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City announces pending resignation of HRECC director; interim director named

HARRISONBURG, Va. – Courtney Doberstein, who has served as director of the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Emergency Communications Center since June 2020, has announced her intention to resign her position with the organization effective June 21. Ben Zimmerman, currently deputy fire chief of the Harrisonburg Fire Department, will be named interim HRECC director until a national search for the department’s next director can take place.

Doberstein, who arrived in Harrisonburg with more than 20 years of experience in 9-1-1 telecommunications, instituted a number of projects focused on improving and modernizing the 9-1-1 call center since taking over as director. This included an effort to reorganize HRECC – a process that identified and instituted better strategies for how the department and key positions should be structured based on current and future expected needs. Doberstein and her team also have taken great strides toward preparing HRECC to implement Next Generation 9-1-1, a progression which will enhance emergency number services by taking 9-1-1 from analog infrastructure to a digital, internet protocol-based system that allows community members to send voice, photos, videos and text messages to 9-1-1 call centers. Other vital HRECC projects under Doberstein’s leadership have focused on ensuring continuity of operations and protecting the security and integrity of the community’s 9-1-1 system.



(Above) HRECC Director Courtney Doberstein

“We are very grateful for everything Courtney brought to HRECC and to our community,” Harrisonburg City Manager Ande Banks said. “When we brought her into this organization five years ago, it was with the goal of uplifting our emergency communications center to where it needed to be for the future. Now, her work, and the work of her team over the past few years, has positioned HRECC to be able to quickly address community needs as they arise while supporting our partner emergency response agencies and law enforcement. We thank her for her work and her dedication to our community.”

HRECC is a joint service provided by the City of Harrisonburg and Rockingham County. It answers and processes all 9-1-1 calls in the city, county and towns in Rockingham County. City of Harrisonburg and Rockingham County leaders have had multiple conversations in recent months focused on HRECC’s future and how best to continue improving the department to serve local communities in coming years and support HRECC staff members. Doberstein, in concurrence with leadership of both local governments, determined this is the correct time to step away from her position to allow the organizations to select a new director to lead the next stage of HRECC’s efforts toward constant improvement.

Zimmerman, who became HFD's deputy chief of operations in summer of 2023, has served with HFD since joining as a firefighter in 2000. Throughout that time, he has worked closely with HRECC and is intimately familiar with the department, its staff and the important role HRECC plays in keeping the community safe.

"I am very confident that Deputy Chief Zimmerman can seamlessly step into this interim director position and provide any support needed by HRECC staff until such time as a new director is selected," Banks said. "We have an incredible team of professionals at HRECC, led by an amazing and skilled pair of deputy directors, a brilliant operations manager with a long history at this organization, and so many talented and dedicated operations and administrative professionals at all positions in the agency. Ben has a strong, trusted working relationship with our deputy directors and so many others at HRECC, which will go a long way toward providing valued continuity and stability as they move forward together.



(Above) HFD Deputy Chief Ben Zimmerman

"Our community should expect the same professional level of service they have become used to receiving from their 9-1-1 call center, which continues to exceed national standards in its role as a public safety agency. We are eager to begin the work of identifying the next leader to join this important public safety organization and continue achieving the mission this team is so dedicated to."

More information on the director search process will be announced when available.

The City of Harrisonburg is centrally located in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. It is home to approximately 56,879 people. More information about the City of Harrisonburg is online at www.HarrisonburgVA.gov.

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