# Arlington County Board

# Audit Committee

# Meeting Minutes

September 2, 2021

1. Call to order

Co-Chair Christian Dorsey called to order the virtual regular meeting of the Audit Committee at 5:00 PM on September 2, 2021, via Microsoft Teams.

1. Roll call

Members of the Audit Committee in attendance were

* Takis Karantonis--Co-chair
* Christian Dorsey – Co-chair
* Brian Sigritz – Public Member, FAAC Representative
* Bill Wiggins – Public Member
* John Vihstadt – Public Member
* Maria Meredith –Director, Department of Management and Finance (DMF)
* Mark Schwartz – County Manager

Also, in attendance were

* Chris Horton—County Auditor
* David Barrera—Assistant Clerk to the County Board
* William Flagler Jr. – Deputy Director, Public Safety Communication and Emergency Management
* Heather Geldart – Integrated Program Manager, Public Safety Communication and Emergency Management
* Jacqueline Snelling – Member of the Public
* Mona Steffen – Member of the Public
* Suzanne Sundberg – Member of the Public
* Sharon Valencia – Member of the Public
* Alistair Watson – Member of the Public
1. Review of June 3, 2021 minutes

Mr. Vihstadt moved to have Chris Horton review the June 3 minutes to correct any errors. Seconded by Mr. Dorsey. The minutes were approved.

1. Approval of June 3, 2021 Meeting Minutes

On a motion by JOHN VIHSTADT, Member, seconded by BRIAN SIGRITZ, Member, the Audit Committee moved to have the minutes of the June 3, 2021 meeting reviewed once more by Dr. Horton. The motion passed by acclamation.

1. Business
2. *Emergency Communications Center Overtime Follow-up Report*
	1. Chris Horton, County Auditor, provided a follow-up to recommendations made in previous audits. He explains his process: Given my limited resources, I am choosing to focus on areas where management has recommended improvements. I will work with management to have the appropriate documentation.
		1. Sigritz: What happens when an agency disagrees with a recommendation? Is nothing done if they disagree?
		2. Horton: At the end of the audit there is an opportunity for agencies to respond. It is a “point-by-point” response. If they agree, agencies will give me a timeframe for implementation. If they do not agree, there is an opportunity for discussion. A disagreement means that the department has determined that whatever risks I identified; they have decided to accept. It is worth noting that new management sometimes comes in and takes another look at recommendations that were previously disagreed on and decides they would like to implement them.
	2. Horton: There were 13 recommendations. My follow ups determined that there were 3 recommendations implemented. The remaining recommendations were “not implemented” or were “partially implemented” based on the documentation I received. Six recommendations were determined to be “not implemented”. I had a good conversation with Aaron Miller who believes that these recommendations can be documented during the follow up this coming January. I also wanted to note that there were gaps in this process. I asked for follow up information in March and then set this follow-up on hold while focusing on other projects. In July there was one last opportunity for the agency to bring up documentation.
	3. Discussion.
		1. Flagler: I want everyone to know that for the past 18 months our department has been engaged in COVID response. We will work with Dr. Horton to get him the appropriate documentation needed for implementing the recommendations.
		2. Vihstadt: Was the ECC audit done under previous director Jack Brown’s tenure?
		3. Horton: It was, but Will led the response process after Jack Brown’s departure. Aaron Miller started the Monday after the audit came out.
		4. Vihstadt: Recommendation 1.7 talks about how the ECC is doing systemic exit interviews. What are you hearing about the causes for employee turnover?
		5. Geldart: We’ve been in a COVID response the last 18 months. Stress levels have been high, and we are hearing a lot about burn-out. In response, we have implemented a mental health care professional onsite that is available daily. We are using dispatch technology that has allowed us to surge our remote call capacity as needed, especially during the insurrection on January 6.
		6. Vihstadt: Do you have any stats about the attrition rate in ECC?
		7. Geldart: I have been here since May 2020, and I have seen it tail off significantly. We instituted a re-organization in coordination with human resources. It has alleviated a lot the burden on managers and staff. We are staffed at 105 percent, for the first time in recent history, under the current administration. We have instituted additional “over-strength” positions. We are fully staffed on the floor and are coming out with competitive positions externally and internally.
	4. Karantonis: My question is on Recommendation 2.3, the piloting of volunteer staffing and the call center. I see reasons why this is not a great idea. Can you tell us about this?
		1. Geldart: Some of the liability of having volunteers at call centers were related to life and death situations. This seemed like too much of a risk to take on.
		2. Flagler: Correct. This is a risk issue. We wanted to minimize this risk.
		3. Horton: This recommendation was very specific about non-emergency calls for the very reason that Heather Geldart mentioned. The idea was to take some of these non-emergency calls and shift them to volunteers. This is best described as a 311 call. That was the idea here. I want to make sure we are on the same page here.
		4. Karantonis: I appreciate that. What is now the next step on this recommendation? There seems like a mismatch on the sense of urgency to implement this.
		5. Mr. Flagler: We need to look at this again. We are looking at different strategies, but we are not looking at any volunteer solutions for emergency or non-emergency calls.
		6. Karantonis: And, if there is a way to address this recommendation differently, can we make sure to credit the ECC for this?
		7. Horton: If there is a way to address this recommendation in a different way, yes. The goal should be to reduce the burden on the ECC operators. If there is a way to do this, we should give credit to the department. This bears some need for discussion with the department in the next round of follow up.
	5. Vihstadt: The ECC is operating at 105 percent. Does this mean that overtime now is near zero? What are on the ground real numbers for OT at the command center?
		1. Geldart: In addition to the staffing achievement, we have informally applied admin mechanisms that reduce overtime overall. We did a study. We have seen a steady decline. It does take time to train our ECC operators to get them to a call center status to provide quality service.
		2. Vihstadt: How is PSCEM’s coordination and work informed by the county advisory commission EPAC (Emergency Preparedness Advisory Commission)?
		3. Flagler: We are the staff liaison to EPAC. Every month we give them a presentation on what we’ve done, and meet with the EPAC co-chairs monthly If they need anything, they can ask us.
		4. Vihstadt: Happy to hear that, but I don’t think EPAC feels like that sentiment is reciprocated.
		5. Dorsey: I am liaison on this commission, I will say that Mr. Flagler and Mr. Miller have been invested in this, on what the county wants and needs. It’s a work in progress, but over the next month we are going to have some interesting options to perhaps reform the EPAC charter. If you are interested, we can talk about it later.
	6. Sigritz: Are all the calls are now being handled remotely? Is that impacting OT?
		1. Geldart: We have 16 remote locations, but we still operate a floor call center.
		2. Sigritz: Does working remotely lessen the need for OT?
		3. Geldart: Absolutely.
	7. Horton: I did want to highlight for members of the committee, that Heather Geldart spoke to the fact that it takes a while to train an operator to work independently. One of the issues that was pretty significant was recommendation 1.3. I do understand that training academies are being stood up. I will work with Erin to get some documentation on that.
		1. Dorsey: What is that training academy process going to look like? What do you hope to see?
		2. Geldart: We identified positions responsible for creating an internal academy for 12 weeks. This includes basic dispatch school. [We are] working with HR to revamp ECC multi-grade progression. When someone moves from an “ECT 1”, they can choose which type of calls to take to progress in their skill set to meet the needs of the ECC
	8. Meredith: In the recommendation from Chris Horton, he suggested hiring a contractor to help with hiring and recruiting. You hired an employee to do this. Did that help you all get fully staffed?
		1. Ms. Geldart: Two things. COVID allowed us to move our hiring process virtually. [This] helped recruiting and accessibility. The Human Resources Business Partner hired in April has helped tremendously.
	9. Snelling (comment in Teams Chat): Has/or will the coordination with DHS regarding emergency mental health referrals impact training and overtime?
		1. Geldart: We don’t have any data to reflect that since it’s a new program, but I do think there will be an impact on retention. It’s a very challenging and stressful job. We are hoping our addressing mental health needs will help ECC’s retention.
	10. Karantonis: There is still documentation pending. Is there any way to determine this recommendation will be completed? A timeframe, or when it will be done?
		1. Horton: The current plan is to initiate a next round of follow up in January. We can do something earlier, and I am happy to do that, but that is the plan right now.
3. *County Auditor’s status update*
	1. Horton: Here is the status of the current projects that are ongoing. The fleet management report has been delivered to management for the technical review phase. There should be a response by September, we will see if this works for them. The projected date is the December 2 for the Audit Committee to receive it. Its ultimately all of county management responsible for the management response, and Mark Schwartz will be involved at one point.
	2. Horton: Two projects have been kicked off, but they are not yet to management for review—one is non-profit funding. This is limited scope engagement. . Board member Katie Cristol is working on a project similar in scope and will focus on equity consideration for non-profit funding. Anything she is doing will inform my work. Hopefully we will have something that is complimentary. Will be collecting benchmarking information from external sources and working with internal County to get non-profit information fully developed. This engagement should be ready [for review] by December 2.
	3. Horton: Next is the COVID-19 project. This is to help make sure that the key requirements of CARES act funding reimbursements are being met. I worked with DMF to make sure are followed and to understand where I can add the most value. We will be reviewing documentation from outside entities, such as contractors and small business. This project one will come to the January 2022 meeting.
	4. Horton: And, as we have more work that is going to be delivered, we may have [a need for] more meetings than quarterly meetings. In January, we are tentatively planning to have the external audit for FY 21.
	5. Horton: Some of the upcoming projects for FY 22 that have not been initiated: The Housing Grants program may be kicked off first, the risk management audit shortly after. I need to get through COVID 19 and non-profit funding audits. I anticipate having both of these kicked off in October. The STAR audit will not be kicked off until after the calendar year of 2022, and I am tentatively looking at February.
	6. Horton: The follow up work that needs to be done this fiscal year is Police OT. This one is substantially complete. I appreciate the PD reaching out proactively. I will be engaging with Chief Penn. We have discussed the ECC OT audit in January. Later this fall, the technology services contract management follow-up will kick off in November. That response may need to slide into January to give management a reasonable timeframe for response.
	7. Horton: Finally, I had been working with the County Manager’s office to see if we can identify funding for an intern opportunity to work with the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, and get a supplier set up with this organization. I would have been able to hire someone, but it hinged on being able to find someone who I believe can do the job. In one case I did offer to someone, but they took another job.
		1. Dorsey: With the need for increased resources, I hope that we have a regular initiation of audits and engage in follow ups. But this becomes unsustainable with a one-person shop. I see a lot of head nods that people would agree to that.
		2. Vihstadt: Have you been able to work with the APS Auditor on pooling resources. Also, with the colleges we have in the area, might there be an opportunity there by our many higher ed institutions?
		3. Horton: I’ve talked with the APS Auditor. He, too, is a one-person shop and will be for the foreseeable future. There are some opportunities, you are correct. There was an opportunity to find interns at Marymount and Virginia Tech. There are some options on my plate to be able to follow up on. I have tried getting an unpaid intern but there has been no interest.
		4. Vihstadt: Depending on the audit subject, maybe there would be an opportunity to leverage the manager’s $2 million contingency funding.
		5. Horton: It’s pretty clear I am going to need additional resources if I am going to make any headway on audits. I am not sure if that contingency funding is sustainable.
	8. Vihstadt: Did you change the fleet management audit to be a SAR report?
		1. Horton: No, it is a letter report. A letter report is a shorter, more streamlined report.
	9. Wiggins: What do you mean by limited scope engagement? Is that a letter report?
		1. Horton: Limited scope engagements could be given in a letter report form, which is intended to just give you the facts. This is to get you as quickly as possible the basic info that you need. The reason I call it a limited-scope engagement is to be able to share with people up-front I limit what I look at.
	10. Snelling: The minutes had also referenced a privacy audit. This would be a valuable area and timely now. Can you give us an idea of when this could be undertaken?
		1. Mr. Dorsey: Privacy is one of those areas identified as a possible future audit.
4. *Next Audit Committee Meetings: Scheduling and Topics*
	1. Karantonis: Are you proposing to squeeze in one or two more meetings?
		1. Horton: I would like us to consider if its valuable to have additional meetings. We are going to have two meetings, December and January, but we normally have a March and June meeting for the audit work plan. Then one in September and December again. If past practice serves us well, it works to have DMF to present at December and Cherry Bekaert in January. That really does suggest that we need to be at five meetings at least, to avoid 3- or 4-hour meetings or needing to rush through audit work. I think it would be a valuable service for the committee and public.
		2. Horton: If this would be valuable, I can schedule a meeting once every other month. Just something to consider.
		3. Karantonis: To make an effort to publish a schedule for the calendar year would be helpful for the public. I am all for it. There will be more output to be discussed. More meetings that are shorter and more centered would be a good idea.
		4. Horton: I am hoping to have a hybrid in-person/virtual meeting in December, but that would mean that 5 members need to be in person to meet state requirements. We need to make sure to have that quorum before we move forward.
	2. Dorsey: I promised to reach out to the Sheriff regarding an approach to deal with OT. I received a response in June. The Sheriff said that a virtual roll call would reduce overtime, but it comes at the cost of operational changes they aren’t comfortable with. This was before the rise of the COVID Delta Variant. They made some changes to control overtime and the most interesting is to have a process for a bi-weekly look on overtime use in order to look at things in near real time. They’ve also decided to do other operational changes to limit overtime from high-cost employees. Taking advantage of diversion programs, pre-trial placements also help reduce OT.
	3. Vihstadt: Did the fleet audit look into school buses? One of the interesting audits completed by the APS Auditor was differentials between choice school then public schools, is that they use twice the number of buses mostly because neighborhood schools are more walkable. Let us know if you looked at schools in any way.
		1. Horton: The only nexus with schools that the audit relates to maintenance. If the bus breaks down, it’s the county’s fleet management function that provides maintenance on white fleet but also the heavy fleet and also the buses. That’s something I talk about within the audit. I am not digging into bus routes.
		2. Vihstadt: Did you look at gasoline procurement at all?
		3. Horton: Lets hold off on talking about that until audit is done.
	4. Dorsey: on the APS side, they’ve implemented something last year that instead of bus service provided for choice schools, what they did for neighborhood schools are doing hub stops.
	5. Karantonis: There is also a shortage of drivers. That should help frame the conversation. I am cognizant of the fact that the county provides a space to park buses and drivers.
		1. Horton: That’s not part of the scope of the audit.
5. Adjournment

Co-Chair Dorsey adjourned the meeting at 6:28 PM.

Minutes submitted by: David Barrera, Assistant Clerk to the County Board.