https://www.ecpbc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/CUPE8911_Backgrounder_FNL.pdf;