

Regional Emergency
Communication Center (RECC)
Investigation Results

What is a RECC?

“Regional Emergency Communications Center”

- A “RECC” is a “Regional Emergency Communication Center”, where the member communities combine their Public Safety (Police and Fire) Emergency Dispatch Operations into a single entity.
- In principle, this is no different from other regional organizations we currently participate in, such as:
 - Regional High School
 - Regional Vocational & Technical Schools
 - Regional Public Health Operations
 - Regional Library Resources
 - Mutual Aid for both Fire and Police.

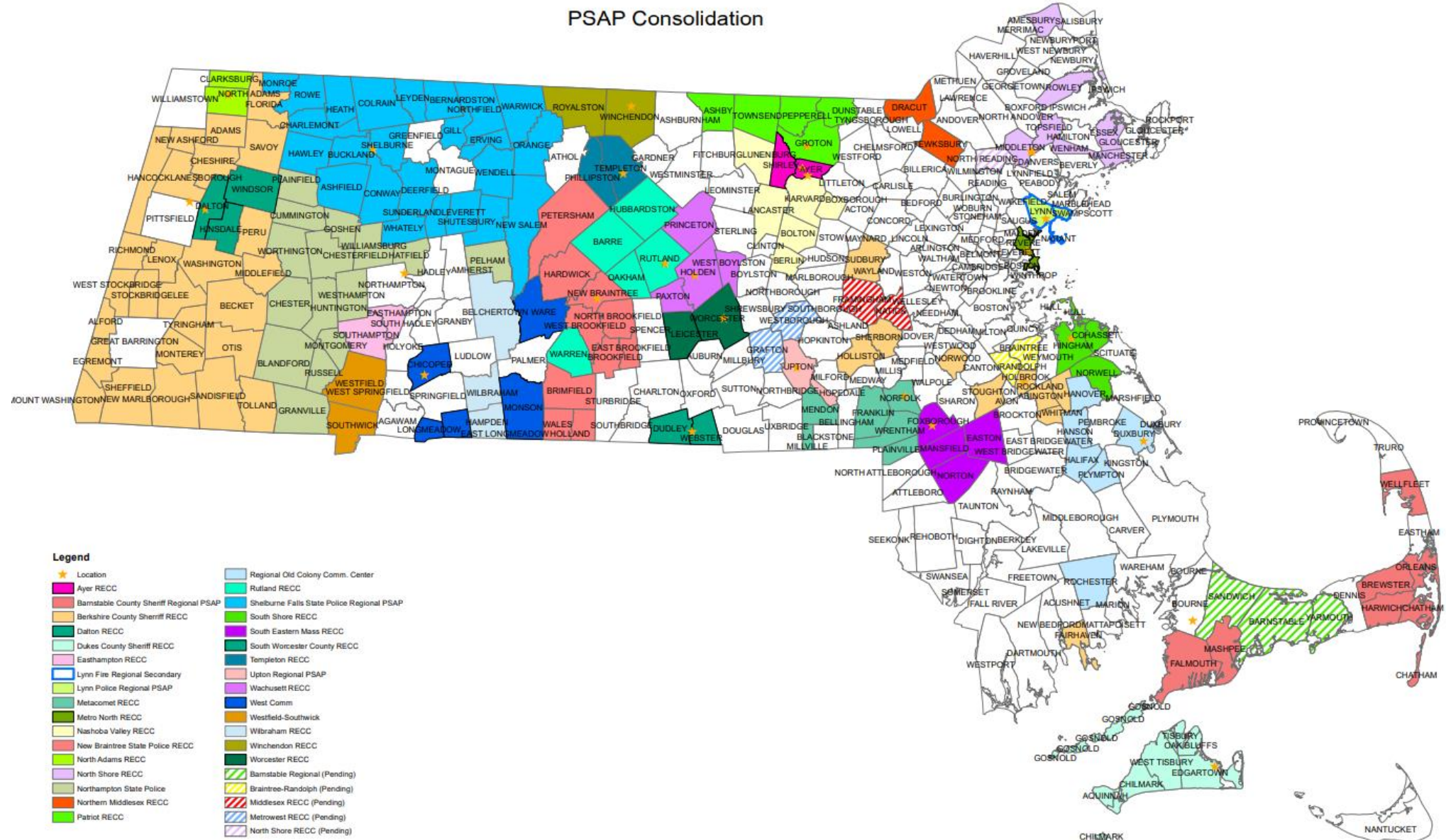
RECC's Are Common in the US

- RECC's have been in operation for decades in much of the rest of the US. – Often County Wide or Centered on a City
- RECC's can be Fire only or Police only or combined.
- The Technology is mature.
- Massachusetts is late in adopting RECC's

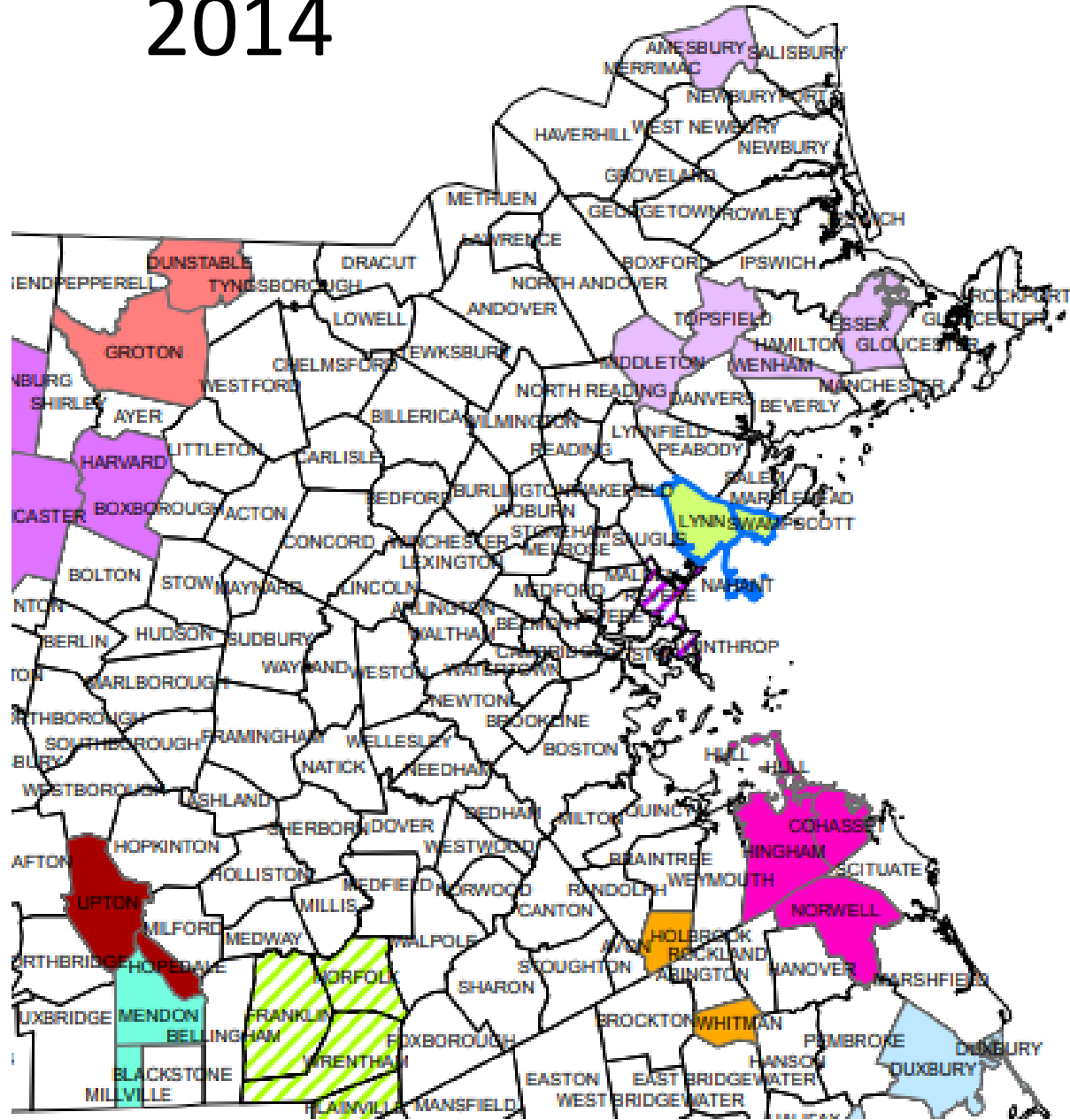
Holbrook Dispatch Center – Serves 7 Communities / 150,000 people



RECC's are Common in Massachusetts Today

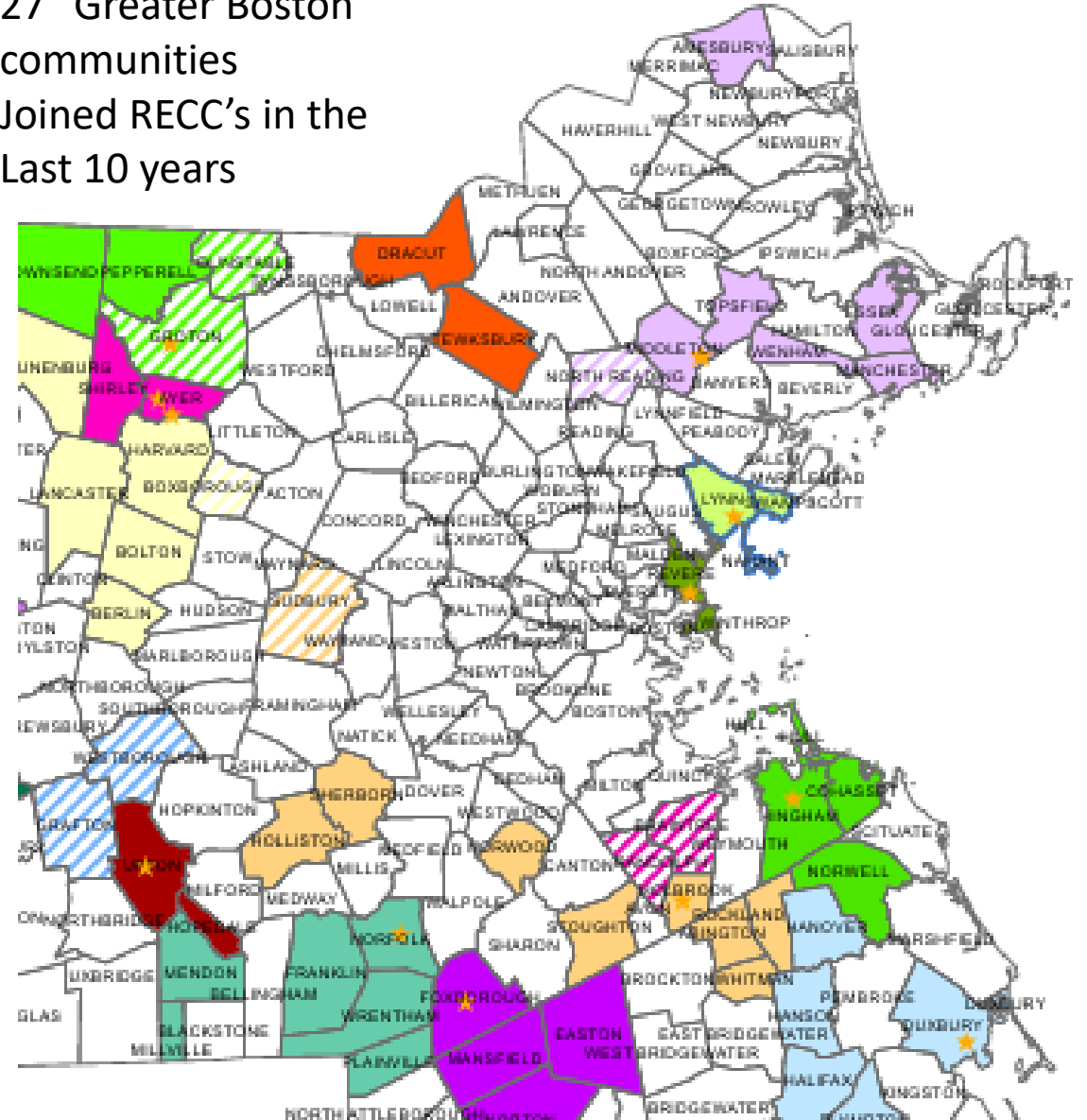


2014



2024

27 "Greater Boston"
communities
Joined RECC's in the
Last 10 years



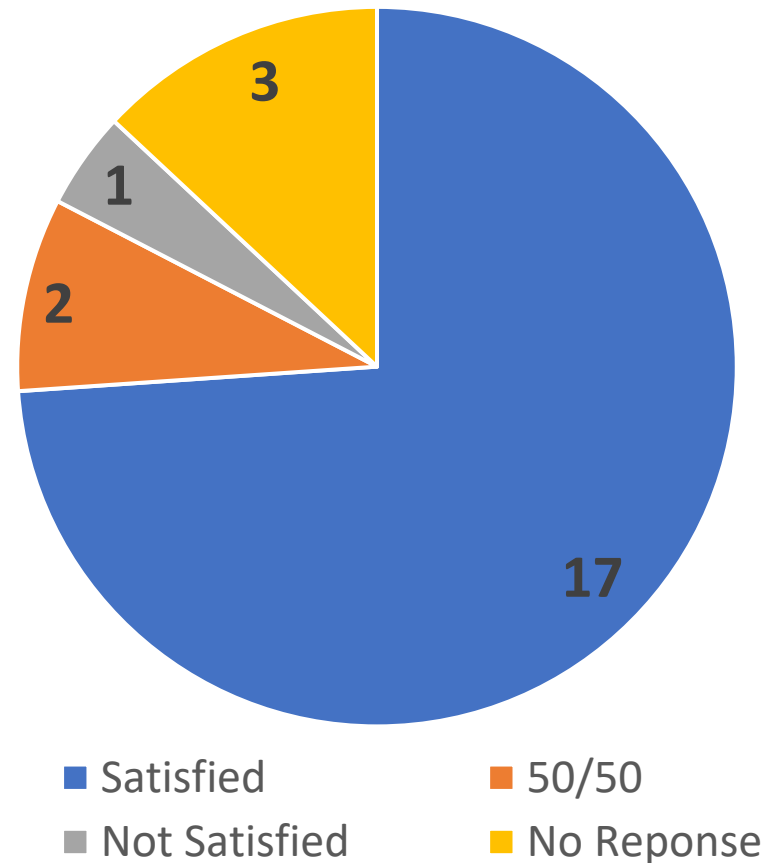
“Should Southborough Join a RECC?”

How Have We Evaluated This Question?

- 2 Select Board Members, the Police and Fire Chiefs and the Town Administrator have been conducting due diligence investigations related to this issue for the past 15 months, with an eye to addressing the concerns raised at the 2023 Annual Town Meeting.
- The review including the following activities:
 - Visited 3 Operating RECC’s: Holbrook, Devens and Foxborough
 - Met with 2 RECC’s that are in the process of being formed: Westborough & Framingham
 - Confirmed that Metrowest (Westborough) building location is no longer at the “Superfund” site.
 - Met with relevant individuals from Northborough, Marlborough, Ashland, Sudbury, Westborough and Grafton.
 - Investigated a new concept – A Virtual RECC
 - Participated in several Discussions with the State 911 managers
 - Surveyed Mass Police Chiefs
 - Interviewed 4 Retired Fire Chiefs
 - Surveyed existing Greater Boston RECC’s for performance data

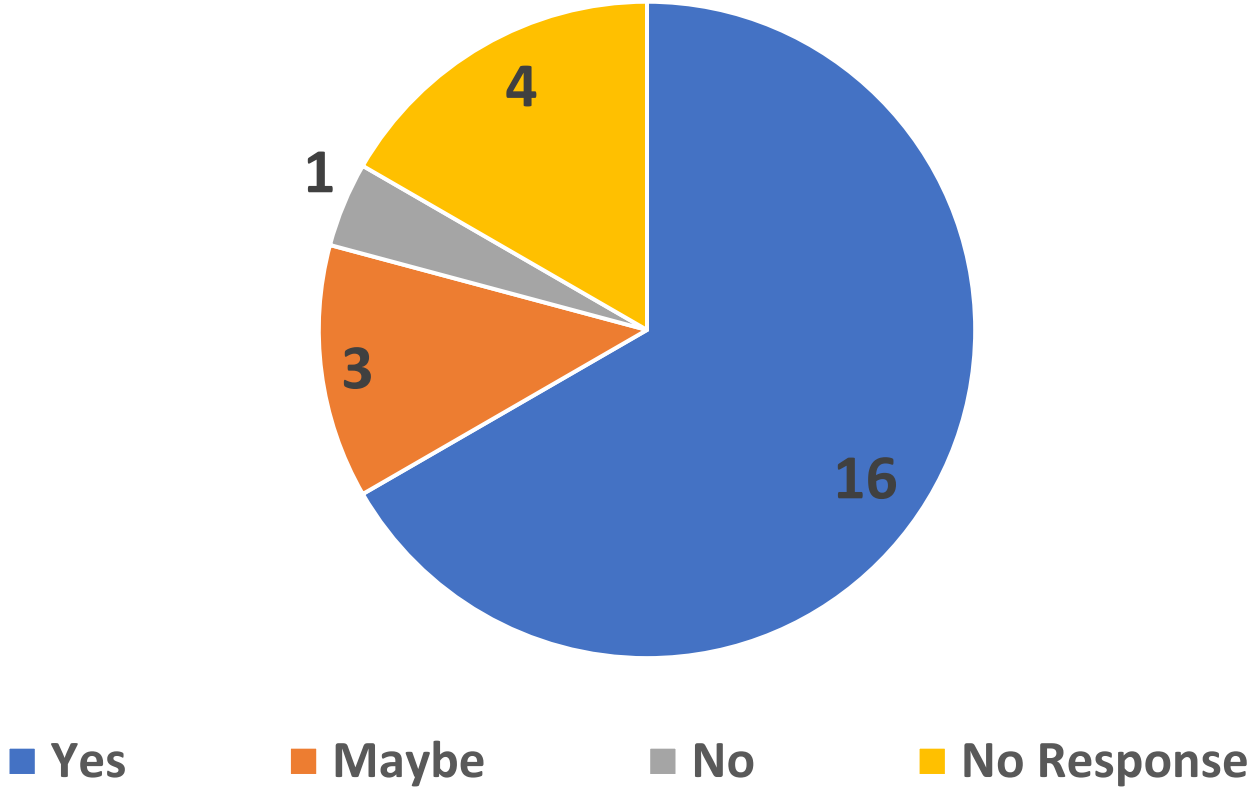
Police Chiefs are Satisfied with RECC's:

A survey of Police Chiefs who are part of a RECC asked "Are you satisfied with the RECC?". **85% of those responding said YES!**



Police Chiefs Survey : “Would you join again?”

80% of those responding said “Yes”, only 5% said “No”.



Police Chiefs Survey:

“What was your motivation to join a RECC?”

- 6 of 13 mentioned difficulty hiring dispatchers
- 6 of 13 mentioned cost savings
- Single Dispatcher Risk
- Equipment Upgrades
- Quality improvements

Fire Chiefs Input

Discussion with 4 Fire Chiefs at the Fire Chief Assessment Center, and Discussion with (former) Chief Achilles. Key Points Are:

- By its nature, our Fire/Ambulance Operations are already Regionalized. Almost any fire of significance will involve a regional response. Our fire and ambulance crews regularly back up other departments when they go out on a call and vice versa. “We are in and out of each others stations every day”
- A Primary Focus is on the integration of a RECC with Mutual Aid Network.
- Having a RECC overlap with a Mutual Aid network has substantial benefits.
- Value of RECC Dispatchers having instant access to the status of crews and equipment in communities that overlap with mutual aid.
- Multiple stories about RECC’s being able to offer faster (and therefore safer) mutual aid response—particularly in large or complex events
- RECC overlap with Mutual Aid structure is also important for Police response

RECC Economics

- A survey of Greater Boston RECC's found that:
 - Busiest Shifts
 - 1 Dispatcher per 9,500 people to 1 dispatcher per 12,000 people
 - Southborough (FY 2024) had 1:10,450
 - Per Capita Operating Budget
 - Greater Boston RECC's – Run between \$42 and \$65 per person covered
 - Southborough
 - FY 24 – Single Dispatcher \$58 per person covered.
 - FY 25 – 2+ Full Time Dispatchers - \$78 per person covered.
 - 2 additional dispatchers to provide 2 person 24/7 coverage - \$98 per person covered.

“Why are we considering joining a RECC?”

Answer: Improved Public Safety!

- Even with 2 additional dispatchers, we will have many shifts with only a single dispatcher.
- A single dispatcher system is not safe – both Town Meeting and the Select Board have recognized this and have stated this on multiple occasions:
 - Dispatchers can be required to perform multiple complex tasks--simultaneously:
 - In a life threatening situation they may be called on to provide over-the-phone instruction on first aid such as CPR.
 - At the same time, they must locate and dispatch the resources needed to respond—resources not only in Southborough but in other (mutual aid) communities.
- Just like other communities, we are having trouble hiring and retaining dispatchers— It took 3 months into the new Fiscal Year to hire the 2 new dispatchers we still have 1 part time dispatch position open. We can fund a position, but we can't make candidates apply for a position.
- We could benefit with faster response times if we have better integration with our Mutual Aid Partners—in public safety response, Minutes Matter!

Dark Station

- Dark Station is a Misnomer
 - Today, if someone arrives at the Public Safety Building with an emergency, they will be greeted by the Dispatcher behind the glass window.
 - The Dispatcher cannot come out to render aid. He/She will dispatch the required aid. Dispatchers are able to lock and unlock doors to provide safety.
 - In a RECC, the person arriving at the Public Safety Building will interact with a Dispatcher just as they would today. That Dispatcher typically has a video link to the lobby, and will be able to summon aid the same way today's local Dispatcher can.
 - RECC Dispatchers can lock and unlock doors just as in-person Dispatcher can.

Dark Station Solutions

- Chiefs report a mix of solutions:
 - 4 of 15 reported that their stations are staffed 24/7
 - 7 of 15 reported that their lobbies are linked to the RECC:
 - Typically Video and Voice
 - Dispatchers can lock and unlock doors
 - Patrolling officers or EMT's can be summoned quickly
 - 4 of 15 reported a Hybrid Model
 - Staffed Lobby for part of day (typically "Business Hours")
 - Video/Voice per above when not staffed

Risks of Joining a RECC

- Start Up Risks – RECC’s use mature technologies, but any new venture comes with attendant risks. Risks can be mitigated by
 - Don’t turn on the RECC until everything works as it should
 - Staff Training – Each dispatcher should do “ride alongs” with each local Public Safety department to get to know the community and the local team
 - Coordination of procedures – Having a RECC means that dispatch procedures need to be standardized in the covered communities
 - Training, Training, Training!
 - Communication, Communication, Communication!
- Finance
 - There are some short-term (3-5 year) financial benefits from joining a RECC
 - The State subsidizes a new community operating contribution for 5 years. These could be worth up to \$3 million to our community vs the cost of operating our own dispatch system.
 - In the long run (5+ years) we expect but cannot guarantee additional state operating subsidies
 - We need to be prepared to pay for our share. Long term cost savings are not assured.
- Growth
 - There is evidence that RECC’s need to achieve critical mass to be most effective. Covering a minimum of 100,000 people should be a goal.

Recommendation

- Apply for membership in the Westborough-based “Metrowest RECC”:
 - This is the best opportunity for strong integration with Mutual Aid
 - With Metrowest RECC’s 50,000 covered lives, there is initial “critical mass” and there are a number of “non-RECC” neighbors to provide good opportunity RECC growth
 - Metrowest RECC offers sufficient response resources to provide deep coverage
 - This is an opportunity to be in on the “Ground Floor”, to influence policies and procedures when they are initially put in place.
- Start Out with 24/7 staffed Public Safety Building Dispatch Office
 - Fully staff for the first year of operation
 - Assess the results after the first year (and ongoing)
- Long Term, don’t expect to save a lot of money on operating costs. There are some opportunities to save on capital costs, such as Radios and CAD System.
- This recommendation is being driven by the goal of improving public safety rather than saving money

