

REGIONALIZATION OF EMERGENCY DISPATCHING FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Q1: Where is the Communications Dispatch Center currently located?

The communications dispatch center is currently located in Building #3 located on the Avon Town Hall Campus at 60 West Main Street. Building #3 is the Police Department Administration building.

Q2: What function does Central Communications perform and what does a Communications Dispatcher do?

This activity provides communications services for police, fire, emergency medical services, and public works activities on a 24/7/365 basis. Located in Police Headquarters, dispatchers handle all telephone and in person requests for emergency and routine services; receive burglary and fire alarm signals; receive messages from, and dispatch all police, fire, medical, and public works vehicles; maintain communication with other local, as well as state and national public safety agencies; initiate inquiries and disseminate information through the Connecticut On-Line Law Enforcement Communications Teleprocessing System (COLLECT) and National Crime Information Center (NCIC) computerized information systems; and provide information to the general public on miscellaneous matters. The Communications Center has the ability to activate community wide emergency notifications.

Specifically, the position description for a Town of Avon Communications Dispatcher includes the following tasks:

- Answers routine telephone calls for Police, Fire, Medical and general town information
- Answers emergency telephone calls for Police, Fire, Medical and other emergency services
- Dispatches Police, Fire and Medical personnel based off the information they receive from the caller
- Operates the radio system
- Receives and transmits orders and instructions to and from police officers and fire fighters at incident scenes and makes additional arrangements for any requested assistance (i.e. tow truck, Eversource, Connecticut Natural Gas, Connecticut Water Company, Farmington Valley Health District, surrounding towns, etc.)
- Holds certification in using E-911, Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD)/Records Management System (RMS), State motor vehicle and national crime information system
- Monitors prisoners through CCTV
- Ability to communicate clearly and effectively under emergency conditions.

Q3: What is the FY 26 operating budget of the Communications Dispatch Center?

The adopted operating budget can be found in the budget document on page F. 10 and is entitled Central Communications. The adopted budget is \$877,079. This equals approximately 0.78% of the Town's General Fund Budget and 8.44% of the Town budget for Public Safety which includes the functional areas of police, fire fighting, fire prevention, emergency management, and building inspection. The Central Communications budget includes the wages and benefits for six dispatchers, overtime, and the services and supplies required to run the Town's public safety communications (radio) system and the Communications Center.

Q4: How many calls are answered by Avon Dispatch each year?

Avon dispatchers receive between 6,000 and 7,000 E-911 calls per year. In 2024, the Communications Dispatch Center received 32,911 routine phone calls.

Q5: How is Avon's Dispatch function staffed?

The Town of Avon typically operates with a full complement of six (6) civilian communications dispatchers under the supervision of the Avon Police Department. The Dispatchers maintain 24/7/365 coverage in the Communications Dispatch Center.

Dispatchers work eight hours per day, forty hours per week. There are three shifts per 24-hour period: A shift (7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.), B shift (3:00 p.m. to 11 p.m.) and C shift (11:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.). When fully staffed, Monday through Thursday there are typically two dispatchers assigned to A and B shifts. One dispatcher each is assigned to work A and B shifts Friday through Sunday. C Shift is always staffed by one dispatcher.

Due to staffing issues, Avon transferred its C shift calls to Farmington Dispatch for a few months in late 2024, freeing up our own staff to be scheduled during A and B shifts.

Q6: What caused Avon to consider alternative options to our current dispatch function?

Staffing Levels – As mentioned in the response to Q5 above, when fully staffed, Avon has six full time dispatchers. While this should be adequate when solely considering the Town's call volume, this number does not sufficiently take into consideration the practical issues of employee turnover, compensated absences (i.e. vacations, sick days), long-term leaves (i.e. medical, military), or time for offsite training or professional development. These events can result in the loss of one, or potentially more than one, employee for days, weeks, or months at a time.

In a department with only six employees responsible for 24/7/365 coverage, each absence significantly impacts the department's ability to operate, putting pressure on those employees that remain on the job. They are required to work additional shifts to cover for their colleagues. This can be through voluntary overtime shifts but more likely it's through mandatory order-in overtime that can prevent employees from spending time with family, tending to personal needs, or getting adequate rest. The result of a significant number of order-ins over time is usually a general feeling of low morale across the unit. If the situation is prolonged, we often lose additional employees to job opportunities with more predictable scheduling, further perpetuating the Town's staffing issues.

The Communications Dispatch Center has experienced significant and frequent periods of short staffing over the last several years. In 2019, the full complement of six dispatchers was suddenly reduced to two due to a military leave and the sudden resignation of three dispatchers. In 2021, the Communications Center was staffed by four dispatchers due to a vacancy and a termination. Most recently, in 2024, we were once again down to four dispatchers due to one vacancy and one long term leave.

In these instances, the Dispatch Center still needs to be staffed 24/7/365 so shifts are covered by full-time employees that are ordered in for mandatory overtime or temporary part-time employees. In the most recent instance, Avon transferred C shift calls to Farmington for a few months in late 2024. The arrangement worked very well which led to the Town exploring the possibility of moving our dispatch function to Farmington permanently.

Shift Scheduling – As mentioned in Q5, depending on the shift and whether or not the department is fully staffed, the dispatch center is staffed with either one or two dispatchers per shift. This scheduling format presents a number of challenges for both service delivery and for the dispatchers' working environment.

Avon's dispatchers are responsible for answering routine and E-911 phone lines and in turn dispatching Police, AVFD and EMS responders depending on the needs of the caller. This can be a challenging and time-consuming task. For example, even a very simple and routine medical call requires the dispatcher to answer the 911 call, ask the caller for details regarding the situation, determine that medical care is being required and/or requested, call the Town's ambulance provider, AMR, and then stay on the phone with AMR and the caller to listen to the questions that AMR is asking along with the caller's responses. Based on those details, the dispatcher is responsible for dispatching an ambulance and a police officer to the scene. While this is occurring, the dispatcher is unavailable to answer any other calls that come into the dispatch center. This is especially problematic if they are the only dispatcher on duty.

The limited number of dispatchers on duty is also challenging during a critical incident such as a structure fire or a multi-car accident. Typically, during a critical incident, many people will call 911 to report the issue with varying degrees of helpful information. For example, if there was a house fire, someone might call from the next neighborhood saying that they see smoke but they're not sure where it's coming from, meanwhile the owner of the house that's on fire is unable to get through to dispatch even though they have real-time, relevant information about the incident at hand and require immediate emergency response. With only one or two dispatchers on duty during these incidents, it's possible to lose information that is critical to the public safety response.

This scheduling structure also creates a challenging working environment for the dispatchers themselves. If a dispatcher is working alone on shift, they are confined to the dispatch center for the entirety of their eight-hour shift. This means no breaks for a meal or to use the restroom. Additionally, a dispatcher cannot end their shift and leave the dispatch center until they are relieved by the next shift. If that relief never reports to work, and someone else cannot be reached to come in to work the shift, that dispatcher could be required to work sixteen hours straight with no advance notice. Relying on this scheduling structure puts strain on everyone in the unit because there is no flexibility or back up.

Supervision & Quality Control – Currently, the dispatch unit reports to the Police Department's Administrative Sergeant. Avon's Police Officers are not certified dispatchers, meaning they are not able to walk into the dispatch center and answer a call. The scheduling structure of only one or two dispatchers on duty per shift does not allow for a working supervisory structure, such as a communications supervisor or a lead dispatcher, within the unit. This means there is no one responsible for ongoing quality control and maintenance of standards for high quality service.

There are also no advancement opportunities for dispatchers, meaning that we are likely to lose them to other organizations that have promotional opportunities. Additionally, with only six dispatchers, opportunities to send our staff offsite for training or professional development are almost non-existent.

Q7: What would it take to improve these issues and retain the dispatch function locally?

The only way to improve the issues outlined above and retain the Town's dispatch function locally in the future would be to hire additional staff. Specifically, the Town would need to hire two additional full-time dispatchers, bringing the total full-time staff for the unit to eight. One of the new dispatchers would function as a working supervisor responsible for quality control.

Two additional dispatchers would allow for an additional dispatcher to be scheduled for all three shifts. This would allow for more calls to be handled simultaneously during high volume periods and critical

incidents, resulting in faster response times for those in need of emergency services. The additional staff would allow for more reasonable scheduling and less mandatory overtime when there are vacant positions or employees are out on leave resulting in stronger employee morale and less employee turnover. The additional staff would also allow for better and more frequent employee training and professional development.

The addition of a unit supervisor would allow for hands-on supervision of staff and quality control of calls, resulting in higher quality caller experience, as well as mentorship for new dispatchers. The creation of a supervision structure would also create an opportunity for employee advancement, encouraging them to build tenure with the Town, rather than pursuing leadership opportunities at other organizations.

Of course, investing the required human resources in the dispatch function comes at a cost. Based the FY 2025-2026 adopted budget, we estimate that the wages and benefits for an additional full-time dispatcher and a full-time dispatch supervisor would cost approximately \$230,000 annually.

REGIONAL DISPATCH:

Q8: What is the proposal? How would it work?

Via a mechanism called an Interlocal Agreement (copy attached), the Town of Farmington would provide Dispatch Services for the Town of Avon for a period of five years with renewal options. Farmington already provides dispatch services for the Town of Burlington's volunteer fire department. With the addition of Avon, this arrangement would be considered a regional dispatch center. This includes the answering and dispatching of all 911/routine Police, Fire and EMS calls. The current Avon Dispatchers would be offered positions in Farmington. The technology is currently in place to allow radio, phone and CAD/RMS connections to the Farmington Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP). State funding would be used to create a connection for PD cameras, including a virtual video system in the lobby allowing dispatchers to greet visitors outside of business hours.

Q9: What would the financial arrangement be under the Interlocal Agreement?

As proposed, the capital and operating costs for Farmington to provide Dispatch Services to Avon would be furnished by Farmington on a cost neutral-basis, meaning that there would be no profit/positive revenue variance to the Town of Farmington.

Avon would be responsible for capital costs for equipment and systems required to establish and maintain effective communication between Farmington and Avon for Dispatch Services. It is expected that the majority of the funding required for this purpose will be provided by the State of Connecticut through a grant for the consolidation of Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs). In the future, if there is a need for capital costs for equipment and systems that would benefit both towns, Avon would be responsible for 25% of the total capital cost. Avon would not be responsible for expenses related to facility upgrades.

In terms of operating costs, for the first year of the Agreement, Avon would pay Farmington \$510,770. This would cover the wages, benefits and overtime of the four full-time dispatchers that Farmington would need to hire in order to cover Avon's call volume. Avon's contribution would also include stipends for the employees to work in a "regional dispatch center." These stipends are required by Farmington's Collective Bargaining Agreement. Finally, Avon would contribute to stipends for "lead dispatchers" that would be required to manage a larger operation in Farmington. A chart outlining Avon's contribution to the proposed regional dispatch center has been included below.

AVON REGIONAL COST		
TOF Cost for 15 Employees	\$ 1,753,389	15 employees includes 11 from TOF and 4 from TOA
Plus Budgeted Overtime	\$ 118,000	Based on 5 year rolling average
Plus Stipend for Regional Dispatch	\$ 28,000	\$2000 per employee - \$1k for Burlington + \$1k for Avon
Plus Stipend for Lead Dispatchers	\$ 16,000	
Total Projected Cost of Regional Dispatch Center	\$ 1,915,389	
TOF Cost Per EE	\$ 127,693	FY 2026 budgeted wages + fringe benefits @ 40% per TOF, overtime, stipends
Avon Regional Cost	\$ 510,770	Cost for four dispatchers
	\$ 574,616	Cost for 4 dispatchers + 50% of 5th (\$63,846)

Note that Avon currently employs five dispatchers. All five dispatchers would be offered a position in Farmington. As mentioned above, as determined by a study conducted by Falcon Public Safety Solutions, a third-party consultant, the ideal staffing levels for the regional dispatch center calls for only four additional dispatchers from Avon.

Under the proposed Interlocal Agreement, if all five Avon dispatchers go over to Farmington, Avon would pay 100% of the cost for four additional dispatchers and we would split the cost of the fifth dispatcher's salary, overtime and stipends (\$63,846) with Farmington until there is natural attrition in the ranks to bring the total staffing complement from sixteen down to fifteen. The partial cost for this fifth dispatcher would be billed to Avon on a monthly basis. The cost for four dispatchers plus 50% of the fifth for the first year of the agreement is \$574,616.

Q10: Does Avon expect any monetary savings as a result of the proposal? What would be done with them?

Yes. We expect that the proposal would yield a net annual savings to the Town of Avon. For the Fiscal Year 2025/2026, the Town's budget for the dispatch unit is \$720,279. This includes \$706,079 in wages, benefits and overtime for six dispatchers, \$3,600 in professional development and training costs and \$10,600 in supplies and equipment. Note this number differs from the Central Communications budget on page F.10 of the Town's Annual Budget referenced in Q3 because there are items included in the Central Communications budget that are required for police department communications that are not solely used by the dispatch unit and would need to be retained after the regional dispatch proposal was implemented.

Based on Avon's current costs, and Avon's anticipated first year cost to participate in the regional dispatch model outlined in Q9 above, we expect a savings of approximately \$145,000 in the first year, assuming all five of our current dispatchers go to Farmington. If only four go to Farmington, we could expect savings of approximately \$209,000.

AVON CURRENT COST (FY26)		
Personal Services	\$ 706,079	Wages, Benefits & Overtime for 6 FT Dispatchers
Professional Development	\$ 3,600	
Supplies & Equipment	\$ 10,600	
Avon Current Cost	\$ 720,279	
Regional Savings vs. Current Costs	\$ 145,663	w/ four dispatchers + 50% of fifth
	\$ 209,509	w/ four dispatchers

However, rather than making a bottom-line reduction to the Police Department's operating budget, some of the cost avoidance is likely to be reprogrammed for other high priority public safety needs without adding new spending, such as a dedicated traffic officer. It is expected that taxpayers will see some bottom-line savings, but also some increased services.

It is also important to note that, as discussed in Q6 and Q7 above, in order to make the Town of Avon's local dispatch function viable now and in the future, additional staffing would be needed. Specifically, two full-time dispatchers would need to be hired, with one in a working supervisory capacity. The cost of these additional employees would be about \$230,000 using FY26 wages and benefits. Therefore, to get a true understanding of the cost avoidance of the regional dispatch proposal, it is important to compare Avon's cost savings, not to our current staffing complement, but to the staffing that would be required to maintain the dispatch function locally in the future. The chart below outlines the savings to Avon under the regional dispatch proposal when compared to the cost to operate dispatch locally with the required increased staffing.

AVON COST W/ INCREASED STAFFING		
Personal Services	\$ 935,660	Wages, Benefits & Overtime for 7 FT Dispatchers + 1 Supervising Dispatcher
Professional Development	\$ 3,600	
Supplies & Equipment	\$ 10,600	
Avon Cost w/ Increased Staff	\$ 949,860	
Regional Savings vs. Increased Staff	\$ 375,244	w/ four dispatchers + 50% of fifth
	\$ 439,090	w/ four dispatchers

Q11: Is there grant funding available?

Yes. There are multiple funding sources available to support the consolidation of PSAPs in CT.

The State of Connecticut Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, Division of Statewide Emergency Telecommunications (DSET) provides transition grants to reimburse certain expenses related to the transition from an existing stand-alone PSAP to an approved multi-town or regional PSAP. We have already been awarded \$20,000 to hire a consultant to assist in identifying and coordinating the physical, technical and personnel costs associated with creating a Regional Dispatch Center with Farmington, Burlington and Avon.

Should the proposal move forward, the consolidated dispatch center would be eligible for an additional \$280,000 transition grant to cover the costs associated with the relocation of telecommunications systems from Avon to Farmington.

Additionally, on an annual basis, DSET provides a regional PSAP subsidy when three or more towns and cities come together to create a single PSAP. The proposed Farmington/Burlington/Avon PSAP would be the sixth regional PSAP to receive this funding. Farmington expects to receive a DSET PSAP subsidy of approximately \$453,000 annually.

MISCELLANEOUS:

Q12: Has regional dispatch been considered in the past? What was the outcome?

The consolidation of PSAPs (Public Safety Answering Points) has been a frequent topic of discussion over the last 20+ years at both the state and local levels. Several bills have been introduced over the years that would require communities below a certain population threshold to consolidate this function with another municipality. While these efforts have not been successful to date, it is possible that this consolidation may be required at some point.

Towns in the Farmington Valley have discussed this concept for years. In 2012, Avon received a grant to hire a consultant to analyze the possibility of consolidating our PSAP with Simsbury and Canton. For several reasons the opportunity was not pursued further.

Q13: What are the advantages to regional dispatch?

Additional Staffing. Instead of the staffing minimum being one and the maximum being two dispatchers, the regional dispatch unit will now have three or four dispatchers during the day/evening hours. This is important for critical incident management, flexibility and predictability for staff scheduling, and creates the opportunity for a supervisory structure and leadership and training opportunities for staff to grow in their careers.

Civilian Supervisor. Farmington's central communications function includes a civilian communications supervisor and lead dispatcher roles. Avon's dispatch function does not have this level of oversight. These positions are instrumental for sustained quality assurance verifications and implements a new "higher standard" of service which would push towards a more professionalized delivery of service.

Emergency Medical Dispatching. Avon residents would benefit from an increase in service delivery standards by offering in-house Emergency Medical Dispatching as part of its operation. Currently, if Avon dispatch receives a medical call, they transfer the call to the Town's ambulance provider, AMR, who then provides the emergency medical dispatching services.

Funding & Subsidies. The Division of Statewide Emergency Telecommunications (DSET) provides conversion funding and yearly subsidies for regional dispatch centers through the 911 Telecommunications Fund.

Cost savings. The savings on personnel and technology when consolidating two similarly situated dispatch centers into one Regional Dispatch Center is considerable.

Q14: What is the drawback of regional dispatch?

A potential drawback that has been identified is referred to as a "dark station." Meaning that if a member of the public were to visit the Avon Police Department after normal business hours, they would not be able to speak to a dispatcher "face to face" or who is physically present in the facility.

However, speaking face to face with a Dispatcher is very uncommon these days. In Avon, the glass window into the dispatch center is covered with a tinted film. Dispatchers cannot hear the person on the other side of the glass and all communication between the dispatcher and the visitor in the lobby is conducted through a phone while the dispatcher sits at their console.

Q15: What will happen when I call 911? How will they know what town I'm in?

By way of background, 911 has been available as the telephone number to dial to request emergency assistance in Connecticut since the 1970s. The first 911 service available was called Basic 911 and it delivered 911 calls to a local police department, fire department or regional dispatch center based on the originating telephone exchange without the benefit of any location information.

In 1984, legislation was passed mandating that Enhanced 911, commonly known as E911, be implemented by the end of 1989. E911 service delivered 911 calls to public safety answering points known as PSAPs and provided automatic location information with a display of the name, address and telephone number of the originating telephone on a screen at the PSAP.

Therefore, regardless of where you call 911 from, the dispatch center (whether located in Farmington, Avon, or any other town in the state) will know your exact location and will be able to dispatch emergency response accordingly.

Q16: What if I come to the PD in person? Will someone be there to assist me?

During the Town Hall's normal business hours, the Police Records office (located across the lobby from the dispatch center) will be open and available to assist visitors. After business hours, a phone and a virtual video system will be available in the Avon PD lobby that will connect directly to Farmington when the receiver is lifted. Farmington dispatch will be able to dispatch an Avon officer to the lobby area to assist the visitor. This is similar to how visitors are handled currently with the communications center in the Avon police department facility. Visitors use a phone in the lobby to communicate with the dispatcher who is at their dispatch console behind a tinted glass window. Typically, visitors do not speak to the dispatchers face to face.

Q17: Have you tried to pilot this program?

Yes. In late 2024, Avon transferred C shift calls to Farmington for several months due to staffing shortages in Avon. The arrangement worked very well which led to the Town exploring the possibility of moving our dispatch function to Farmington permanently

Q18: What would happen to the Town's current employees?

The Town currently has five full-time dispatchers (one dispatcher position is currently vacant). All five dispatchers will be offered positions in Farmington. Based on an analysis of the estimated call volume of the proposed regional dispatch service conducted by third party consultant Falcon Public Safety Solutions, LLC, it was determined that four additional dispatchers would be required. However, in order to make this transition work for both communities, it has been determined that Farmington would take up to five of Avon's dispatchers, with each community covering 50% of the wages and benefits for the fifth dispatcher. When natural attrition in the ranks occurs, the extra position will not be filled.

Q19: Have other communities regionalized their dispatch function? Which ones?

There are a number of regional (3 or more towns) and multi-town (2 town) Public Safety Answer Points (PSAPs) in Connecticut.

Litchfield County Dispatch (LCD) is the PSAP for 22 towns in northwest CT. LCD dispatches for sixty-two fire, medical and police services covering 945 square miles and approximately 150,000 residents. LCD manages over 90,000 calls annually.

Other consolidated PSAPs include Tolland County Mutual Aid Emergency Communications Center, Quinebaug Valley Emergency Communications Center, Valley Shore Emergency Communications Center, NW CT Public Safety Emergency Communications Center, Fairfield County RDC (New Canaan, Westport and Fairfield), Glastonbury Police Department (Glastonbury and East Hampton), and Willimantic Switchboard Emergency Communications Center (Windham and Franklin). A map of CT's PSAPs can be found at the following link:

portal.ct.gov/DESPP/Division-of-Statewide-Emergency-Telecommunications/911-In-Connecticut/Public-Safety-Answering-Points

Additionally, Farmington already provides dispatch services to the Burlington Volunteer Fire Department as a multi-town PSAP.

Q20: What does the AVFD think about this?

The Avon Volunteer Fire Department is very supportive of the proposal. Dispatching fire calls, such as a structure fire, is a labor-intensive activity because many resources are required to be called in such as mutual aid partners and volunteer personnel. The AVFD feels that the additional staff coverage that would be provided by a regional dispatch center will result in higher quality service.

Q21: Would Farmington benefit from this arrangement as well?

Farmington will benefit from having more dispatchers on each shift that are available to field calls. They will also be able to create opportunities for employee advancement through shift supervisor/leadership roles. This will provide a higher level of service for residents via quality control while also helping to retain staff by providing advancement opportunities. Retaining staff also provides higher quality levels of service for all towns participating in the regional dispatch center.

We also anticipate that Farmington will experience some financial benefit by moving to a regional dispatch model. Currently, Farmington receives an annual subsidy from the State for operating a “multi-town dispatch” center due to their relationship with the Burlington Volunteer Fire Department. This subsidy is about \$194,000. By moving to a regional dispatch center model (three towns or more), Farmington will be entitled to a State subsidy of approximately \$453,000. That subsidy, coupled with Avon’s annual payment to Farmington will result in a net savings to Farmington of about \$258,000 annually.

Q22: How many dispatchers does Farmington currently have? How would this proposal change staffing levels?

Farmington has 11 dispatchers, and their schedule allows for a minimum of two dispatchers working at once, but most of the time there are three dispatchers working. Occasionally one dispatcher works between 2:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m. With regionalization, we would look to have a two-dispatcher minimum on C shift (11:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.) and have at least three if not four, depending on call volume, for the day and evening shift. Additionally, there would be a dispatch supervisor working who can also jump on daytime calls.

Q23: When will this transition be effective?

The Town’s existing collective bargaining agreement with the Dispatcher’s collective bargaining unit expires on June 30, 2025. We have negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding to extend the agreement for a period of three months. We expect that the transition will be finalized before the MOU expires.

Q24: What would happen to all the new dispatch equipment the Town bought as part of the radio project?

The Town’s three dispatch consoles would be repurposed in the Farmington dispatch center to facilitate communications with Avon’s Police, Fire and DPW mobile and portable radios. A fourth console will be purchased using grant funding from the State.

Q25: Will our radio systems work together?

Yes. Due to staffing shortages at the end of calendar year 2024, Avon shifted its C shift calls over to Farmington dispatch. At that time, technology was implemented to connect Avon PD to Farmington Dispatch and Farmington PD. This remains in place and would be hardened should the proposal to regionalize dispatch be approved.