



# Police Dispatch: Facts

## What is Police Dispatch?

Police Dispatch is part of the Records and Communications function of the La Palma Police Department. Dispatchers are responsible for answering emergency 911 telephone requests as well as routine business calls, monitoring routine and emergency police radio communications, and monitoring cameras in the booking room and holding facility. They also provide support for police records and reception. Emergency medical and fire calls are transferred to Orange County Fire Authority for dispatch. Currently the City employs four full time Police Dispatchers. Dispatch handled 17,435 calls in 2012, an average of 48 calls per day, or two per hour. The adopted budget for the Records and Communications function is \$652,780.

## What is the change being studied?

As part of developing the budget for FY 2013-14, the City Council approved studying a possible change to Police Dispatch service delivery, commonly referred to as “contracting out” or “outsourcing.” No decision has been made as to whether to contract out this service or who the contracting agency would be. The budget process will continue through June, during which time the initial proposal will be refined and discussed.

Multiple agencies have expressed interest in taking on La Palma’s dispatch function and preliminary investigation indicates that due to economies of scale the service could be performed in a substantially equivalent way at a lower cost by having another agency provide this service. The City Council has discussed the possibility of contracting out in two budget study sessions, both open to the public. The City is also in informal discussions with the La Palma Police Association and any decision regarding contracting would require an opportunity to meet and confer per their Memorandum of Understanding and State law. The current change being studied is for dispatch only, no sworn police officers or functions are a part of the study, nor is there any reduction in force being considered for sworn positions.

The City currently contracts out for a number of services: animal control, building and safety, information technologies, landscape maintenance, street sweeping, and waste collection and disposal. The Police Department also participates in a number of consolidated regional teams to perform specialized functions such as SWAT, serious traffic accident reconstruction, and emergency response team training. Contracting for dispatch would be an extension of these existing efforts.

## What would the impacts be?

Security is one of the core values of La Palma’s vision statement and maintaining high levels of public safety is a 2013 City Council goal. Even with the loss of approximately 20 percent of general fund revenue (the Police Department accounts for about half of all general fund expenditures), the emphasis continues to be on protecting frontline services, especially police patrol, investigations, and crime prevention. The standards for

police dispatch performance will therefore continue to be high whether the function is performed by City of La Palma employees or by another agency. Setting and maintaining performance requirements would be part of any contract and would ensure these standards are met and maintained. For the public, calling 911 should be seamless and the change should have minimal if any impact on response times.

Many specific impact details are unknown at this time due to the early stage of study and because the contracting agency is unknown. However, some impacts would occur regardless of who the contracting agency would be. One impact would be no longer having the Police Station front counter open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. While some staff time would need to be added to the Police Records function to make up for records support work currently done by Police Dispatchers, Records would not have sufficient staffing to maintain the same counter hours. Drop in customers to Police during “non-business hours” would instead communicate with the in-station Watch Commander via an audio box by the front door.

### What are the cost savings?

The City anticipates 13% less General Fund revenue in FY 2013-14 than will be received this fiscal year. About 55% of General Fund expenditures are dedicated to the Police Department. As a high priority service area, it is not anticipated that Police would find 55% of the entire projected FY 2013-14 budget gap (or about \$735,000) But the gap cannot be eliminated if Police is exempt from any change. Our financial reality is that we cannot continue to provide current services, the way they are currently provided, with current revenue (for more on the general financial situation, go to the City’s website at [www.cityoflapalma.org](http://www.cityoflapalma.org)).

In terms of cost, there would be both on-going operating savings and one-time savings expected from contracting out dispatch. Orange County will be requiring all public safety agencies to upgrade their radio communications system (i.e., the 800 MHz system) and the one-time costs for this change are considerable. Not having to purchase the necessary equipment for our own dispatch function is estimated to save about \$162,500. On-going savings from contracting out would depend on the existing capacity of the contracting agency ultimately chosen, but is estimated to range from \$50,000 to \$150,000 annually.

### What are the next steps?

Over the next few months, the budget process will examine assumptions for police dispatch costs, along with numerous other budget balancing proposals. Discussions are scheduled for regular City Council meetings from April 16 through June 4. Labor negotiations could continue longer and actual proposals from other agencies will be received over the next few months leading up to final City Council action on the dispatch contracting question. If contracting out were to be approved by the City Council, any implementation would take another several months after July 1. The City Council decision to approve a contract and eliminate positions, or to retaining the function in-house is therefore likely to be some months away. Learn more at [www.cityoflapalma.org](http://www.cityoflapalma.org).