



\$15 million approved for new 911 call center

BY ABBY WOJCIK

Committees of the Board of Aldermen approved Board Bill 120 on Feb. 10, appropriating \$15 million toward building a new Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) and an additional \$1.6 million toward computer-aided dispatch (CAD) software.

Mayor Tishaura Jones recently announced the plan to combine St. Louis City's police, fire and Emergency Medical Services into one call center. The PSAP would address a dispatcher shortage in the city as well as concerns for long hold times when calling 911.

The funds for Board Bill 120 come from the American Rescue Plan Act, which provided St. Louis and other cities with money intended to help communities thrive after COVID-19. A total of \$74 million is authorized through the bill, with

large portions of the funds going to improve pedestrian and street safety through upgrading hot-spot crash sites and repaving damaged roads.

Under current emergency 911 operations, all calls must be triaged by police before being transferred to EMS or fire, which creates the backlog of calls resulting in long hold times. The CAD software will help with streamlining triage and transfer processes, city officials said.

Dispatchers within the facility will evaluate emergency and non-emergency calls to determine the appropriate level of response for each, ideally enhancing service and experience for citizens and first responders, even in extreme conditions.

Captain Christi Marks of the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department shared that they have been in contact with BJC and Washington University, which have their own security and police departments. The police also work closely with the CWE Neighborhood Security Initiative in investigations.

Response times are averaging 3.8 minutes for Code 1 calls and 18 minutes for Code 2 calls.

Tina Pihl (17th Ward Alderwoman now running to represent the newly drawn 9th Ward) co-sponsored and voted to approve Board Bill 120, stating, "I think that it's really good that we're looking to consolidate 911 services under one umbrella because we have so many silos and this will allow for less miscommunication."

The project is in the early stages with a target completion date of 2026. As interim Public Safety Director Dan Isom departs for his announced retirement, Deputy Fire Chief and Fire Marshal Charles Coyle will take over on an interim



PHOTOS VIA UNSPLASH

basis and move the plans forward.

"I know there has been a prevalence of hold times," Pihl said. "I have experienced it myself. It's not an isolated case in the city, it's something widespread. I think that's important to point out to people, that it's not just happening to them but this is a citywide issue that needs to be resolved."

SLMPD's Crime Statistics indicate that the most prominent types of directed calls received in the CWE during 2022 were disturbances, traffic accidents and suspicious persons/vehicles. Response times are averaging 3.8 minutes for Code 1 calls and 18 minutes for Code 2 calls.

Car larcenies also continue to be a prevalent crime, with 23 calls for service in the 9th Ward involving a larceny from a motor vehicle this year so far. Car break-ins normally constitute a code 3 call, but depending on circumstances it may be a code 2, which can be a reason why response times are longer, Marks said.

"For me, as an alderperson," Pihl said, "the most important and critical concern is to make sure that the residents of this ward are getting the best services possible, and I will continue to do as much as possible to do that."

The PSAP will be housed on the west end of the existing St. Louis Fire Department Headquarters Facility at Jefferson and Cass.

Access to crime reports specific to any district and neighborhood is available on the SLMPD website under "Crime Information," and then select "Crime Statistics." Residents also are encouraged to voice concerns to their representatives in order to ensure government officials are aware of their primary concerns.

"That's what I'm here for," Pihl said, "to connect you with appropriate resources to get the answers. So, I might not have the answers but will find you the answer or can connect you with the resources."

