

Alachua ARES/NFARC/NF4AC Clubs

MINUTES

September 13, 2023

Attendance: 17. Meeting held in person at the Queen of Peace Catholic Community and also via ZOOM.

Gordon Gibby
Leland Gallup
Wendell Wright
Susan Halbert
Eric Pleace
Larry Novak
Wendell Wright
Mike Martell
Earl McDow
David Huckstep
Vann Chesney
Manish Sahni
Jeff Capehart
Craig White
Randy??
Mike Hasselbeck
Lorilyn Roberts
Rosemary Jones

Introductions. From 1830 until 1900 when the meeting commenced. The NFARC/NF4AC radio club met for this month in person at the Queen of Peace Catholic Community and via ZOOM.

- 1. INTRODUCTION/NON-APPROVAL OF AUGUST 2023 MINUTES.** August minutes with the Secretary for editing and will be submitted for approval in the October meeting. Jeff Capehart, W4UFL led the meeting in introducing all participants.
- 2. PRESENTATION OF AUGUST SECTION HOURS.** Jeff Capehart showed 352 service hours reported. Most were related (164) hours related to Hurricane Idalia. 73 hours for the license course we presented in August.
- 3. LAB N'LUNCH FOR SEPTEMBER 23.** The topic will be making data cables for the EOC Go-Boxes. This will afford us the ability to do digital VHF work with our Go-Boxes. This is a need identified at least for a year in our ARES overall plan. Will permit us to use the Go-Box VHF/UHF radios, with a Signalink, to do either VARA FM or Packet. Jeff Capehart is developing an alternative prototype that permits various wire arrangements to work only with the four wires required, not all eight from a typical mic. Less soldering, more crimping, but needs a prototype check. The goal is to build 10 of whichever design is adopted. Jeff is working on an A/B switch that will allow simple switching between mic and Signalink. We expect our badged volunteers to have their own Signalink or equivalent. Eight volunteers said they'd

come to the Lab N'Lunch and build the cables. This gets us close to the 10 total we need. KX4Z showed a descriptive picture of the design with the cable design and connections.

4. **FIRE STATION ANTENNA PROJECT PROPOSAL.** Raised by Reid Tillery. The concept entails placing VHF/UHF antennas and or equipment at the Windsor/Melrose/Cross Creek Fire stations. Discussion addressed how to proceed. Reid has located three fire stations that are willing to accept VHF/UHF antennas on towers. Advantage would be better coverage of the eastern regions of the county which currently are ill-served. He guarantees staffing for one sight, but asks this group for formal support for staffing other sites. KX4Z asked the group to provide input. Huckstep began the discussion with a question: where is our priority? If the EM asks to activate shelters, they expect us to staff them. Staffing even the local shelters in this most recent storm was problematic; W4JIR says we just don't have the volunteers to staff the shelters we already have. His point is that we just cannot support Reid's proposal. We have to be realistic about what we can offer. It's really an issue if one of the really bad risks come to pass, and the repeaters are off line...in which case we are already overstretched. Consensus: using the Reid concept of towers, but with digipeaters. This offers a greater way to provide support without having to actually staff a station with a volunteer. W4JIR repeated that we have limited resources. Prioritizing is such that we can support Reid's idea. Suggest that Reid move with unmanned support. Motion: cannot support Reid's proposal, but recommend to Reid that he investigate unmanned digipeaters. Larry Rovak suggested that Reid test connectivity with Waldo repeater, which is back on line. Motion carried.
5. **GMRS PROPOSAL.** Discussion of current Gainesville GMRS repeater and proposed gift of transceiver to Waldo/Alachua EOC. Potential for encryption will be discussed. Jim Carr proposes increased use of the GMRS repeaters. He has two free radios that he'd give away...one to Waldo EOC and one to the Alachua. Motion tabled for another day to discuss whether to accept the proposal.
6. **MLK TROUBLESHOOTING REPORT.** Report on efforts by W4JIR and KO4ZSD to identify and rectify problem with the VHF antenna at the MLK shelter. Bad connection on the outside coax connector (12 feet in the air); coaxes were mislabeled and switched: VHF-800 MHz switched. David and Eric used adapters to switch them up. This took five hours of work by W4JIR and KO4ZSW. Over two days these two figured it out. Bottom line: they have repaired the VHF antenna/coax connection, and the main MLK VHF antenna is operable.
7. **MOBILE BROADBAND KIT.** Discussion. AA3YB, KO4ZSD, and KN4TWS demonstrated the "old" MBK and the "new" MBK broadband kits. EM now has four. One, the older one, is slightly different from the smaller newer kits (three in number). EM want the ARES group to test and familiarize ourselves with these new kits, and then teach volunteers who go to shelters with the MBK kits. KX4Z's suggestion is that we get connectors that permit us to use adapters and much lower loss cables to get around the cable loss issue. That issue presents because the kits basic concept is that they use onboard SIMS to receive 4LTE/5G signals from cell towers. The group demonstrated the directional antenna and mast that permit an enhanced ability for the kits to be used as a hotspot for a large number of shelter WiFi users. Susan Halbert pointed out that the WiFi signals will not go very far inside the buildings where these things are used. Point: if you were to bring short low loss coax and adapters, you may be able to improve these kits' usability.

- 8. HURRICANE IDALIA AFTER ACTION AND IMPROVEMENTS ALREADY. KX4Z** went over the AAR/Improvement Plan that he composed in the aftermath of Hurricane Idalia. He made a few points before the Improvement Plan. We did a pretty good job to make sure that folks weren't pushed too hard and we had reserves in the event additional shelters opened. We didn't have an ICS 201 or an IAP. We notified our group in accordance with our comms plan, we were careful how we sent our information out. Everbridge proved useful in getting information out and getting volunteers – and even here we were overstretched – not that many actually could and did volunteer to staff shelters. SARNET is fragile and too easily disrupted to be useful. Larry Rovak says that “Joe down south” is much too quick to pull the plug on a SARNET repeater: this can be done by “Joe Down South” hitting a kill switch on a master control computer. The repeaters usually use FX1's collocated at the DoT microwave sites. Our repeater is different...the DoT repeater “talks” to our UHF repeater (dedicated to the SARNET) by what is in effect a “walkie talkie” arrangement. These old SARNET radios, when turned off, sometimes can't turn back on. This is what happened to G'ville the last time we were barred from the SARNET for a week. Improvement plan: KX4Z has had the plan out for some days and has requested us to read for discussion. He then walked through the various enumerated Improvement Plan issues. Flash report issue fixed. SatPhones all work now. Batteries with Go-Boxes...KX4Z thinks that will go better next time. We haven't done well with tracking equipment (215's). We need to do better in that regard. Shelter GoBox's not able to use WinLink: we're fixing that with a Lunch N'Lab on September 23. KX4Z polled the group – eight have Signalinks that they can bring. W4JIR will do GoBox training at the October ARES meeting. Antenna at MLK fixed. Testing the shelter antennas: this needs to be discussed with EM so they test the antennas (we don't need a repeat of the MLK antenna issue). Easton missing ground rod: we believe the issue may have been solved, since a new conduit has appeared that logically looks as if it might contain the ground wire that formerly went directly to the ground rod. W4JIR will test. The shelter count issue is a County/Monday.com issue that the County should be working. Peaton asked David Huckstep if we had been able to send in the Idalia 214's...he told Dave Peaton that all the 214s were in fact submitted. Lack of MBK instructions...we need to make sure instructions are in the kits before deployment, and that they contain the correct passwords for cell phone usage. Discussion of items 22 and 23 in the Improvement Plan. No volunteers for taking these two missions. Getting across the fence at the EOC? Not really an issue (Gordon will drive around), and the EOC is moving away in 18 months, so not an issue. Weather reports? This is item #24. KX4Z put the issue on the table. Suggest made to create a weather report template. Have to work out who gets the information, from where, how often, and how does that information get to the shelters. KO4ZSD recommends that we at all times remember professionalism in dealing with the entire EOC/shelter community. IAP agreed by the group.
- 9. EOC OPERATIONS AFTER QUINTPLEXER INSTALLATION. KX4Z** showed the quintplexer as now installed at the EOC. Question: how to actually use it? ALE? Local 3.970? State wants us to monitor ALE, but that requires the transceiver be frequency agility. State was listening on 40m during the day. KX4Z asks whether we amend the Comms plan to state that we should monitor both 80 and 40m? No resolution of that question.
- 10. GARS QUINTPLEXER TALK BY KX4Z.** He will give a talk on how these work. At GARS meeting next week...spent hours putting together the talk. Encourages folks to attend this meeting. Lorilyn asked Larry to see if the Zoom session can be recorded. A lot of slides.

11. WINTER FIELD DAY UPDATES. N3FJP logging software already purchased. There is no FT8 or FT4 for Winter Field Day...so we'll be doing RTTY mostly for digital. Which begs the question of training. We need RTTY training. CW is good with KX4Z and Lorilyn. N3FJP is well integrated with RTTY ops in the FLDGI suite. Winter Field Day is all about "multipliers," unlike regular Field Day. KX4Z put out a query for staff positions. Incident Commander, Planning, Operations, etc. KX4Z asked for volunteers to fill these positions. Crickets chirped....then W4JIR nominated Dr. Gibby. No volunteers, so this is a subject on the table for discussion. Thought: three stations, use quintplexer, use 7300s. One in the radio room, and the other two out in the main room.

12. ADJOURN at 8:38pm, 13 September 2023.