

MEMORANDUM

Date: July 17, 2018

Re: Response to Audit of Emergency Management

To: Steve March, County Auditor

I would like to thank you and your staff for conducting this Audit of Emergency Management. The Office appreciates the recommendations and while some are being addressed currently, others would require additional resources to implement. As your report states, The Office of Emergency Management has staffing limitations and has had to make tradeoffs. We also thank you for the kind remarks about myself and my team including:

“Since hiring the current director in 2015, the Office’s credibility has increased” (page 2)

“Many who participated in the EOC were impressed with the Office’s leadership, effort, and proactive approach” (page 4)

In an effort to respond to this Audit, this letter will respond to each of the recommendations identified on Page 1 under Report Highlights.

Recommendation 1 - The Office should continue to build capacity for staffing the Emergency Operations Center. This can be accomplished by reporting on progress with identifying additional County staff, ensuring staff have adequate training, and establishing a tracking system.

Over the last three years, the county has built a cadre of Emergency Operation Center (EOC) representatives. To build additional capacity requires the Office of Emergency Management to provide additional training and exercise to ensure these representatives can be confident in their roles. Not everyone in the EOC must have extensive training in advance in order to provide support during emergencies, but it is absolutely critical for certain positions and activities to be fully trained. Expanding our cadre of EOC representatives beyond where we are today would also require additional resources.

The Office of emergency management also agrees we can and should do more to track the training of staff. Implementing an effective tracking system is challenged by the variety of organizations that provide training, as well as, the need to track students from outside county enterprise. A centralized, searchable database that incorporates experience, certifications, exercise participation as well as training is a goal of emergency management agencies across

the state. Our office has been communicating with the Multco Align staff and while Workday may alleviate several issues, this fix is not slated to be part of the initial roll-out and will not capture training offered by outside organizations including the State and Federal governments. The short term solution is to regularly request training information from county employees and track it in a database. This also requires resources which would need to be pulled from other projects.

Recommendation 2 - The Office should develop procedures to set expectations and clarify roles and responsibilities for expense reimbursement and continuity of operations planning.

The Eagle Creek Fire was the first event in recent memory where the county sought reimbursement through a federal grant called the Fire Management Assistance Grant (FMAG). It was also the first activation where the county's finance and procurement personnel managed all aspects of the reimbursement process. In my opinion, this group did a fantastic job both learning a new reimbursement process and putting together all the documentation for reimbursement. As the Audit indicates, there are some opportunities for improvement. The expected Workday system will provide better reporting, scanning and expense documentation. It should also be easier to collect information for enterprise wide reimbursement from a single or central location. Additionally, the process to draft a county wide fiscal administrative procedure has already started.

For Fiscal year 2019, the board has funded a position to focus on improving the County's Continuity of Operations Program. The previous funding was eliminated in FY 2015 after a significant reduction in grant dollars, over 40% of the Office budget, which resulted in several eliminated positions and a re-adjustment in priorities. The current board has brought stability to the office budget and staffing as well as additional resources to address some of the capabilities lost in FY 2015. This new position will be able to work with other departments to develop metrics, monitor programs and provide much needed guidance and technical assistance.

Recommendation 3 - The Office should also take short-term steps to mitigate long-term challenges, including developing strategies to address turnover; improving short-term action planning; and developing Emergency Operations Center facility plans in line with intended usage.

As the report states, "the demands on this small office (Emergency Management) are substantial". The report also identifies on page 10 that staff "have more work than they can possibly do". I believe there are many factors that have resulted in high turnover from people feeling overworked, the gap between resources and community expectation, and the presence of other higher paying positions outside the county. Building a workforce that is up to the

challenges of the work our office must support is my top priority. In the last three years, we have closely examined and updated every position description. We have also discussed with HR the possibility of re-classifying staff to ensure both the work and compensation are aligned. Last year we developed our first ever 3-year strategy, this year we reinvigorated our monthly newsletter and recently we held our first retreat where we discussed both the Office's vision and how we would work with staff to support career development. We have a great team, and while many are newer to the county and office, I believe the positive response to Eagle Creek is a direct result of many of the changes we have already made.

The County's current Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is not a viable long term solution to meet our requirements. I don't believe a cell block in the juvenile detention facility was ever meant to be a permanent solution. That being said, a solution that will meet our EOC requirements will likely be an expensive investment and that is why my office believes a dual use facility would be the most cost effective option. When the EOC is not in use supporting emergencies, exercises or training events, it should be available to other departments to support their training events and meetings. For 2 years my office has worked with facilities and I am happy to report that a new EOC is considered a Tier 1 priority in the county's strategic capital plan. It's not the only Tier 1 priority, but it is on the list. Until we do have a solution that can support many of our known hazards, my office will continue to rely on an incident based approach that could have us in our current EOC, co-located with Portland (as we were with the Cully Fire), co-located with the Sheriff's Office in Troutdale (as we were with the Eagle Creek Fire), or somewhere else where we and our partners could be in a position to support the required response.

In closing, Emergency Management is much bigger than the Office of Emergency Management. Much of our success is a result of the relationships we cultivate over years through planning, exercises and other workshops. My office has 8 staff positions, but the Eagle Creek Response included 385 county and regional partners supporting the EOC, shelters, re-entry sites, etc. With the continued support of the Administration, we plan to further strengthen our ability to prepare, respond and recover from disasters. Thank You again.

Sincerely,



Chris Voss

Director

Multnomah County Office of Emergency Management

C: Deborah Kafoury, Chair; Marissa Madrigal, COO; Commissioners Meieran, Smith, Vega Pederson, & Stegmann; Jenny Madkour, County Attorney; Sheriff Reese; District Attorney Underhill