

MEETING

ROUNDTABLE MEETING

**Update on emergency preparedness and
homeland security issues**

DATE
TIME

March 3, 2003
6:07 P.M.

PRESIDING OFFICER

Mayor Sullivan

PRESENT

Mayor Sullivan, Vice Mayor Davis, Councillors
Davis, Decker, Maher, Murphy, Reeves, Simmons
and Toomey
Councillor Galluccio

ABSENT

Also present were City Clerk D. Margaret Drury,
Deputy City Clerk Donna P. Lopez, and Sandra
Albano, City Council Assistant

City Administrative Staff present: Robert W. Healy,
City Manager, Deputy City Manager Richard Rossi,
Gerald R. Reardon, Fire Chief, John J. O'Donoghue,
Deputy Fire Chief, Ronnie Watson, Police
Commission, David Degou, Police Superintendent,
Michael Giacoppo, Police Superintendent, Harold
Cox, Chief Health Officer, Rickie Lacey, Director of
Public Health Nursing, Sam Lipson, Director of
Environmental Health, David O'Connor, Director of
Emergency Management, Sam Corda, Director of
the Water Department, George Fosque, Director
Emergency Communications, Ellen Semonoff,
Deputy Director, Human Services Department,
Susan Clippinger, Director of Traffic, Parking and
Transportation, Ini Tomeu, Public Information
Officer, Julia Bowden, Assistant to the City
Manager and Maryellen Carvello, Executive
Assistant to the City Manager..

See attached summary of discussion points

ADJOURNMENT

8:05 P.M., on motion of Councillor Murphy

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SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION AND REQUESTS

Cambridge is one of only two cities in the state with stand-alone hazardous material (hazmat) teams. Springfield also had one until very recently when state budget cuts forced fire department layoffs. Training and drilling has been extensive and is ongoing. Cambridge has had a hazmat team since 1983-84, so there is great depth of experience. The Cambridge hazmat team is averaging a four-minute response time to incidents, while other local communities are having to wait up to two hours for response from the state team.

Cambridge has an extensive radio operation on an 800 Megahertz trunk system with interoperability to the degree that there is capacity for a large-scale operation with integration among fire, police, MIT and Harvard police, and other public safety entities. Over 1,000 radios have been distributed to city staff in 20 departments, along with 100 pagers. Cambridge users are able to talk with fire and police departments in neighboring towns. Cambridge currently has one decontamination trailer and is getting two more. Chief Reardon is confident that Cambridge is as well or better prepared than any other municipality in the state.

State and federal aid for the required additional resources is nonexistent. Cities and towns have been left on their own. None of the promised aid for overtime has been forthcoming. The next two state budgets will make the situation much more difficult. However, public safety has always been a priority in Cambridge and will continue to be a priority.

The announced "orange alerts" have not been helpful. They are not specific enough to engender any response aimed at a particular danger. Public safety agencies have responded with general increases in security. There is a set of protocols in place for each public safety agency. They are flexible and depend on specific information, not the color code.

In the Police Department there has been an upgrade of the Tactical Response Team. The department has two hazmat-trained police officers and several police vehicles are equipped with Level 3 suits and masks. There has been a great deal of training in emergency response areas, and it will continue. The Police Department has held community meetings, which have been well received.

In response to a request by the regional emergency safety team and the Mayor of Boston, Cambridge has prepared an evacuation route to get people out of Boston without

blocking all of Cambridge. Public safety personnel did a test of the first five minutes of the plan, the initial rollout.

The Public Health Department continues to be deeply involved in emergency preparedness. The major roles for this department include focus on issues around surveillance and monitoring for infectious disease and biological events, communication to the public, and hospital coordination on the public health aspects of emergency preparedness, including incident command training, small pox planning activities and decontamination unit involvement. With regard to smallpox preparedness, vaccination of health care individuals at the hospitals is beginning. The plan is to have about 100 people at each hospital vaccinated and able to care for small pox victims. Regarding communication with the public, the Health Department has gained a great deal of expertise through its experience with West Nile virus and anthrax. Communications strategies include preparation and dissemination of fact sheets, staff attendance at public meeting, use of the web site, information hotlines and reverse 911 where appropriate. It is very important to get information out to community leaders to pass on to other community members.

Last year the Water Department did an internal security assessment, and the department is now in the middle of an outside vulnerability assessment that includes all the watershed and reservoir areas. The Water Department has an extensive array of treatments available to address biological or chemical contaminants as well as the technology for quick discovery.

The Office Of Emergency Management has applied for a grant to implement a Citizen Corps Community Emergency Response Team. Citizens would receive 40 hours of training in how to assist the community in an emergency.

The City Manager's staff is looking at various models of information packets and will do a citywide mailing of an informational packet.

Thanks to years of investment in the public safety infrastructure, Cambridge is better prepared than most communities in the United States including major metropolitan areas.

CITY COUNCIL REQUESTS

That the City to develop a plan to provide the residents with much more information about the City's impressive emergency preparedness. Many members of the community are very nervous about security and Cambridge has a high level of emergency preparedness that would calm many residents' fears if they knew about it. Vice Mayor Davis and all members present.

That information about what to do to prepare for an emergency be disseminated to residents. Councillor Murphy and all members present.

That the City Manager provide information about how the School Department is responding to the concern of parents about how to find about their children's safety in the event of an emergency during the school day. Mayor Sullivan

That information about emergency preparedness be available in other languages in addition to English. Councillor Decker

That there be more community meetings at which the topic of emergency preparedness is discussed, and that community meetings such as those the Police Department has held on the issue include representatives from the other public safety agencies. Councillor Decker

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