

**FIRE AND EMS FOR THE SOUTHERN SUBURBS OF MILWAUKEE COUNTY:**

**INDEPENDENCE OR CONSOLIDATION**

EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper was written to address the problem of duplication of Fire/EMS services in suburban Milwaukee County that could be avoided by consolidation of fire departments. The purpose of this research is to assess the viability of consolidating Fire/EMS Services in Milwaukee County. The research was conducted using action research based on analyzing data collection, personal interviews, survey and literature review to answer the following questions:

1. Where does duplication of Fire/EMS services exist in Milwaukee County suburban departments?
2. What criteria should be used when studying a consolidation of Fire/EMS services?
3. What benefits have other jurisdictions obtained by consolidation?
4. What outcomes can be expected from a consolidation of Fire/EMS Departments in suburban Milwaukee County?

Data analysis involved searching for information on fire department consolidations. Interviews were held with key fire department personnel and community leaders. Surveys were conducted to gain the perspective of Fire Chiefs and other key Fire Department Officers. The results found that duplication of fire services does exist within the southern suburbs of Milwaukee County. Additionally, many benefits would be expected from a consolidation. Political resistance was seen as a realistic and probable outcome of a consolidation effort.

The study recommended that the Wauwatosa Fire Department lead a consortium of southern suburbs of Milwaukee County in investigating a feasibility study of consolidation of Fire/EMS services.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Suburban Milwaukee County Fire Departments duplicate many services and functions. Recently, in the State of Wisconsin, the public has been very critical of small units of government that duplicate neighboring communities' services and programs.

The problem is there may be duplication of Fire/EMS services in suburban Milwaukee County that could be avoided by consolidation. Milwaukee County Fire Departments generally provide very similar services and programs yet each community provides its own staff to research, develop, implement and operate the various services and programs required. Each department operates their own response units but does utilize mutual aid units for extra alarms and filling in when communities are short response units due to activity.

The purpose of this research is to assess the viability of consolidating Fire/EMS Services in Milwaukee County. Action research based on analyzing data collection, personal interviews, survey and literature review were conducted to answer the following questions:

1. Where does duplication of Fire/EMS systems exist in Milwaukee County Suburban departments?
2. What criteria should be used when studying a consolidation of Fire/EMS services?
3. What benefits have other jurisdictions obtained by consolidation?
4. What outcomes can be expected from a consolidation of Fire/EMS Departments in Suburban Milwaukee County?

## **BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE**

Like most Suburban Fire Departments in the United States, the Wauwatosa Fire Department finds itself in an area of numerous smaller units of municipal independence. The City of Wauwatosa is located on the western side of Milwaukee County between the Milwaukee-

Waukesha County line and the City of Milwaukee. The City of Wauwatosa is approximately 13 square miles and populated by approximately 47,000 people. It should be noted that the Milwaukee County Institution grounds is located basically in the middle of the City of Wauwatosa. This land was once primarily institutional but has been transforming into primarily large health care, educational and research facilities.

The State of Wisconsin for the last few years has been hit with major budget shortfalls. The state has a history of making significant contributions to all communities within the state; these contributions are developed from a complicated and somewhat inequitable manner. This system is commonly referred to as State Shared Revenue. For the last few years, the State of Wisconsin has reduced the contribution to local communities and schools. This has created an outcry from tax payers to control or reduce taxes.

The County of Milwaukee has 18 suburban communities located around the largely populated City of Milwaukee. Fire departments in Milwaukee County have a long history of cooperation and planning for mutual aid responses within the county using both City of Milwaukee resources and suburban resources. This arrangement worked well and stayed intact for many years, until the early 1990's. It was at this time that the City of Milwaukee responded un-requested to a fire at an apartment complex in the City of Wauwatosa in 1992. Later, the City of Milwaukee requested reimbursement for services at the fire. When the City of Wauwatosa refused to pay, changes would come that affected all mutual aid throughout all suburban communities. Suburban communities were given an option of working solely with Milwaukee and no other suburbs or they would be cut off of all mutual aid from the City of Milwaukee. The Suburban Fire Chiefs decided to band together and cover each other's communities and eliminate any need for responses from the Milwaukee Fire department into the suburbs. In

addition, the leadership of the Milwaukee Fire Department began evaluating means to increase revenues to the Milwaukee Fire Department, which included making offers to provide Fire/EMS services to neighboring communities for a fee. To date, only one community, the Village of West Milwaukee is the only community that contacts with the City of Milwaukee for Fire/EMS services. In 1991 the Village of West Milwaukee entered into a contract with the City of Milwaukee to provide Fire/EMS protection to their community. This marked the first time in modern times that a suburban community contracted for Fire and EMS from another community and disbanded their own fire department.

For many years, the North Shore suburbs of Milwaukee County discussed consolidation of their fire departments. Many of these departments were run by the local Police Chiefs often called Public Safety Chiefs. Terry responded with a variance of full-time and/or paid-on-call firefighters. For the seven North Shore communities, modern firefighting principal and practices were becoming harder to manage for the Police Chiefs. It was two large fires in the early 1990's that seemed to convince the community leaders that a consolidated Fire/EMS department was needed to improve service and possibly save money for some of the full-time departments. The North Shore Fire Department became reality in January of 1995 and the original seven fire departments were disbanded. Then in the late 1990's after years of rumors, the southeast suburbs began to formally look at consolidating their fire services. What started out as a four-community consolidation of Oak Creek, South Milwaukee, Cudahy and St. Francis settled into a two-department agreement to study consolidation. As of today, the two departments have not consolidated but the communities seem to have agreed to the principals of consolidation. Full consolidation is expected in the next year.

There have been other consolidation discussions and studies; some formal some not. Consolidations of Wauwatosa, West Allis and Greenfield have been discussed. Greenfield and West Allis have developed plans for consolidation. Franklin and Hales Corners have held informal discussions. There have been other discussions that have not even been reported. Through the last 10 years, almost every possible consolidation partnership of suburban departments has been discussed at some level, from informal to contracted studies. The City of Wauwatosa is currently in discussions with the City of Brookfield Fire Department on a consolidation plan. This would be the first cross-county consolidation if it were to take place.

It would appear that almost every suburban Milwaukee County Fire Department at one time or another over the last ten years has been involved in some form of consolidation discussions. In most cases, duplication of services is cited as one of the most obvious reasons for consolidation. All of the studies or discussions seem to be based on small geographic area consolidations and none have looked at the larger sections of the county. The Milwaukee county Emergency Management “Zones” seems to also play a role in potential partnerships. Rarely have any of the studies ever looked beyond the traditional “Zones”. Having noted this, most mutual aid requests generally come from one zone for routine fire and emergencies; it is in the large incidents that communities generally cross these zones for needed resources.

It is expected that with dwindling funding for municipal services in the Milwaukee County suburban communities, the expectation is that studies on the consolidation of services will continue. The evaluation periods in fire departments can be very disruptive. Communities become less likely to invest in fire department capitol projects. Short-staffed fire administrations are forced to reallocate significant staff hours to service studies. General organizational culture is disrupted.

It is probable that the future impact of small consolidations will lead to larger consolidations. In the National Fire Academy's *Executive Leadership course*, students were able to learn the importance of providing community leadership that looks at the "Big Picture" and analyze the impact decisions or lack of decisions will have on the whole community for years to come. Most consolidation issues are brought on by past and current conditions. The *Executive leadership course* stressed the importance of visioning the future. This research will exceed one of the key United States Fire Administration operational objectives to *promote within communities a comprehensive, multi-hazard risk-reduction plan led by the fire service organization.*

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

A literature review was conducted to answer questions relating to the subject of consolidation of the suburban Milwaukee County Fire Departments. The literature review began at the National Fire Academy's Learning Resource Center where a study of related Executive Fire Officer Program Applied Research Projects was conducted. The research also involved a search of trade journals, review of textbooks and conducting personal interviews. A search of the World Wide Web was performed to obtain a broad perspective of different fire department consolidations and the effects on their communities.

When studying factors for fire department consolidation consideration, duplication of services would appear to be a principal concern in most consolidation studies. Johnson and Snook (1997) suggest, "Duplication is one of the most common indicators that will prompt fire chiefs to consider developing a formal relationship with a neighboring organization" (p.45). This thought would become somewhat common in the literature review. Daniel Elsass of the University of Wisconsin-Extension Local Government Center studied consolidations and

mergers in many different units of government in the State of Wisconsin. In explaining the need for his study of these consolidations Elsass (2003) writes, “The perception was that local governments literally were ‘tripping’ over each other by providing duplicative services to citizens that could be served better by a unified, regional approach to service delivery”(p.4). This view is also expressed in the text *A Systematic Approach to Fire Service Consolidations and Mergers* (1990), “Systems exist immediately adjacent to one another, each with a complete and many times, duplicated set of resources” (p.1). From the review, the desire to eliminate duplication can be seen as a strong sentiment within a political environment. Johnson & Snook (1997) explain in some detail, “Eliminating duplication is a very powerful argument for proposing intergovernmental cooperation. Those areas being duplicated are easy to identify and the cost savings and efficiencies gained by eliminating the duplication are easy to project” (p.46). Kamrath (1994) added, “Maintaining separate fire departments results in the duplication of services, administrative tasks, and responses and does not allow as much specialization” (p14). Kamrath (1994) elaborates:

Specialization of various functions also is a consideration as smaller departments cannot afford full-time training or code enforcement and arson investigation personnel. There is also a reduction in the redundancy of personnel. As the organizations join, each department does not need someone to play the role of fire chief, fire marshal, training officer, etc. This allows better utilization of personnel resources, which in turn allows for the specialization of personnel (p. 14).

This leads to the basic objective of most consolidation efforts. As clearly stated in the handbook *A Systematic approach to Fire Service Consolidation* (1990), “Goal of Consolidation: To eliminate (wasteful or unneeded) duplication of physical plant, manpower, apparatus, equipment, political, and fiscal resource” (p. 1).

Within the fire service Johnson and Snook (1997) found, “Common duplications include: dispatching, apparatus maintenance facilities, training centers, and the development and staffing of specialty teams such as hazardous materials teams, urban search and rescue, and dive rescue teams” (p.102). All of the listed areas are common in the suburban Milwaukee County Fire Departments. In a more detailed list, *A Systematic approach to Fire Service Consolidation* (1990) recommends that during a study of duplication of services:

Identify areas of duplication that may include but not necessarily be limited to:

- \* Redundant positions
- \* Purchasing
- \* Training facilities
- \* Communications facilities
- \* Number and types of apparatus (p.8)
- \* Operational overlap
- \* Number of stations and locations
- \* Supply stocks (p.3)

The research examined the criteria necessary when examining Fire/EMS consolidations. Feasibility studies were mentioned extensively in the review with many common elements provided. In her article *Consolidation: Two experts offer a positive approach*, Wagner (1996) writes, “A feasibility study can be conducted by your own department or by a consultant. And anybody that has ever been through the process will tell you that a clear direction and set of goals mapped out in advance is a key to success (p. 22). A more specific model of criteria was found by Thomas (1994),

Consolidation model:

- \* Determine feasibility
- \* Form and activate advisory group
- \* Identify key needs, issues, requirements, and constraints
- \* Develop goals and objectives
- \* Establish criteria for selecting programs and approaches
- \* Develop and analyze alternative programs and approaches
- \* Formulate an action plan
- \* Implement the plan
- \* Monitor implementation (p.105-106)

A similar list was developed by Daniel Elsass (2003) as a guide to communities considering consolidation or merger of any public services. In his work, the Elsass report (2003) was not just limited to Fire/EMS, it included many other common government services such as recycling, police protection, library, parks and recreation and waste water to name a few. Elsass (2003) listed the following as his “Best Practices and Financial Lessons Learned:

- I. A private feasibility study may be the best starting point
- II. Consider appointing a joint advisory board to review service options
- III. Have a clear vision and firm objectives in mind before the proposal goes public
- IV. Error on the side of maximum public participation before adoption
- V. Well-crafted legal agreement may prevent future problems
- VI. Agreements should contain clear and equitable funding formulas covering members obligations
- VII. Appoint permanent joint administrative boards to monitor service levels, personnel and finances

- VIII. Include key personnel in the planning and transition process
- IX. Most joint operations require a fiscal agent
- X. Conduct a complete appraisal of all participants' assets before merging
- XI. Consider a "dissolution" or "disbanding clause" in case things do not work out as planned
- XII. A mandatory cooling off period prior to dissolution is a good idea

Financial Lessons Learned:

- I. Mergers do not always create short-term savings
- II. Results must be judged on a 3-5 year basis or longer
- III. Functional consolidations often continue to prevent long-term inefficiencies and higher services costs
- IV. Fiscal savings come from several sources(p.6-10)

In addition to specific study criteria, McCormack (2000) encourages communities to ask certain questions of themselves before beginning the study process.

Questions to ask yourself:

- How can I "sell" the idea to the troops?
- Is there a way to measure the effectiveness of the newly organized department?
- What about deployment issues, i.e., how many people are assigned to each company...How many companies respond to different types of alarm...etc.?
- How does fire research relate to consolidation?
- What effect will consolidation have on responses?
- Are any other measures necessary to improve fire safety in a consolidated jurisdiction?

(p. 22).

The rumblings of consolidation of Fire/EMS services have existed in many organizations for many years: some more than others. Eventually the question needs to be asked, “Would fire protection organizations realize cost savings if they participated in operational consolidations” (McGrath, 1995, p.45)? He continues, “Only a consolidation feasibility study would give reliable insight into the answer to that question” (p.45). To determine what benefits other jurisdictions have realized, the research found numerous examples of benefits. Johnson and Snook (1997) suggests:

Consolidation improves the efficiency and effectiveness of fire departments. It allows for better use of scarce resources, the reduction of duplicative efforts and greater staff flexibility and capability. It can improve service levels, allow departments to develop specialized and dedicated divisions such as public education, fire prevention, urban rescue teams and hazardous materials response teams, while also creating stronger internal programs (p. 17).

When reporting to the communities of South Milwaukee and Cudahy, Wisconsin in a fire service consolidations study, Tri-Data (2001) listed the following:

- Qualitative benefits include increased flexibility from pooling resources and economy of scale. Economy of scale could be improved in operations, training, prevention, communications, and management spans of control.
- The ability to improve on-duty staffing to an appropriate level that provides for the safety of responding personnel will also be accomplished; for example, a larger complement can be sent to a fire and still have some resources to deal with the other incidents that arise simultaneously.

- Finally, a fully consolidated department reduces the duplication of executive and administrative efforts. Policy development and implementation require significant expenditures of senior personnel time (p. 30-31).

Other examples of expected benefits were found. One extensive list was revealed by McGrath (1995).

He lists advantages, positive aspects and major costs advantages, and they are as follows:

Consolidation:

- \* It appeals to those who philosophically believe that less government is better;
- \* Change can be made in the name of the change
- \* It creates greater political clout;
- \* It increases the ability to absorb financial crisis;
- \* It increases the ability to comply with mandates;
- \* It allows funding for specialty team needs

Advantages/Positive Aspects:

1. Reduction in costs (attrition due to retirements, resignations)
2. Reduction in duplication of services such as:
  - A. Legal Fees
  - B. Board Expenses
  - C. Civil Service Expenses
  - D. Fire Code Appeal Board Expenses
  - E. Memos
  - F. Staff Decisions
  - G. Operating Procedures
  - H. Election Expenses

I. Training Development and Delivery

J. Purchase of Public Education Materials, Films, Brochures, etc.

K. Accounting Systems

L. Filing Systems

M. Inventories

N. Libraries

O. Audio Visual Equipment

P. Fire Prevention Codes and Plan

Q. Reviews

R. Reduced Overtime

S. Shop Equipment and Supplies

T. Mapping

U. Radio R&M

3. Standardized Equipment

4. Better Utilization of Resources

Major Cost Advantages:

1. Grant Procurement (Resource person available to work in this area)

2. HAZMAT Response (Built in backup)

3. Improved ISO Rating (Apparatus and manpower available to accomplish)

4. Telephone System (One system capable of service to all)

5. Dispatch Centers

6. Training (Cost effective, standardized training and facilities for all departments)

7. Cost of Negotiations (Only one negotiator needed)

8. 911 Monies (Combined for greater impact)
9. Apparatus and Equipment (Plenty in reserve when combined)
10. Bank Accounts (Increased return)
11. Public Benefits (Coordination of Codes. One set of rules for all cities and citizens)
12. Enough people to do the job (More expertise and "brain power" available to be applied to problems and tasks)
13. Political "Clout" (Strength in size and numbers)
14. Area Growth (Ability to provide top-notch service at the same cost per thousand)
15. Ability to do things together we can't do singularly (More resources - physical and mental)
16. Better survival rate in case of tax limitation (Combined valuation and growth will be advantageous) (p 30).

When reporting on a consolidation of the Cherry Hill, New Jersey area, Robert Giorgio (2000), explained in his article:

A broad range of benefits after six years, the consolidated department has many improvements to report. Standard operating guidelines provide for the uniform operations of our forces. The department's Training and Safety Division implemented certification-based training that has led to national certification of our personnel under Firefighter, Fire Officer I, Fire Officer II and Fire Service Instructor. The department's fleet of apparatus has improved substantially since we consolidated. (p.1)

When large incidents occur in the Milwaukee suburban area the control and command of units is always a concern, Giorgio commented (2000), "Stronger Incident Command: Before consolidation, company officers at times had to operate as incident commanders, which reduced

the number of people available to fight the fire. The on-duty BC now responds and commands all significant incidents” (p.3). He continued:

Before consolidation, staffing levels varied between one and four members per company by time of day. The new department established a minimum of three firefighters and one officer for each company, to improve personnel safety and allow us to work toward meeting the minimum levels for interior firefighting. This action ensured that we would arrive with a minimum of 13 members at any structural fire” (p.3).

The literature examined the likely outcomes that could be expected from some form of Fire/EMS consolidation in the Milwaukee Suburban communities. McGrath (1995), explained, “Some public officials feel that they are giving up local prerogatives when they agree to cooperate with another jurisdiction; this is particularly true when the service is relatively controversial and unstandardized” (p.40). This view is continued by Johnson and Snook (2000), they discuss why mergers fail and refer to the reasons as “the big four: turf, politics, power and control. They are real, tangible and visible and they are the cause of most cooperative effort failed attempts” (p. 97). Haney (1998) listed what he believed to be the four negative aspects of consolidations:

- Decentralization of influence
- Visibility of operations
- Potential labor problems
- Mixing apparatus and equipment (p.15)

These concerns continued in the text *Managing Fire Services* (1988), “The primary disadvantage of consolidation is the perceived loss of local control, and this has been the reason why consolidation is frequently opposed by individual departments as well as by local

politicians” (p. 439). To put it more bluntly, Johnson and Snook (1997) simply state, “Tragically, most failures are the result of some form of personal sabotage” (p.105). They also warn, “During a merger or consolidation, personnel and elected officials become so enthralled with the mechanics of making the merger work that drill schedules seem to slip and inspections go undone” (p.2)

The information was not all negative regarding the outcome of consolidations. Giorgio (2000) reported, “Streamlined purchasing procedures saved thousands of dollars through joint purchasing” (p. 107). He continued, “Sold surplus vehicles, reduced the overall age of the fleet, replaced most of the light-duty fleet, and constructed a new maintenance facility” (p. 107). Possibly one of the most significant outcomes Giorgio (2000) reported was, “...development of Standard Operating Guidelines for the uniform operation of the forces” (p.107).

Acceptance of a consolidation plan is critical. The text, *A Systematic Approach to Fire Service Consolidation* (1990), advised, “Without fire Chiefs willing to support, the result will be failure” (p.8). Elsass (2003) asserts, “Strong local leadership was vital to win public acceptance” (p.5). It was Giorgio (2000) that warned, “The individuals who weren't happy with the consolidation focused on defeating the budget and were successful in their efforts” (p. 107).

In summary, the Literature Review exposed a significant amount of material on Fire Department consolidations. While each local issue can be quite different and no two consolidation efforts are the same, considerable information exists to guide almost any community into consolidation consideration. The information gathered in the review will provide many different views of similar conditions. This will help in the formation of a diverse research project.

## **PROCEDURES**

The procedures used to develop this research was centered on whether there was a problem of duplication of Fire/EMS Services in the Milwaukee County suburban area and if it could be avoided by consolidation of fire services. The research was constructed using Action research based on analyzing data collection. The research procedures used in preparing this paper included literature review, personal interviews and survey. This research explored existing material on the subject of fire department consolidations in an attempt to advise the leadership of the Wauwatosa Fire Department on future improvements to service delivery and possible cost avoidance.

### **Literature Review**

Initial research for this paper began at the National Fire Academy Learning Resource Center in Emmitsburg, Maryland in December of 2003, to review technical reports, articles in publications, journals, previous Executive Fire Officer Applied Research Projects and fire service books and literature. This material was reviewed for information on consolidations of Fire/EMS Departments within the fire service. Information was sought to help answer the four research questions. The Internet offered information primarily consisting of fire department web sites, public agencies and matching sites via search engines.

### **Interview**

An important component to the procedure was open interviews held with key personnel from the City of Wauwatosa, the Milwaukee County Executive and outside fire department personnel. The personal interview questions were intended to establish information that would help answer the four research questions. The first interview was conducted with Chief Dean Redman of the Wauwatosa Fire Department; his opinion was sought on current and future

delivery of service issues and the related overall cost trends expected in a consolidated department. An interview was also held with Mrs. Terri Estness, Mayor of the City of Wauwatosa. This interview was intended to gain the perspective of the local elected official regarding the desirability of alternate service deliveries and the impression of the community in general regarding a fire department consolidation. The Wauwatosa City Administrator was also interviewed for his perspective on consolidations and the impact on the community. Mr. Scott Walker, County Executive for Milwaukee County was contacted. Questions were given to the County Executive on his perspective of potentials and pitfalls of a multi-community fire department consolidation effort and to determine his prospective on such an effort, the responses were returned by Mr. Greg Reiman, Executive Assistant and Policy Advisor to the County Executive. Lastly, an interview was held with Chief David Berousek of the North Shore Fire Department located in northern Milwaukee County (Wisconsin). In 1995, his department was involved in the largest fire department consolidation in Wisconsin history. Chief Berousek was questioned on the viability of a similar consolidation for the Southern communities in Milwaukee County.

### **Survey**

In effort to understand the opinions of the effected communities within Milwaukee County, a survey was developed to assist in answering the research questions. In early March 2004, the author attended a meeting of the Milwaukee County Fire Chiefs Association. During a brief presentation, the author explained the intentions of this National Fire Academy Applied Research Project and explained that surveys would be sent to each Chief via e-mail requesting assistance with a survey and provision of the name of one community leader to assist in answering an additional survey. The complete survey instrument is contained in Appendix A.

The survey was sent to all ten Fire Chiefs in the effected communities within Milwaukee County and the Chief of the North Shore, Wisconsin Fire Department. The survey asked 7 questions and provided for personal input. To answer research question #1, survey questions 1 and 2 were developed. To answer research question #2, survey questions 3 and 4 were developed. To answer research question #3, survey questions 5 and 7 were developed. To answer research question #4, survey questions 5, 6 and 7 were developed. Surveys were sent to each of the Fire Chiefs in the Milwaukee County suburban communities of Wauwatosa, West Allis, Greenfield, Greendale, Hales Corner, Franklin, Oak Creek, South Milwaukee, Cudahy and St. Francis. Surveys were also sent to the North Shore Fire Department, which represents seven communities in the northeastern area of the county. The surveys were sent in the first week of April 2004. Of the 11 surveys sent out to the Chiefs, 5 were returned. Some Chiefs expressed they chose not to return the survey as was explained on chance meetings with the author. One Fire Chief expressed that the topic of fire department consolidation was too politically charged and that he would not participate in the survey. Another simply reported that he would not be completing the survey. The return rate of surveys by the County Fire Chiefs was 45%. The surveys were also given to all of the Fire Training Officers the first week of April 2004, within the aforementioned communities with the exception of Wauwatosa; the author's fire department. The complete survey instrument is contained in Appendix B. The Training Officers were selected because of their exposure to administrative responsibilities and their knowledge of fire department operations. Answers to the surveys would be used to help answer the four research questions. This survey asked the Fire Officers the same questions as the Chiefs' survey. Of the Fire Officers surveys, 9 of the 10 surveys were returned for a return rate of 90%. It should be noted the Fire Chiefs' survey included a request for each Fire Chief to supply the name of a community leader

from each community. These persons would be sent a copy of a similar survey. This would allow for input from three different perspectives. Only three Fire Chiefs submitted contact names. With the lack of contact information and support for the additional surveys, the surveys that were to be sent to community leaders were never sent. The data from all surveys received was compiled, tabulated and analyzed for percentages, common themes and insightful comments.

### **Limitations**

This study should not be seen as a feasibility study of consolidation of the southern Milwaukee County Fire Departments. It is limited to discovery of facts that effect Fire/EMS department consolidations. The lack of survey responses from the area Fire Chiefs severely limited the amount of information needed to completely understand the positions of over half of the fire departments in the effected area. The withholding of names of community leaders and line officers may have suggested an unwillingness to provide information and therefore eliminated the possibility to gauge views other than those of the Fire Chief. This indication was respected and no other attempt was made to contact community leaders or line-officers within the effected communities.

## **RESULTS**

The results of this research project came from an assessment of data published from National Fire Academy Executive Fire Officer Applied Research Projects, journal articles, periodicals, texts, a survey of fire department personnel and personal interviews.

### **Survey Results**

The Fire Chiefs' Survey was developed to help gain the perspective of the current Fire Chiefs in the southern Milwaukee County Fire Departments and that of the Chief of the North Shore Fire Department, which is located in northern Milwaukee County. This survey would help answer the

research questions at least from the perspective of the existing Fire Chiefs. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix A. The survey's summarized results are as follows:

Fire Chiefs' Survey Question 1:

60 % of the Fire Chiefs felt that duplication of services exist within the Milwaukee County Suburban Fire Departments.

Fire Chiefs' Survey Question 2:

This question asked the respondent to list key examples of duplicated services within the Milwaukee County Suburban Fire Departments. The answers were quite similar and included the following:

Fire and EMS Training	Hazardous Materials Response
Special Rescue Response	Dispatch Communications
Purchasing Efforts	Administrative Services
Human Resource Services	Labor Pool
Station Locations	Fire Equipment

Fire Chiefs' Survey Question 3:

100% of respondents reported that their departments had studied consolidation in some form within the last 10 years.

Fire Chiefs' Survey Question 4:

This question asked for the respondent to state what criteria or systems were used to study consolidations within their communities in the past. The most common answers to this question are as follows:

Contracted Feasibility Study	Review of other departments studies
Communications Studies	Paramedic Services Studies

Joint Labor/Mang. Studies

Joint Studies that include Citizens

In-House Feasibility Studies

Consolidation Benefit Study

Service Improvement Study

Fire Chiefs' Survey Question 5:

This question asked the Fire Chiefs to list key benefits that they were aware of in other fire department consolidations. Many of the same categories were identified in the survey and are listed below:

Flexible Staffing

Some Cost Savings

Standardizing Equipment

Improved Services

Better Financial Support

Additional Administrative Support

Better Equip./Staffing Response

Additional Staffing

Improved EMS

Improved Training

Group Purchasing of Equipment

Improved Incident Command

Improved Tech. Rescue Operations

Fire Chiefs' Survey Question 6:

The Fire Chiefs were asked what they felt would be the actual outcomes of a consolidation of Milwaukee County Suburban Fire Departments. The responses have been summarized as follows:

Improved communications

Improved Incident Command

Improved responses

Cost Savings

Standardized Training

Standardized Equipment

Reduced fleet size

A unified department

Improvement in personnel Accountability System

Fire Chiefs' Survey Question 7:

This question asked the Fire Chiefs to directly list their opinions on the pros and cons of consolidating the Suburban Fire Departments of Milwaukee County.

Pros:

Better response and service to citizens  
Unified command  
Public opinion  
Improved use of human resources  
Less political meddling  
Savings thru larger purchases  
Improved communications  
Less staff and additional field personnel  
Greater overall ability to provide services  
Capital savings on apparatus/equipment

Cons:

Feeling of loss of local control  
Loss of local identity  
Dealing with bargaining units  
Politics  
Determining cost sharing formula  
Improved/unified training  
Improved response pool

The Fire Officers' Survey was developed to help gain the perspective of current Fire Officers in the southern Milwaukee County Fire Departments. This group was comprised of the training officers from each of the suburban fire departments within Milwaukee County. This group consists of Chief Officers or high-ranking members of the department. This group was questioned to obtain the perspective of an active member of a fire department leadership team to see if a different perspective may be found than that of the Fire Chiefs. Most answers were very similar yet different enough to include in this report. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix B. The survey's summarized results are as follows:

Fire Officers' Survey Question 1:

90 % of the Fire Officers felt that duplication of services exist within the Milwaukee County Suburban Fire Departments.

Fire Officers' Survey Question 2:

This question asked the respondent to list key examples of duplicated services within the Milwaukee County Suburban Fire Departments. The answers were quite similar to each other and to that of the Fire Chiefs, they included the following:

EMS Services	Special Rescue Services
Management Roles	Code Enforcement
Training Efforts	Fire Prevention
Purchases	Fire and EMS Apparatus
Public Education Efforts	Hazardous Materials Teams
Fire Responses	Administrative Services

Fire Officers' Survey Question 3:

100% of respondents reported that their departments had studied consolidation in some form within the last 10 years.

Fire Officers' Survey Question 4.

This question asked for the respondent to state what criteria or systems were used to study consolidations within their communities in the past. While this question was similar to that asked of the Fire Chiefs, it did provide a few additional comments and ideas. The most common answers to this question are as follows:

Fair method for cost share	Employee Issues
EMS Services Studies	Operational Effectiveness
Contracted Feasibility Study	Evaluation of department activities

## Evaluation of Duplications

Would new dept. become Taxing Authority?

### Fire Officers' Survey Question 5:

This question asked the Fire Officers to list key benefits that they were aware of in other fire department consolidations. Many of the same categories were identified in the survey as the Fire Chiefs' survey. Ideas not mentioned in the Fire Chiefs' survey are listed below:

Improved Staffing	Cost Savings
Cost Avoidance	Improved ISO Rate
Reduced Fleet Size	Common Training
Improved Incident Command Staffing Options	
Ability to meet NFPA Response Guidelines	

### Fire Officers' Survey Question 6:

The Fire Officers were asked about what they felt would be the actual outcomes of a consolidation of Milwaukee County Suburban Fire Departments. Ideas not mentioned in the Fire Chiefs' survey are listed below:

Improved response times	Improved staffing
More defined roles	Improved performance standards
Improved staff deployment	Labor problems
Eliminate call-backs	Cost saving on apparatus/equipment
Better distribution of resources	

### Fire Officers' Survey Question 7:

This question asked the Fire Officers to directly list their opinions on the pros and cons of consolidating the Suburban Fire Departments of Milwaukee County. These responses again were

very common with the Fire Chiefs responses with some variance. Those responses different from the Fire Chiefs are listed:

Pros:

Deeper pool of resources

Improved staffing

Consistent SOP/SOG

Common training program

Improved moral

Improved expertise/experience

Improved dispatching

Additional staffing at large events

Use of shift commanders

Cons:

Loss of “Home Rule”

Equipment consistency

Loss of identity

Labor issues

Gaining agreement

Lowering standards for some

Change

Political interference

**Personal Interviews**

The personal interviews provided information from key leaders of the Wauwatosa Fire Department, Fire Chief of the North Shore Fire Department, Wauwatosa City Officials, and the Milwaukee County Executive. They provided valuable positions on the fundamental aspects of this research.

When questioned on his views of duplication of Fire and EMS services in the southern suburbs of Milwaukee County, Chief Redman (personal communication, July 1, 2004), asserted, “Duplication exists in several areas such as dispatch, Hazardous Materials Response, and Technical Rescue”, Chief Redman continued, “These aspects could be much better administered in a larger organization.” When looking at the functions of duplicated services, Chief Redman stated (personal communication July, 2004), “It is highly inefficient to train, manage, and equip

several small groups to do these functions.” Chief Redman (personal communication, July, 2004) addressed the response to large incidents and the ability of many small departments verses one larger department, “I believe this is an aspect that would offer the most significant improvement to service provided to the public.” Chief Redman was asked to discuss the criteria needed to judge the effectiveness of a consolidation and he reported (personal communication, July 2004), “The cost factor must always be considered but is not necessarily the deciding factor.” He continued, “Other studies on consolidation show that often there is no cost reduction but there is generally major improvement in service.” Continuing on his position relating to improved service, Chief Redman (personal communication, July 2004) suggests, “If analysis shows that the service improvements are a good value based on the new costs, consolidation is a viable option.” In trying to uncover the benefits for a consolidation of the southern suburbs of Milwaukee County, Chief Redman offered this important note, “This will have different answers depending on the specific departments to be included in consolidation”, he went on to outline specific benefits from the various consolidation groupings that have been discussed in the southern Milwaukee County suburbs for many years and how each smaller consolidation may have different benefits to each community (personal conversation, July 2004). The Chief was questioned on the current situation where small pockets of departments are discussing small consolidations with only two or three departments involved. Chief Redman had a lot to say on this situation, he stated (personal conversation, July 2004), “To me, the classic example of a consolidation is the North Shore Fire Department, making one large merger at once provided for a complete new identity that allowed the department to more effectively meet challenges it faced.” He also made it clear, “That move took forward thinking individuals to see that the end result would be better than the sum of its components,” (personal conversation, July 2004). In

addressing the likelihood of a long-term outcome of a large consolidation, the Chief stated “Well thought out plans to consolidate fire service will continue to be a benefit”, he further stated, “We live in an urban community but we still think like small towns” (personal conversation, July 2004). Chief Redman was asked to give his view on the reluctance that a consolidation effort will most likely face; he looked at it in two ways, the effect from Fire Chiefs and the effect from elected officials. He explained (personal conversation, July 2004), “Probably the strongest reluctance will be fire chiefs,” he continued with, “Chiefs will resist consolidation because the department they know will disappear.” On the elected official side Chief Redman felt (personal conversation, July 2004), “Elected officials will be reluctant because of a fear of loss of control”, then he added “since history shows there is seldom significant money savings, elected officials may not be motivated to make the move to a consolidation.” And finally Chief Redman makes this important comment (personal conversation, July 2004), “If you can show improvements without new costs, elected officials may support the change.”

Chief David Berousek was interviewed to reveal his opinions on the subject of consolidation of fire services within the southern suburbs of Milwaukee County. In discussing criteria to study consolidation, Chief Berousek commented (personal conversation, July 2004), “Studies should focus on the need to improve service, the notion that consolidations have to show economical cost savings should be secondary”. The Chief explained the benefit of responders working from one set of operational guidelines when he said (personal conversation, July 2004), “You have one set of Standard Operational Guidelines, this allowed Firefighters to operate much more aggressively and more successfully”. He did warn, “The new standards will bring most departments up but can bring some departments down.” The Chief was questioned on the current ability to respond to large incidents that would currently require most departments in

the southern suburbs to respond, Chief Berousek commented (personal conversation, July 2004), “The consolidated department would have greater depth, all trained to the same standard or level, allowing higher performance.” When asked to explained what he felt would be the biggest obstacle to consolidation, he responded (personal conversation, 2004), “Individual ego’s and misguided perception of ownership.” The Chief listed the key outcomes that could be expected from consolidating the fire departments of the southern suburbs of Milwaukee County (personal conversation, 2004), “Level of proficiency will improve and quality of employees will be elevated”. In closing, Chief Berousek added (personal conversation, July 2004), “Consolidation on a large scale is a real opportunity to improve on the service that we are employed to provide.”

To help answer the research questions the Wauwatosa City Administrator, Mr. Thomas Wontorek was interviewed. He was asked whether he felt that duplication of services existed among the southern Milwaukee County Fire Departments. Mr. Wontorek stated (personal conversation, July 2004), “If you ask whether fire departments in other neighboring cities provide services similar to those provided in Wauwatosa, I would say that there are.” Mr. Wontorek was asked to explain under what condition that he would recommend a consolidation, he suggests:

In order for me to recommend a consolidation of fire departments, we would have to see one or more of the following conditions: acute service reductions due to budgetary constraints or inability of current staff to meet operational requirements without significant added cost (personal conversation, July 2004).

The City Administrator did point out this, “Before recommending consolidation of departments, I would prefer to consider consolidation of specific services.” When asked what the key on benefit(s) of consolidation of Fire/EMS services he simply stated (personal conversation, July

2004) “Increased service levels without significant added cost.” Mr. Wontorek was asked to compare the consolidation of the North Shore suburbs with a potential consolidation of the southern Milwaukee County Suburbs. He was asked if he felt the North Shore consolidation was successful and could a successful consolidation happen in the southern suburbs, he reported (personal conversation, July 2004), “the North Shore consolidation seems to have worked,” he continued:

One key element was the willingness of the smaller communities who did not have paid fire personnel to absorb the greater cost of a share of full time personnel in exchange for improved service levels. In times of fiscal restraint, other municipalities near Wauwatosa may not be able to absorb increased cost (personal conversation, July 2004).

At the end of the interview, Mr. Wontorek was asked about his expected outcome of a successful consolidation, he suggests, “The outcome should be improved service levels and accountability without significantly increased cost.”

Wauwatosa Mayor Estness was interviewed for her perspective of the issue of fire department consolidation in effort to help answer the research questions. During the interview, an area of strong importance to the Mayor was the issue of current EMS delivery. The mayor stated (personal conversation July, 2004), “We need to look at the communities that offer like services and direct changes that could affect savings.” When discussing her general views of a consolidation of Fire/EMS services with the southern suburbs of Milwaukee County, the Mayor said (personal conversation, July 2004), “It makes sense if there is parity from a fiscal and policy standpoint,” she continued, “Historically, we have worked well together, we have similar cultures but, the Milwaukee Fire Department is different, I don’t see similar culture or expect parity.” The Mayor described what she felt would need to be achieved in a consolidation, she

said (personal conversation, July 2004), “The challenge is to enhance service and not cost more.” As for her expectations in regard to a consolidation, the Mayor pointed out (personal conversation, July 2004), “Ideally, we would enhance current services and add new services at a lower cost.” When asked if she would support a multi-community feasibility study to consolidate the southern suburbs of Milwaukee County, Mayor Estness suggested (personal conversation, July 2004), “The only way to determine whether a consolidation is good for Wauwatosa is to study it.”

The Milwaukee County Executive was asked if he believed that duplication of services existed within the southern suburbs of Milwaukee County, his response was (personal communication, July 2004), “Yes, absolutely. I would think that this is particularly true in the administrative hierarchy.” The County Executive was also questioned on the need to study consolidation, his reply (personal communication, July 2004), “Start with reconfigured response zones to gain efficiencies. This could/should lead to investigation of more efficient deployment of equipment, manpower and administrative overhead. Of course cost analysis is also key.” As for the role of County government on this issue the response was:

Milwaukee County spends over \$7 million annually in County tax levy to support the EMS program. With the financial crisis that the county is facing, it is a very real possibility that this level of support may not be sustainable in the future. A reduction in EMS service costs should be a serious consideration in any consolidation study (personal communication, July 2004).

The County Executive also recommended this very interesting idea:

In addition, the County runs a fire department at the Airport, and I would encourage including this in any feasibility study with the possibility that a consolidated fire service

of this type could contract with the Airport to provide appropriate service at a cost that would give Milwaukee County a reason to consider joining into this consolidation plan (personal communication, July 2004).

Mr. Walker was asked for his opinion on a consolidation that did not save money but improved service, the response was blunt:

If such a consolidation study did not find ways to save significant money, then I would consider the study to have been compromised. I would not recommend entering into such a study without an absolute bottom line requirement that it save significant money (personal communication, July 2004).

#### Question #1

Where does duplication of Fire/EMS systems exist in Milwaukee County suburban departments?

The research found that duplication of Fire/EMS services does exist in Milwaukee County suburban fire departments. The actual answer to this question did not receive full agreement in the survey; only 60% of the Fire Chiefs believed duplication of services existed while 90% of the Fire Officers felt there was duplication. The Literature Review supported the belief that duplication of services existed. When looking more closely, it was learned that areas of duplication at a minimum, could be found and categorized in the following areas:

- Management Functions and Administrative Services
- Fire Prevention and Code Enforcement
- Training
- Apparatus and Equipment Inventories and Repairs
- Fire/EMS Response & Dispatch Capabilities and use of available labor pool
- Special Response Teams such as Hazardous Materials and Technical Rescue

## Question #2

What criteria should be used when studying a consolidation of Fire/EMS services? The research found that there are no specific criteria used for studying Fire/EMS consolidations. What was found is most local consolidation studies had been developed to answer specific local issues or concerns and often are weighted in one direction or another. The study did find one criteria or plan that seemed to be followed in many of the feasibility studies reviewed. These elements should be considered the fundamental steps in studying consolidation. In their text *Making the Pieces Fit* (Snook and Johnson, 1997), the three key components to determine whether departments should proceed with consolidation are:

- A complete evaluation of each organization involved
- The writing of the feasibility report at the conclusion of the evaluation
- The development of implementation strategies with time lines, which includes a strategic plan (p.65)

## Question #3

What benefits have other jurisdictions obtained by consolidation? The research found consistent answers for determining what benefits other departments have obtained by consolidating Fire/EMS services. The benefits could be summarized and listed in the following categories:

1. Cost Savings: larger purchase power for apparatus, equipment/facilities, lowering of ISO rates, reduced overall fleet size, reduced equipment inventory, reduction in multiple purchases of seldom used required equipment.
2. Improved training programs.
3. Improved EMS delivery systems.
4. Capability to provide special teams such as Hazardous Materials and Special Rescue.

5. Additional administrative support services.
6. Improved staffing and the ability to use a larger labor pool to meet immediate needs.  
Ability to meet NFPA standards.
7. Improved Fire Prevention Services.

#### Question #4

What outcomes can be expected from a consolidation of Fire/EMS Departments in Suburban Milwaukee County? From reviewing the literature and responses from the local Fire Chiefs and Chief Officers, the research found numerous detailed items that could be expected as outcomes of a consolidation of Fire/EMS Departments in Suburban Milwaukee County. A list of the most common expected outcomes is as follows:

1. Improved response times
2. Standardized training
3. Improved communications
4. Reduced fleet and equipment size
5. Improved incident command, accountability and firefighter safety
6. Cost savings on future apparatus and equipment
7. Cost avoidance
8. Better defined roles for personnel
10. Improved staffing and deployment
11. Elimination of callbacks
12. Improved performance standards
13. Labor problems
14. Loss of local control

## Summary of Results

The research determined that duplication of Fire/EMS services exist in the southern suburbs of Milwaukee County. This duplication is somewhat objective and in some cases not fully agreed on. The research has listed the common areas of duplication and found that in many cases major department functions are involved. To determine the “right” method of criteria to be used when studying consolidation, many options were found but a simple plan was discovered and described. This three-step process was followed for the most part in many feasibility studies reviewed. When determining the benefits of consolidations, an abundant amount of different benefits were found and listed. The research provided many examples of these benefits yet only a proper study of the effected departments would validate the results of this research. The results also found an abundance of what could be called positive expected outcomes. While the list of positive out comes was quite long, the list of negative outcomes was quite short, however, very significant. A fact of the results was the poor response to the survey by the Fire Chiefs. This poor response was unexpected and does seem to signal the seriousness of the issues to many of the communities and leaders involved. This concern was not expected yet is worth mentioning because it may signal an underlying environment. While a project of this seriousness is expected to be difficult and challenging, when faced with the potential for service improvements and cost savings identified in this research, a study is warranted. Therefore, a proposal to the Fire Chief of the City of Wauwatosa will be forwarded with this research project. This proposal will summarize the findings of this research and suggest the Fire Chief begin the process of determining interest in the consolidation of the southern communities of Milwaukee County Fire/EMS services (see Appendix E).

## DISCUSSION

Johnson and Snook (1997) clearly state, “Consolidation allows for better use of scarce resources, the reduction of duplicative efforts and greater staff flexibility and capability” (p.17). Johnson & Snook (1997) also suggested, “Duplication is one of the most common indicators that will prompt fire chiefs to consider developing a formal relationship with a neighboring organization.” In the research, duplication seemed to be seen consistently by those surveyed or interviewed. Those that did not feel duplication existed primarily came from two specific departments in the survey. The other observation was that those outside of the fire department were not keenly aware of what services may or may not exist. Elsass writes (2003), “The perception was that local governments literally were ‘tripping’ over each other by providing duplicative services to citizens that could be served better by a unified, regional approach to service delivery” (p.4). This view has been a very popular stance by many politicians and the media within the last few years in the State of Wisconsin. In the text *A Systematic Approach to Fire Service Consolidations and Mergers* (1990), “Systems exist immediately adjacent to one another, each with a complete and many times, duplicated set of resources” (p.1). This is true in the southern suburbs of Milwaukee County and can be seen in such things as Hazardous Materials teams as possibly the best example. Almost all of the ten fire departments in the southern Milwaukee County have some form of Hazardous Materials Team for Level “B” Responses, considering that collectively, basic equipment and thousands of hours of training each year is duplicated in each department for only a small number of incidents each year. These resources could be pooled at a very large cost savings as reported consistently in the surveys. Another primary example would be the training function, six of the ten communities fund a Staff Officer position to meet training needs, this is redundant and ultimately produces significant

variances in the way neighboring departments operate. Comments in the surveys stressed how this can also lead to inconsistency at multi-agency responses, which have become almost daily events. The research largely agreed both in the literature review, surveys and personal interviews that these resources could be redirected for the better good. Johnson & Snook (1997) explain in detail, “Eliminating duplication is a very powerful argument for proposing intergovernmental cooperation. Those areas being duplicated are easy to identify and the cost savings and efficiencies gained by eliminating the duplication are easy to project” (p.46), to support this view the survey of both Chiefs and Chief Officers listed numerous examples of duplication. Kamrath (1994) added, “Maintaining separate fire departments results in the duplication of services, administrative tasks, and responses and does not allow as much specialization” (p.14). Kamrath (1994) elaborates:

Specialization of various functions also is a consideration as smaller departments cannot afford full-time training or code enforcement and arson investigation personnel. There is also a reduction in the redundancy of personnel. As the organizations join, each department does not need someone to play the role of fire chief, fire marshal, training officer, etc. This allows better utilization of personnel resources, which in turn allows for the specialization of personnel (p. 14).

It was suggested in the surveys that redirection of the duplicated efforts and related cost could be focused on improved staffing and more efficient administrative functions. Johnson & Snook (1997) wrote, “Common duplications include: dispatching, apparatus maintenance facilities, training centers, and the development and staffing of specialty teams such as hazardous materials teams urban search and rescue, and dive rescue teams” (p.102). This view is consistent with the Fire Chiefs and Chief Officers with the extensive lists they provided in the survey instrument.

The research looked at what criteria are needed to properly evaluate a consolidation of Fire/EMS services. The research found many different criteria. In her article *Consolidation: Two Experts Offer a Positive Approach* (National Fire Rescue 1996), Wagner writes, “A feasibility study can be conducted by your own department or by a consultant. And anybody that has ever been through the process will tell you that a clear direction and set of goals mapped out in advance is a key to success” (p. 22). In the survey of the Fire Chiefs, many criteria not listed in the literature review were listed. Many departments had been through professional and local studies. The various criteria was closely related to existing local issues that had already been studied such as dispatch studies, EMS delivery studies and often listed were “in-house” evaluations that may or may not have followed professional feasibility study models. A good example of criteria or a professional model for studying feasibility was found in *Fire Chief Magazine* (Thomas, 1994):

Consolidation model:

- \* Determine feasibility
- \* Form and activate advisory group
- \* Identify key needs, issues, requirements, and constraints
- \* Develop goals and objectives
- \* Establish criteria for selecting programs and approaches
- \* Develop and analyze alternative programs and approaches
- \* Formulate an action plan
- \* Implement the plan
- \* Monitor implementation (p.105-106)

The research also discovered the writings of Elsass (2003) as a guide to communities considering consolidation or merger of any public services. In his work, the Elsass' report (2003) was not just limited to Fire/EMS, it included many other common government services such as recycling, police protection, library, parks and recreation and waste water to name a few. Elsass (2003) listed the following as his "Best Practices and Financial Lessons Learned"

- XIII. A private feasibility study may be the best starting point
- XIV. Consider appointing a joint advisory board to review service options
- XV. Have a clear vision and firm objectives in mind before the proposal goes public
- XVI. Error on the side of maximum public participation before adoption
- XVII. Well-crafted legal agreement may prevent future problems
- XVIII. Agreements should contain clear and equitable funding formulas covering members obligations
- XIX. Appoint permanent joint administrative boards to monitor service levels, personnel and finances
- XX. Include key personnel in the planning and transition process
- XXI. Most joint operations require a fiscal agent
- XXII. Conduct a complete appraisal of all participants' assets before merging
- XXIII. Consider a "dissolution" or "disbanding clause" in case things do not work out as planned
- XXIV. A mandatory cooling off period prior to dissolution is a good idea

Financial Lessons Learned:

- V. Mergers do not always create short-term savings
- VI. Results must be judged on a 3-5 year basis or longer

VII. Functional consolidations often continue to prevent long-term inefficiencies and higher services costs

VIII. Fiscal savings come from several sources(p.6-10)

McCormack (2000) encourages communities to ask certain questions of themselves before beginning the study process:

Questions to ask yourself:

- How can I "sell" the idea to the troops?
- Is there a way to measure the effectiveness of the newly organized department?
- What about deployment issues, i.e., how many people are assigned to each company...How many companies respond to different types of alarm...etc.?
- How does fire research relate to consolidation?
- What effect will consolidation have on responses?
- Are any other measures necessary to improve fire safety in a consolidated jurisdiction? (p 22).

These comprehensive examples given were superior to the material discovered in the surveys or personal interviews.

When comparing the results with the findings of the surveys and personal interviews regarding expected benefits there seemed to be little difference. McGrath (1995) makes this important point, "An advantage often overlooked is the future cost avoidance communities might realize" (p.29). This opinion was also seen by many of the respondents to the survey and also in the personal interview with Chief Berousek of the North Shore Fire Department. Chief Berousek for example, commented on balancing the appropriate number of various resources and facilities and explained how one governing unit now purchases one object/service and shares it throughout

the seven communities. “Previously, all seven communities would purchase the same object/service and often only use it sparingly” (personal conversation, July 2004). Giorgio commented (2000), “Stronger Incident Command: Before consolidation, company officers at times had to operate as incident commanders, which reduced the number of people available to fight the fire. The on-duty BC now responds and commands all significant incidents” (p.3). The survey results expected the same benefits. Some respondents commented on the ability to respond in a more coordinated attack, something that the smaller communities cannot currently do. To determine what benefits other jurisdictions have realized, the research found numerous examples of benefits. Johnson and Snook (1997) suggests:

Consolidation improves the efficiency and effectiveness of fire departments. It allows for better use of scarce resources, the reduction of duplicative efforts and greater staff flexibility and capability. It can improve service levels, allow departments to develop specialized and dedicated divisions such as public education, fire prevention, urban rescue teams and hazardous materials response teams, while also creating stronger internal programs (p. 17).

These thoughts were again echoed by the respondents especially those found in the Officers’ Survey. They agreed that training would improve, responses would bring more resources and that administrative staff would be less fragmented.

The expected outcomes from a consolidation of Fire/EMS services are very consistent between both the research and the specific findings. McGrath (1995) explained, “Some public officials feel that they are giving up local prerogatives when they agree to cooperate with another jurisdiction; this is particularly true when the service is relatively controversial and unstandardized” (p.40). Most of the respondents to the surveys seem to feel the same way by listing “loss of local control” as one of their expected outcomes. This view is continued by

Johnson and Snook (2000), “the big four- turf, politics, power and control. They are real, tangible and visible and they are the cause of most cooperative effort failed attempts” (p. 97). In review of the responses, it was hard not to see two views. Respondents either strongly supported looking at consolidation and a few seem to feel strongly that it was not necessary. In the text *Managing Fire Services* (1988), the authors explain, “The primary disadvantage of consolidation is the perceived loss of local control, and this has been the reason why consolidation is frequently opposed by individual departments as well as by local politicians” (p. 439). From the responses, it would be easy to see that gaining agreement from the Fire Chiefs would be most difficult on the issue of consolidation. Johnson and Snook (1997) simply state, “Tragically, most failures are the result of some form of personal sabotage” (p.105). This extreme view was not listed in the surveys or explained during the interviews yet by the low number of responses to the Chiefs’ surveys, one could draw correlating conclusions. The expected outcomes were not all negative in nature, Giorgio (2000) reported, “Streamlined purchasing procedures saved thousands of dollars through joint purchasing” (p. 107). He continued, “Sold surplus vehicles, reduced the overall age of the fleet, replaced most of the light-duty fleet, and constructed a new maintenance facility” (p. 107). This view was shared by most respondents in both surveys with numerous examples given. The Fire Officers seemed to be assured that improved operation functions would be an expected outcome. They mentioned more resources, common training and uniform operating guidelines. Chief David Berousek (personal conversation, July 2004) listed improved Incident Command and Control as a key benefit of the North Shore Consolidation of 1995. Giorgio (2000) agreed and identified the outcome of, “...development of Standard Operating Guidelines for the uniform operation of the forces” (p.107) as a major benefit. The text *A systematic Approach to Fire Service Consolidation* (1990), advised, “Without fire Chiefs

willing to support, the result will be failure” (p.8). This view was seen in the literature review and only hinted at in the surveys. Elsass (2003) asserts, “Strong local leadership was vital to win public acceptance” (p.5). From the interviews to the surveys, strong leadership on the concept of studying consolidation of Fire/EMS services in the southern Milwaukee County suburbs was not evident. Results indicate the unlikelihood of action.

### **Authors Interpretation**

When looking at the results, duplication of Fire/EMS services becomes quite obvious. The literature review outlined it and the surveys listed it. Duplication does exist in many ways within the southern suburbs of Milwaukee County. It is in eliminating these duplications that other possibilities are born. The criteria needed to effectively study consolidations are well documented in existing studies and reports that were discovered during the literature review. This is not referencing the existing local studies, rather the numerous studies that have been conducted from one end of the county to the other on fire department consolidations. The research showed some variance in criteria for a feasibility study but in reviewing existing professional consolidation reports, the industry seems to have developed standards that agree with the findings of this research. There is no question; the benefits that can be expected from a consolidation are extensive. This is what makes the prospect of a consolidation so encouraging. The research and findings listed numerous benefits that should be expected from consolidation with generally no disagreement. The outcome of a consolidation may have both pros and cons and both should be expected. Overall, outcomes of improved services and cost savings are realistic expectations. The research listed many factors that could create improved services. Unfortunately, the concerns for “loss of local control” and “turf protection” may ultimately control the likelihood of a study being requested.

## **Organizational Implication**

The primary organizational implication is that the current Wauwatosa Fire Department would cease to exist. In its place would be an organization that would produce an increase in services and this would ultimately benefit the community. The question of cost would need to be studied. From the interviews with the Mayor and City Administrator of Wauwatosa, it was made clear that for a consolidation to be acceptable, it would have to improve service and save money.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Wauwatosa Fire Department needs to lead a consortium of southern suburbs of Milwaukee County in investigating a feasibility study of consolidation of Fire/EMS services. The study should be a joint effort between the cities of Wauwatosa, West Allis, Greenfield, Franklin, Oak Creek, South Milwaukee, St. Francis and Cudahy and include the Villages of Hales Corners and Greendale. This study should also include Milwaukee County and the Milwaukee County Airport Fire Department.

The research found that duplication of Fire/EMS services does exist in many ways within the southern suburbs of Milwaukee County. Consolidation could eliminate much of this duplication, freeing-up money to be spent on centralizing, coordinating and improving overall delivery of Fire/EMS services. Duplication of services has drawn the ire from many political observers in the State of Wisconsin in the last few years as politicians attempt to control increasing municipal budgets and decreased revenues. A feasibility study of Fire Department consolidation would give those interested in government efficiency the ability to know whether their fire departments are efficient or not.

Consolidation of fire departments will result in improved services, yet the expectation of cost savings will only be determined by proper study. There are numerous models for feasibility studies available, at a minimum, the study should include:

- A complete evaluation of each organization involved.
- The writing of a feasibility report at the conclusion of the evaluation.
- The development of implementation strategies with time lines, which include a strategic plan.

This applied research project addressed a problem that potentially affects not just the Wauwatosa Fire Department but all fire departments within the southern suburbs of Milwaukee County. It is expected, by following these recommendations the Wauwatosa Fire Department can improve its response capabilities and possibly save money. It is anticipated by reviewing this research, it will be useful to other fire departments investigating ways to improve their services within their own departments. The recommendations here would be completely appropriate with many other fire departments.

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Appendix A

**Survey for National Fire Academy  
Executive Fire Officer Program Applied Research Project  
March 2004**

**Fire Chiefs Survey**

My name is William Q. Rice, Deputy Chief, Wauwatosa, Wisconsin Fire Department. I am working on an Applied Research Project for the National Fire Academy. My research paper will be studying the problem of duplication of Fire/EMS services and the viability of consolidation of Milwaukee County Suburban Fire Departments. Your assistance in answering the questions listed below is greatly appreciated. Please note, this study will concentrate on all Milwaukee suburban communities from Wauwatosa, south to Franklin, east to Oak Creek, and north to St. Francis. Please return the survey as an attachment by April 1, 2004.

1. Do you feel duplication of services exist within the Milwaukee County Suburban Fire Departments?

YES \_\_\_\_\_

NO \_\_\_\_\_

2. If you answered "Yes" to the previous question, list key examples:
3. Has your department studied fire department consolidation in the last ten years?

YES \_\_\_\_\_

NO \_\_\_\_\_

4. If YES: What information, criteria or systems did your department use to study consolidation.
5. What key benefits are you aware of in other fire department consolidations?
6. What outcomes would you expect from a consolidation of Milwaukee County suburban fire departments?
7. List any Pros or Cons that would result from consolidating the Suburban Milwaukee County Fire Departments.

Pros

Cons

**NOTE:**

I am very interested in your thoughts regarding this subject. Please feel free to add any comments that you feel may be helpful in the discovery of research on this subject.

Appendix B

**Survey for National Fire Academy  
Executive Fire Officer Program Applied Research Project  
March 2004**

**Fire Officers Survey**

My name is William Q. Rice, Deputy Chief, Wauwatosa, Wisconsin Fire Department. I am working on an Applied Research Project for the National Fire Academy. My research paper will be studying the problem of duplication of Fire/EMS services and the viability of consolidation of Milwaukee County Suburban Fire Departments. Your assistance in answering the questions listed below is greatly appreciated. Please note, this study will concentrate on all suburban communities from Wauwatosa, south to Franklin, east to Oak Creek, and north to St. Francis. Please return the survey as an attachment by April 1, 2004.

1. Do you feel duplication of services exist within the Milwaukee County Suburban Fire Departments?

YES \_\_\_\_\_  
NO \_\_\_\_\_

2. If you answered "Yes" to the previous question, list key examples:

3. Has your department studied fire department consolidation in the last ten years?

YES \_\_\_\_\_  
NO \_\_\_\_\_

4. If YES: What information, criteria or systems did your department use to study consolidation.

5. What key benefits are you aware of in other fire department consolidations?

6. What outcomes would you expect from a consolidation of Milwaukee County suburban fire departments?

7. List any Pros or Cons that would result from consolidating the Suburban Milwaukee County Fire Departments.

Pros  
Cons

**NOTE:**

I am very interested in your thoughts regarding this subject. Please feel free to add any comments that you feel may be helpful in the discovery of research on this subject.

## Appendix C

### **Proposal to the Fire Chief**

As a student of the National Fire Academy Executive Fire Officer Program, Deputy Fire Chief William Q. Rice of the Wauwatosa Fire Department, was responsible to write an Applied Research Project on a subject that would improve the students own organization (the Wauwatosa Fire Department). Students were asked to find a problem that currently affected their fire department. Deputy Chief Rice was compelled to study the issue of duplication of Fire/EMS services within the southern suburbs of Milwaukee County and consolidation of fire departments as a solution. The following is a formal proposal by Deputy Chief William Q. Rice to the Fire Chief of the City of Wauwatosa.

It is recommended that the Wauwatosa Fire Department lead a consortium of southern suburbs of Milwaukee County in investigating a feasibility study of consolidation of Fire/EMS services. The study should be a joint effort between the cities of Wauwatosa, West Allis, Greenfield, Franklin, Oak Creek, South Milwaukee, St. Francis and Cudahy and include the Villages of Hales Corners and Greendale. This study should also include Milwaukee County and the Milwaukee County Airport Fire Department for their inclusion.

The study should include:

- A complete evaluation of each organization involved.
- The writing of feasibility report at the conclusion of the evaluation.
- The development of implementation strategies with time lines, which include a strategic plan.