

**FEASIBILITY AND EFFICIENCY ANALYSIS OF A CONSOLIDATED FIRE
AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SYSTEM FOR ROCK COUNTY, WISCONSIN**

EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT

BY: James P. Jensen
Janesville Fire Department
Janesville, Wisconsin

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ABSTRACT

Consolidations in public safety have often been utilized as a means of improving efficiency. Due to depressed economic conditions in Wisconsin, the problem confronting the City of Janesville Fire Department was a significant loss of operating revenue. The purpose of this research project was to identify and analyze the fiscal, operational, and political advantages and disadvantages of a consolidated fire and emergency medical system for Rock County. Descriptive research methodology was used to address the following questions:

1. How do available case studies and other documentation on consolidations relate to a possible consolidation of fire and EMS service in Rock County?
2. Would a consolidation of fire and EMS service in Rock County result in overall financial savings to the county?
3. Would a consolidation of fire and EMS service in Rock County benefit service delivery or allow for other significant operational advantages?
4. What political ramifications can be predicted in a consolidation attempt, and does it appear that consolidation would be politically feasible in Rock County at this time?

Research procedures included a literature review, a survey of elected and municipal officials within Rock County, and personal correspondence with others involved in consolidation efforts. The research revealed several consolidation case studies characteristic of Rock County, and showed that a consolidation in Rock County would benefit service delivery and have operational advantages. This research did not show that a consolidated fire and EMS system in Rock County would result in overall financial

savings or that a complete operational consolidation would be politically feasible. It was recommended that (a) Rock County conduct a comprehensive analysis to determine what levels of fire, rescue, and emergency medical services are desired, (b) a detailed financial analysis be completed to determine if an operational consolidation would be advantageous, (c) potential incentives for consolidation provided by the State of Wisconsin be investigated, and (d) the Janesville Fire Department, collectively with all Rock County fire and EMS departments continue to pursue and expand cooperative agreements for functional consolidation.

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INTRODUCTION

In America, the responsibility for providing the services associated with public safety is primarily entrusted to individual states and communities. Most states, as is the case in Wisconsin, give local governmental units the authority to determine how they will deliver this vital service. Expenditures for public safety, including fire and emergency medical response, typically consume a significant portion of the annual budgeted expenditures for these local governments. To assist communities in providing public safety and other essential services, Wisconsin utilizes a shared revenue system. Historically, this “state-shared” revenue program returns to local governments nearly two-thirds of the tax revenue collected by the state.

The present economic climate in Wisconsin has threatened the existence of the current shared revenue program. Fearing the loss of this assistance, local governments have been required to contemplate service reductions and search for methods to improve efficiency. The problem confronting the City of Janesville Fire Department, as well as most other fire departments in Wisconsin, is a significant loss of operating revenue. Some state officials have criticized spending at the local government level, citing consolidations in public safety as a means of improving efficiency.

The Janesville Fire Department is one of ten fire departments currently operating independently in Rock County. Of these ten departments, nine also provide emergency medical service (EMS) or are affiliated with a private EMS provider in their community. The purpose of this research project is to identify and analyze the fiscal, operational, and political advantages and disadvantages of a consolidated fire and emergency medical system for Rock County. Research procedures include a literature review, a survey of

elected and municipal officials within Rock County, and personal correspondence with others involved in consolidation efforts. Descriptive research methodology is used to address the following questions:

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BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Janesville Fire Department serves the City of Janesville and three bordering towns located in the center of Rock County, Wisconsin. Eighty-six uniformed career personnel provide fire suppression, rescue, emergency medical, and fire prevention services to a population of approximately 65,000 in a 96 square mile area. Five stations are staffed with a daily minimum of 22 personnel. The department responded to 7,041 service requests in 2001, including 2,747 engine alarms and 4,294 EMS alarms. The annual operating budget for the department is \$7.2 million (City of Janesville, 2002).

Rock County is located in Southern Wisconsin, bordered by Illinois to the south. The two largest cities in the county are Janesville, population 60,775, and Beloit, population 35,918. Total Rock County population is 153,195. Both Beloit and Janesville

employ career fire departments; the other eight departments are combination, paid-on-call, or volunteer departments. Mutual Aid has existed formally within the county for many years. The practice of mutual aid was recently enhanced with the formation of a Mutual Aid Box Alarm System (MABAS) division within Rock County.

Most of the fire departments within Rock County have some type of agreement with a neighboring governing entity to provide service. Many of these agreements are renewed on a yearly basis. Several individual fire departments have formed fire districts with one or more of these adjacent communities. None of the districts formed have included more than one fire department, although a neighboring fire department may provide automatic aid or first response coverage to a portion of another fire district. Joint training sessions among departments are occasionally held, and there have also been some attempts at joint purchasing among fire departments in the county. Dispatch operations for all fire and police agencies in the county were consolidated in 1993 and are operated and funded by the county. A board of representatives from participating agencies has oversight responsibility for the dispatch management.

Consolidation of fire and EMS in Rock County has been discussed in the past, mainly in the southern portion of the county, between the City of Beloit and Town of Beloit. The Town of Beloit, like the city, also has a fire department. Using a combination of career and paid-on-call personnel, the town provides fire and EMS coverage to an area that borders and intertwines the city. For various reasons, consolidation attempts between the town and city, or among any of the other fire departments in the county, have been unsuccessful.

Former City of Beloit Fire Chief Jim Reseburg (1990) also studied the idea of consolidation for Rock County. He wrote, “If a consolidation effort is a feasibility for us, we need to address this issue before the issue is forced upon us... (p. i).

Wisconsin currently faces a growing budget deficit. Early in 2002, Governor Scott McCallum estimated the deficit to be \$1.1 billion. On January 22, 2002, McCallum presented his *Budget Repair Reform Act of 2002* to the state legislature. McCallum called his plan “the most sweeping, fundamental reforms in our government structure since Wisconsin became a state.” He proposed “a bold plan that completely restructures the state and local financial partnership...a plan that forces a major examination of how local governments are funded, organized, and provided services.” McCallum intended to decrease shared revenue payments over a two-year period, totally eliminating the funding in the 2004-2005 fiscal year.

Many public officials were critical of McCallum’s plan, and actively voiced their disapproval. State Senator Judy Robson commented that the governor was essentially “pinning groups against each other in a sort of negative feeling...firefighters against teachers, towns against cities and libraries against schools” (Jensen-De Hart, 2002, p. 1). McCallum’s cuts ultimately were not included in the budget bill signed in the summer of 2002. A compromise budget repair bill, known as Act 109, kept the state-shared revenue program intact through 2003. The governor chose to use \$831 million in one time revenue from Wisconsin’s share of a negotiated litigation settlement with the tobacco industry to fill most of the deficit (Witynski, 2002). However, using the tobacco settlement to fill the current deficit does not get to the root of the state’s economic

problems, and only postpones tough decisions until the next biennial budget period when the shared revenue program will no doubt be examined again.

In November of 2002, Governor Scott McCallum lost his bid for re-election to Wisconsin's former Attorney General Jim Doyle. Governor Doyle, in his first day in office, talked about the financial problems he was faced with. "The culture of ever increasing spending must stop," Doyle said. "We don't have the money to do even the things we should do" ("Doyle Pursues Cuts," 2003, p. 3B). Because spending continues to outpace revenue projections, Wisconsin's Legislative Fiscal Bureau has estimated that the state would enter the 2003-2005 biennium with a deficit of \$2.8 billion (Witynski, 2002). Doyle believes those estimates are too optimistic. "As I assume office today, I have been handed a staggering budget deficit of \$4.3 billion," Doyle said. "It shouldn't have happened, but it did, and I'm going to fix it" ("Doyle Pursues Cuts," 2003, p. 3B).

In the budget repair bill passed in July of 2002, former Governor McCallum did manage to salvage a portion of his original strategy for cutting expenditures. Act 109 cuts shared revenue in 2004 by \$40 million. It also removes up to \$45 million from the shared revenue program to fund a new local government consolidation incentive payment program (Witynski, 2002).

The state's dismal financial picture is having an effect on delivery of emergency services in the county. In the City of Janesville, a Fire Department Total Quality Management (TQM) Committee's five-year strategic plan has been put on hold pending a decision on the fate of the state-shared revenue program. The TQM plan called for adding staff to implement additional paramedic ambulances in the city due to increasing response times. The City of Beloit, facing possible drastic cuts in state aid, has been

forced to look at radical changes in service delivery, such as privatization of paramedic service. With this basis, an analysis of consolidation is not only warranted but essential.

This research is being conducted as a requisite component of the *Executive Development* course in the Executive Fire Officer Program of the National Fire Academy (NFA). The course content relates to a study of consolidation in a number of key areas. In a *Fire Chief Magazine* article on consolidation written several years ago, Chief Charles Rule (1992) had these observations about providing quality service in the future, “Some will face this as a problem, while others will see it as an opportunity. If the turf and ego mentality that has prevented progress in the past prevails, outsiders will determine the fire service’s future direction” (p. 33). Unit Four of the *Executive Development Student Manual* discusses managing organizational creativity. Regarding preoccupation with order and tradition the text states,

Order is important, even vital, but if everything happens according to plan, there is no innovation. Tradition and order usually go hand-in-hand because the most orderly way of doing something is to do it the way it was done before. This places excessive reverence on the past and creates conformity when it is not necessary, or even effective. While tradition produces stability, it may also produce stagnancy (NFA, 1998, p. SM 4-20).

Unit Seven of *Executive Development* includes relevant material on the topic of organizational culture (OC), and specifically, managing cultural change to ensure that the organization has its mission and supporting culture built around an emphasis on customer service, rather than being inwardly focused (NFA, 1998). In summation, the author

explains that “The executive leader is in a very influential position to influence the OC” (p. SM 7-14).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Consolidation Forms and Alternatives

There are various forms of fire department consolidation and alternatives to consolidation in use in the United States. Some of the alternatives are already in place in Rock County as cooperative agreements. Consolidation itself also offers a variety of alternatives. Snook and Johnson (1997) place consolidation into three main categories. In a partial consolidation, separate fire departments are retained, and a special agreement is formed to handle specific tasks or situations. The authors use as an example two departments sharing the staffing of a fire station located where it can serve two or more jurisdictions readily. In the second method, called functional consolidation, the departments retain independence as well, but one or more duties normally performed by each department are joined together and carried out as one organization. A joint training center is a common example. Entering into an agreement that allows one department to perform fire apparatus maintenance for another department would be another example. Consolidation of dispatch services is another common model of functional consolidation. In the third type, an operational consolidation, two or more separate departments join together operationally or administratively to form one organization. Snook and Johnson write that the entities remain legally separate, but deliver services as if they were one agency. The advantage of operational consolidation is that departments are normally permitted to deploy personnel and equipment across jurisdictional boundaries, improving efficiency and effectiveness.

Other sources describe an operational consolidation as one that joins departments through a legal process. Thomas and Campbell (1994), consider operational consolidation to be synonymous with a merger. Snook and Johnson (1997), believe that in a merger, departments take the final, legal step in the consolidation process. If the operational consolidation is successful the entities then unify by merging into one department, often with a new name. One advantage seen in a merger is that it forces the new department to develop a strategic plan, considering such issues as positioning of personnel and equipment, the purchasing of major equipment, and future service levels.

Mutual aid agreements can be considered an alternative to consolidation and are a valuable tool for ensuring adequate service coverage. MABAS, first created in 1968 in the northwest Chicago area suburbs, has grown to 42 divisions in Illinois and four in Wisconsin. All divisions are capable of sharing resources both within and outside of their respective divisions. According to a MABAS summary report issued in November of 2002, the system “is activated approximately 750 times per year by local communities dealing with emergency incidents of significance, but less than a Declaration of Disaster” (p. 2). A MABAS response is designed to request resources from various participating communities, while not depleting any one agency. This theory allows for response to routine emergencies while the major incident is dealt with. MABAS is an excellent system for the long-term, major incident. However, as Snook and Johnson (1997) offer in their research, the system is not intended to handle normal day-to-day emergency activity, since the closest unit may not be the unit dispatched. MABAS General Operating Procedures state that “MABAS is not intended to relieve a community of their

responsibilities of providing adequate emergency services for all local emergencies, since all communities should have their own first line of defense” (p. 1).

Automatic mutual aid agreements are usually a more specialized form of aid, designed specifically for two or three departments. Some automatic aid agreements even allow the closest unit to respond, regardless of jurisdictional boundaries. According to Snook and Johnson (1997), “this arrangement is an option to many departments as a first step toward a more permanent cooperative effort” (p. 17). They go on to explain that the automatic aid does not address the concerns of overlap and inefficient station locations.

The findings of this section of the review aided the overall research by more clearly defining the different types and levels of cooperative relationships that exist, including alternative forms of consolidation currently utilized in Rock County.

Consolidation Case Studies

Jensen and Snook (2000) estimated that in 1990 only about 20 to 30 consolidations were occurring nationwide. In 2000, they estimated that the number had increased to more than 500 consolidation efforts in various stages of development. In the article, California State Fire Marshal Ron Coleman was quoted as saying “There are approximately 950 fire departments in the State of California, and if the current rate of consolidations continues, by the year 2015 there could potentially be less than 250 fire departments” (p. 102). California was at the time losing up to 25 departments annually through consolidation.

Consequently, there is a tremendous volume of information available on various forms of consolidations, nationally and internationally, both successful and unsuccessful. This report discusses only a select few of the documented cases, more of which are available by reviewing the listed references.

In November of 1973, the Seminole County, Florida Board of Commissioners passed a fire protection ordinance establishing the Seminole County Fire Control District. This action was based on the recommendation of a citizens group studying the countywide fire protection problem. Newly appointed Chief Fire Administrator Gary Kaiser was given the task of preparing a proposal for a county fire department (Seminole Public Safety, 2003). Snook and Johnson (1997), comment that the primary factors in the creation of the county department were financial and political. The county was providing fire protection and a few cities were threatening to raise the contract fees. Also, a large portion of the county lacked adequate fire protection. The county chose to merge the six existing fire districts into one county department under county direction.

The Seminole County Fire Unit began operation the following October. According to fire department records, the department consisted of 67 personnel, with a budget of \$892,000.00. Initially it had nine fire stations staffed with two persons each. Four personnel using a radio console borrowed from the sheriff's office staffed the dispatch center. A department report goes on to explain,

This start was rather unconventional, as rented trucks were used for fire apparatus and mobile homes, space in a warehouse, and even a rented two-bedroom apartment served as fire stations. The Administration Office was assigned one office in the County Courthouse. During its first year of operation, the department

responded to approximately 2,800 alarms and was rated a 9/10 by the Insurance Services Office (ISO) department (Seminole Public Safety, 2003).

In 1975, reorganization in county government changed the Department of Fire Protection to the Department of Public Safety. Gary Kaiser was appointed Director and was now responsible for providing emergency fire, rescue, communications, emergency medical services, and disaster preparedness, for the unincorporated areas of the county. The budget increased to \$1.4 million dollars and the Seminole County's ISO rating was reduced from a Class 10 to Class 7, resulting in substantial savings for property owners (Seminole Public Safety, 2003). Seminole County received the National Association of Counties Award for Innovative Fire Protection Services for the year 1975. The following year, the department reports that Seminole County entered into a First Response Agreement with the City of Altamonte Springs Fire Department, providing for the automatic dispatch and response of fire and rescue units. The Seminole County Dive Team was formed that same year, in 1976.

The First Response Program between Seminole County and Altamonte Springs was a functional consolidation that began with shared dispatch services. The two departments later agreed to disregard jurisdictional boundaries and dispatch the closest emergency unit (Snook and Johnson, 1997). The next step was to strategically plan station locations together and jointly build new stations. The cooperation later progressed to apparatus purchasing and maintenance. Seminole County and Altamonte Springs essentially operated as one department, but Altamonte Springs chose to retain autonomy. The cities of Longwood, Casselberry, Winter Springs, Lake Mary, and Sanford, Winter Park, Maitland, and Orange County all joined the First Response Program in later years.

In 1989, the ISO rating for Seminole County Fire Rescue improved to Class 4. In 1999, Fire Station 65, a joint project between Seminole County, Orange County, and the University of Central Florida was placed into service (Seminole Public Safety, 2003).

The functional consolidation between the Altamonte Springs Fire Department and Seminole County Fire Rescue continued until 2002, when the two officially merged. With the addition of 72 members of the Altamonte Springs Fire Department, Seminole County Fire Rescue now includes a staff of 393 personnel (Seminole Public safety, 2003). The population of the county, according to 2001 Census Bureau estimates, is 374,334.

Seminole County Fire Rescue Administration reports that Gary Kaiser, who served as Director of Public Safety and Fire Chief since the inception of the Department, officially left his position with Public Safety in March of 1997 and was appointed County Manager for Seminole County (Seminole Public Safety, 2003). Kaiser comments on the consolidation in Snook and Johnson's research (1997), "Creating Seminole County has eliminated duplication...It provides service in the shortest amount of time possible because the city and county fire station locations and response coverage are seamless" (p.11).

Orange County Florida also was discussing consolidation and cooperating in functional areas in the mid-1970s. However, it wasn't until 1981 that the county commission merged the 14 fire departments in Orange County to form the Orange County Fire Department, known today as Orange County Fire Rescue. Up until that time, all 14 departments were part of separate fire control districts, each with elected Fire Commissioners overseeing fire operations. The decision was made to consolidate the

districts, creating one department to serve Orange County under the authority of the Board of County Commissioners (Orange County, 2003). Within three years, the new department's coverage area increased 22 percent, and the number of fire stations increased from 24 to 27. "Orange County greatly improved its level of service without inflating costs to the taxpayers, and even reduced insurance costs" (Snook and Johnson, 1997, p. 9). Orange County Fire Rescue history records state,

Now looking back, 20 years later, it has been proven that the consolidation was successful. The recent challenges of FireStorm 1998, Wildland Fires of 2000, numerous multi-alarm fires and Hazardous Material Alarms have proved the advantage of having one Professional Fire Department serving the citizens of Orange County. Orange County Fire Rescue has grown to be one of the best in the State of Florida and is among the best in the nation.

Orange County Fire Rescue now employs over 750 emergency response personnel. In 2000, the department responded to 77,000 emergency calls (Orange County, 2003). The reported population of Orange County is 923,311 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003).

The Poudre Fire Authority, Colorado, was organized in 1981 with the consolidation of the City of Fort Collins and the Poudre Fire Protection District. The Fort Collins area was growing rapidly. Planning for future services was difficult. A need for adequate response coverage was seen, but a duplication of resources was also apparent (Thomas and Campbell, 1994). The merger took place in stages, beginning with an automatic aid agreement, then consolidations of communications, training, operations, and finally, fire prevention functions. Chief John Mulligan commented, "the early

cooperative ventures were positive...having those joint programs in place was beneficial for all concerned” (Thomas and Campbell, 1994). The consolidation required action by the state legislature to allow such an agreement between entities representing different jurisdictional levels. Colorado now recognizes such an agreement by statute (Thomas and Campbell, 1994). Snook and Johnson (1997) estimated that the savings from the consolidation totaled \$1.25 million.

Thomas and Campbell (1994) comment that establishing the funding formula for The Poudre Fire Authority (PFA) was difficult. The funding is reviewed annually. Fort Collins pays the major share, which has ranged from 76 to 80 percent of the total, between 1981 and 2001 (PFA Budget, 2001). The district does not have taxing power, so funding comes from the parent jurisdictions in the form of property tax, sales tax, and user fees.

A five-person Board of Directors governs the PFA. Its members are two city council members and two district board members. The fifth member is chosen jointly by these four and has historically been the Fort Collins City Manager. The Board appoints the Fire Chief. John Mulligan has served in that position since the consolidation, and prior to that as the City of Fort Collins Fire Chief (PFA, 2001).

The PFA service area is 235 square miles with an estimated population of 156,608. Its 151 full-time employees staff nine fire stations. It additionally operates three volunteer fire stations with 40 volunteers. The district also serves the communities of LaPorte, Timnath and Bellvue, and responds to parts of Larimer and Weld counties. The estimated property value of the protected area is over \$12 billion. Requests for service

numbered 10,752 in 2001 (PFA, 2001). The PFA 2001 Annual Report shows the per capita fire protection cost at \$88.48, not including capital expenditures (PFA, 2001).

Chief Mulligan remarked that, “One of the benefits of consolidation is the ability to plan regionally and not have to locate stations simply by whatever the borders happen to be at a given time” (Snook and Johnson, 1997).

In 1995, seven Milwaukee area communities created the North Shore Fire District (Elsass and Kettlewell, 2001). The NSFD provides fire and emergency medical services to the communities of Bayside, Brown Deer, Fox Point, Glendale, Shorewood, Whitefish Bay, and River Hills. Total population served is approximately 69,000. This is the largest cooperative fire department in Wisconsin with 112 full-time fire fighters and six civilian positions (Elsass and Kettlewell, 2001).

The NSFD is termed a success today, but the consolidation was not a quick and easy process, according to those involved. Chief David Berousek told the Beloit Daily News that the idea of consolidation came up several times while he was the chief in Brown Deer before it finally became a reality. He commented that the district actually cost more in the short-term, but today residents are seeing savings and improved service (Munro, 1997).

Sammis B. White, Professor of Urban Planning and Center Scientist, Center for Urban Initiatives and Research at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee compiled a comprehensive report on the history of the consolidation process. In his report, *The Formation of the North Shore Fire Department: A Lesson in Intergovernmental Cooperation*, White (2002) states that the seven municipalities were brought together by a number of reasons. Glendale, Shorewood and Whitefish Bay saw a need to increase their

quality of service. These original three communities were actively pursuing consolidation, regardless of the other four. To make service improvements involved considerable added costs, if they were to proceed individually. If the costs could be shared over a larger population, everyone would benefit. That same rationale eventually persuaded all seven members to unite. Through the consolidation the communities have realized dramatically improved fire and rescue services at an overall reduction in costs, along with a significant reduction in fire insurance premiums.

White compiled a list of several “hurdles” that had to be overcome in the successful completion of the NSFD merger. The items are listed in an approximate order of their relative importance, according to the feedback received by several of the participants.

Overcoming the general desire for community autonomy

Accepting the notion that one’s own fire service is inadequate

Deciding what is “fair” for each community to pay

Fearing loss of service quality, response time, engines, and even stations

Procuring the acceptance of all of the fire chiefs that only one will be needed

Procuring the acceptance of the existing fire fighters to work in a different setting

Creating sufficient trust among the communities that they will take chances

Including enough parties in the discussions to build consensus

Accepting the possibility that individual communities may pay more for service

Creating a truly consolidated department from the disparate elements

Creating a governing mechanism that is acceptable to all communities (p. 10).

The communities selected a consultant, Tri-Data, from Alexandria, Virginia, who determined the feasibility of the consolidation. The group's report was titled *North Shore Communities Fire Services Planning Project* (1994). White notes that,

not only did the firm have experience in such efforts, it had staff that was extremely knowledgeable. The individual consultant from Tri-Data who took charge quickly established rapport with and respect from everyone including the fire fighters because he knew so much about fire fighting (p. 14).

To ensure that the needs of each community would be met, a governing board had to be created that would be acceptable to all. Each community had the feeling it was giving up control. A seven-member board consisting of the village presidents or their designees was selected to govern the NSFD. This group is responsible for monitoring the operations and operating budget of the district. A separate Fire commission is appointed to handle personnel issues. In 2001, the board hired its own comptroller to manage finances. Originally the consulting firm recommended that staffing levels should be at 124 full time positions. The district began with 110 positions and has added nine additional since its inception (Elsass and Kettlewell, 2001).

At issue in the NSFD structuring was the formula used to apportion costs to the participating communities, and concerns for future cost increases following approval of the consolidation agreement. The language of the contract contains very definitive cost control language:

The annual percentage increases in the total operating budget and the capital budget of the North Shore Fire Department will not exceed the lesser of
(a) the percentage of the U.S. Urban CPI (Consumer Price Index), or...

(b) the limit for increases in municipal budgets certified by the Wisconsin Department of Revenue for purposes of Section 79.05, Wisconsin Statutes (Expenditure Reduction Act).

Plus, in each case, one-half (½) of one percent (0.5%) (Elsass and Kettlewell, 2001, p. 3).

Insurance ratings for residential, commercial, and manufacturing properties in the district have been upgraded since the consolidation. Four communities that had previously been graded by the Insurance Services Office (ISO) as Class 4 were upgraded to Class 2, and one community improved from Class 5 to Class 2. The other two villages that previously were rated at Class 8 and Class 9 were able to improve to Class 5. While the improved ratings offered no direct financial benefit to the municipalities, they have saved millions in dollars in annual insurance premiums for property owners in the district (Elsass and Kettlewell, 2001, p. 4).

The NSFD received the 1995 Salute to Local Government Shared Service Innovation Award from the Public Policy Forum. The group stated, "This is an example of how shared services and political collaboration among seven municipalities can produce improved fire protection for all of their residents....It is a model for others to follow" (North Shore Fire District, 2002).

Chief Berousek recommended consolidation in his interview. He said, "It works here. There's not a lot of reasons why it shouldn't work anywhere. If you can put aside your personal ego, it can be good for all parties" (Munro, 1997).

The Wisconsin cities of Neenah and Menasha completed a consolidation of fire departments on January 1, 2003. The city of Neenah has a population of 24,507, while

Menasha has a population of 16,785 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). Both cities have experienced steady growth, and continue to annex property for retail, manufacturing, and residential development. Neenah Fire Chief Len Vander Wyst felt that in order to improve or even maintain service levels, the fire department needed to add staff. Vander Wyst also felt pressure and a responsibility to control costs (personal communication, January 21, 2003). In a 2001 research project for the NFA, Chief Vander Wyst discussed the working relationship between the two departments. As far back as 1977, the departments have used automatic mutual aid to enhance response capabilities for both departments. The system essentially allows for automatic response to structure fires in each community with an engine company and personnel from the other community. The departments have also participated in joint training activities. During a City of Neenah fire station remodeling project, three firefighters were housed temporarily at a City of Menasha station. This cooperative effort allowed Neenah to keep response times to a minimum.

Vander Wyst (2001) noted that it was possible that other services could also be provided more efficiently through consolidation, including confined space and heavy rescue, building inspection services, and an opportunity to expand emergency medical services. He stated, "Separately, neither department has the human resources necessary to provide for these future services" (p. 10). The Chief recommended an operational consolidation rather than functional only. The major advantages predicted for both communities in a full consolidation rather than a functional consolidation were the ability to share administration, staffing, and equipment resources.

A Neenah-Menasha Fire Consolidation Study Committee met in the summer of 2001. Part of their discussions centered around a new National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standard on staffing. Comments were made supporting and negating the value of attempting to comply with the standard. Menasha Mayor Joe Laux remarked, “If we really do need to add the staff to meet the standards and that becomes a true objective, then it really makes a lot of sense to avoid those extra costs [and consolidate].” Neenah Alderman George Scherck agreed. “We could meet those standards better consolidated,” he said. “We couldn’t meet them at all, individually” (King, Post Crescent, 2001).

Chief Vander Wyst felt that the overall consolidation process went as smoothly as could be expected. Every attempt was made to make the process as “politically acceptable” as possible. Both fire fighter unions were involved from the beginning. The forming of a fire district was ruled out. Both cities retain control over the joint department, through the wishes of the two city councils. The final negotiated funding formula is directly proportional to each city’s respective budget prior to the consolidation. Vander Wyst is convinced that the consolidation will fulfill his original intent of improving service and holding down costs to the taxpayer (personal communication, January 21, 2003).

The Town of Caledonia Fire Department, in Racine County, Wisconsin, operates out of three stations with a paid staff of forty firefighters. According to Fire Chief Pete Waselchuk, Caledonia has an excellent relationship with the neighboring Mt. Pleasant Fire Department. In 1999 the two departments opened a new fire station together. The chief commented that both departments have been flexible in solving political and

logistical differences in order to better serve their respective communities (personal communication, January 21, 2003).

Chief Waselchuk is an advocate of complete operational consolidation, and has recently started working toward that goal. His reasons are mainly to improve service through an increase in staffing, but his department also has seen severe budgetary restraints. When promoting the consolidation efforts, the emphasis is being place on providing quality service, rather than cost savings. However, Waselchuk feels that there will be some savings realized, mainly through an overall reduction in administrative expenses. The chief is hoping for a smooth merger. Both the Caledonia and Mt. Pleasant Town Boards have worked closely in the past, and the labor unions from both fire departments have had involvement in the process (personal communication, January 21, 2003).

A merger is also being studied in the Wausau, Wisconsin area. A report from the Wausau Area Fire and Ambulance Consolidation Steering Committee was recently released which proposed full-time staff in all of the participating communities. Robert W. Baird and Co. assisted the committee with the financial consulting. Participating municipalities include Wausau, Weston, Rib Mountain, Schofield, and Rothschild. The Wausau Daily Herald reported the cost estimates for the proposed district to be \$1.88 per thousand of assessed value. This amounted to a 20 percent decrease for Wausau taxpayers. Wausau is currently the only one of the five communities involved that has continuous, full-time staffing. Each of the other communities would pay more after the consolidation, but would see significant improvements in emergency response times (Peckham, 2002).

Wausau Assistant Fire Chief Mike Pierce was pleased with the outcome of the study. Pierce commented, “We’re looking at four-minute to six-minute response times within 90 percent of the coverage area.” He predicted that some of the property owners who would pay more for the improved service would see some savings due to lowered insurance premiums (Peckham, 2002).

After the final report from the committee was released, several of the participants decided not to proceed with the consolidation. Assistant Chief Pierce cited “political” issues, rather than just costs, as the reason for the failure. One of the communities with a volunteer department decided against the proposal, which would have provided them with a full-time staff of five, including full-time paramedic coverage. The additional cost to that municipality would have been \$.30 per thousand (personal communication, January 22, 2003).

Pierce thought the committee’s plan was a good one, and that the benefits to each community were clear. Although the first attempt was unsuccessful, two of the communities are still discussing a merger, and he believes that some form of consolidation will take place in the Wausau area within the next several years (personal communication, January 22, 2003).

The information that was gathered relating to other consolidations influenced this project in a number of ways. The number of consolidations that are occurring and the volume of documentation that was available indicated that consolidation is very prevalent. The findings illustrated that cooperative efforts have been successful for many years, in various parts of the country, and in many different sized departments. Many situations were discovered comparable with conditions existing in Rock County.

Research also established that there were numerous areas of concern present in consolidation efforts, and that not all consolidation efforts have been successful.

Personal interviews were conducted with City of Neenah Fire Chief Len Vander Wyst, Town of Caledonia Fire chief Pete Waselchuk, and City of Wausau Assistant Fire Chief Mike Pierce. These three were selected due to their close involvement in consolidation efforts in each of their respective communities. Their topical personal experiences helped to support and substantiate other documentation. The research showed that these consolidation initiatives were among the most recent examples available among Wisconsin communities.

Following is a brief review of several issues relevant to this research that were prevalent in most, if not all of the consolidation cases studied.

Financial Considerations

Financial considerations were a predominant factor in all consolidation efforts researched. A potential advantage of consolidation is economies of scale. The concept of economies of scale refers to a decrease in average cost as the quantity of output rises. Regarding consolidation, the term refers to a decrease in cost per person for a given amount of service as population served increases (Fisher, 1996). Cost savings can also be realized by reducing duplication of personnel and equipment, through joint purchasing agreements, and through savings in capital expenditures. In the case of the North Shore Fire District, for instance, economy of scale in administration occurred. Following the consolidation, seven top administrative positions existed, compared to 21 under the old system (Elsass and Kettlewell, 2001).

Intergovernmental cooperation between and among municipalities often produces less expensive and more efficient services (University of Wisconsin, 2000). However, consolidation efforts are usually motivated by economic need rather than a desire for efficiency (McGrath, 1995).

For residents of the North Shore Fire District part of the savings appeared in reduced insurance premiums. The ISO rating dropped in all seven communities. In Fox Point, for example, the ISO rating dropped from Class 5 to Class 2, allowing annual savings of several hundred dollars for a more expensive home and at least \$90 for the least expensive housing. Fox Point residents received both reduced taxes and insurance costs (White, 2002).

However, the insurance impact cannot be accurately estimated unless the ISO conducts a new fire suppression rate survey. The real monetary impact can only be generalized until after a consolidation occurs and ISO survey is completed (Dalbey, 1996). According to McGrath (1995), “Most citizens who support consolidation will only do so if there is no rise of increase in taxes” (p. 36). Frazier (1998) commented about the consolidation efforts between a city department and a county district in Hutchinson, Kansas, “Even if there are no cost savings, it is still the most efficient way to provide fire management for both cities” (p. 17).

Operational Considerations

The desire to improve service is also common to most consolidation attempts, and is closely associated with the financial considerations. Findings showed that in a consolidation effort it is difficult to improve services for all participants and not have an initial negative financial impact on some of the participants. The objective is normally to

make operational improvements that benefit everyone, with the expectation that long-term savings will be realized.

Service demands continue to increase for fire departments. Along with these come changes in state and federal operational regulations and standards. The problem is exacerbated by the fire service's traditional willingness to assume responsibility for these new demands without consideration to budgetary restraints or long-term consequences. (McGrath, 1995).

Services and service levels need to be identified early in a consolidation process. The existing service delivery system must be analyzed for compatibility with what is desired. The degree and level of services provided can be difficult to objectively analyze (Snook and Johnson, 1997).

Political Experience of Consolidations

Wagner's research (1996) indicated that the four major obstacles to a merger or consolidation are turf, power, politics, and control. The biggest issue normally faced is loss of control. One way to eliminate the concern is to be very specific in whatever agreement or contract you sign. In accordance, White (2002) commented,

Communities have to look beyond having their name on the fire truck or being in total control of a service to see if there are enough advantages to consolidation that they can give up some control and publicity to benefit from cooperation.

That is a tall order (p. 9).

White notes that a related political issue is the difficulty for public officials to admit that the quality of the service they are providing may be inadequate. Relating his research to the North Shore consolidation efforts he wrote,

These leaders were also willing to admit that their then current fire departments were not providing adequate services. This is a hard pill for communities to swallow. But all of these communities eventually admitted that their services were inadequate and that the services could be improved through joint efforts (p. 22).

Documentation showed that for a consolidation to be successful, it must have the acceptance, if not the approval, of the people directly affected. Staley (1999), notes that fire service personnel tended to watch out for their own interests, and they desired to keep their identity and maintain some type of control. Labor groups should be involved from early in the process and convinced of the merits of consolidation (Thompson 1992). In the case of the North Shore consolidation, a very diverse group of fire personnel existed. The career fire fighters belonged to two different unions and five different locals. Two communities were staffed entirely by volunteers, and one was a combination of full-time and paid-on-call personnel. They had been organized and fighting fires their own way in each community, operating out of one station (White, 2002). Consolidation efforts had to address the concerns that these fire fighters had about the impact of the changes that would come with the new district.

Evident in all of the successful case studies, were the elements of cooperation and trust. White (2002) recorded that, "Less evident but certainly in existence was a fear that one's community might be taken advantage of by other communities" (p. 11). Wagner (1996) summarized this issue, "A merger can make all the sense in the world, but if people don't trust each other, it won't ever happen" (p. 22).

PROCEDURES

This research project used descriptive research methodology to examine documentation on consolidations, and related that documentation to conditions existing in Rock County. Special emphasis was placed on (a) financial experience, (b) operational experience and service delivery outcomes, and (c) associated political issues and ramifications. The procedures utilized in the project included a literature review, a survey of elected and municipal officials within Rock County, and personal correspondence with fire officials involved in current consolidation efforts.

Literature Review

A literature review was initiated at the National Fire Academy Learning Resource Center in July 2002. Topic subject matter included consolidation and inter-governmental cooperation. The review was continued at the Janesville Fire Department reference library, the Hedburg Public Library in Janesville, Wisconsin, and the author's personal library. All literature was obtained between July 2002 and January 2003. Additional literature was collected from Internet sources, also during this period.

Literature reviewed included textbooks, research papers, trade journals, state statutes, government publications, and news articles in print and electronic form. Applicable sources were summarized and included in the review. As previously mentioned, the volume of information available on the topic made it impractical to include all of the available research sources.

Personal Interviews

Personal interviews were conducted with City of Neenah Fire Chief Len Vander Wyst, Town of Caledonia Fire chief Pete Waselchuk, and City of Wausau Assistant Fire

Chief Mike Pierce. These three were selected due to their close involvement in consolidation efforts in each of their respective communities. These interviews were conducted by way of telephone communications in January of 2003.

Survey Instrument

Three surveys were developed to assess the opinions of elected and municipal officials in Rock County on the merits of consolidation, and to collect data on current operating costs and staffing. The respondents were asked to respond to a series of statements by selecting one of five answers: (a) agree strongly, (b) agree somewhat, (c) not sure, (d) disagree somewhat, and (e) disagree strongly. The survey groups selected included: (Group 1) Rock County Board Supervisors, village presidents, and mayors, (Group 2) any known professional administrators or managers employed by a municipality in Rock County, and (Group 3) all Rock County Fire Chiefs. These groups were selected for participation because it was felt that they were closely involved with government in Rock County and would be qualified to provide reliable, first-hand financial, operational, and political information.

Names and addresses of the selected groups were obtained from a directory of Rock County, Wisconsin, which is released by the Rock County Clerk's office.

The survey instrument for the first survey group consisted entirely of opinion statements relating to fire and emergency medical service in Rock County, the possible advantages or disadvantages of consolidating those services, and the study and funding of consolidated service. Respondents were also allowed to make comments on the survey as desired. The second survey group was asked to respond to similar opinion statements. In addition, they were asked to provide information on their municipality's budget

allocation for fire and EMS. The third survey group was also asked to respond to similar opinion statements. Additionally, they were asked to provide information on their department's expenditures and staff.

Prior to distribution, draft surveys were reviewed by several members of the Janesville Fire Department administrative staff. Several questions were modified in an attempt to ensure clarity. Personalized cover letters and postage-paid, addressed envelopes were prepared to accompany each survey. A total of 50 surveys were distributed by means of first-class mail through the U.S. Postal Service. A total of 33 completed surveys were returned, equating to a response rate of 66 percent. Responses were summarized and included in the Results section of this report. Copies of the surveys and cover letter for groups one, two, and three are included in Appendix A.

Assumptions

For the purposes of this research, it is assumed that all authors referenced in the literature review performed objective and unbiased research. It is further assumed that all survey participants responded honestly and objectively, and that data collected through the use of the survey instrument was complete and accurate.

Limitations

The author acknowledges several limitations with this research. It was recognized, due to the somewhat controversial nature of the topic, that some individuals may be unwilling or unable to participate in the survey. Consequently, obtaining complete financial and personnel data through the use of the survey instrument would not be probable. The author recognized the inherent limitations of obtaining data in this manner. No assumptions were made as to how non-respondents would have responded to the

opinion statements. However, other predetermined sources were considered as a means of obtaining estimated data representative of any agency not responding.

RESULTS

The results of this research were compiled using relevant findings from the literature review and personal correspondence, and correlating the data obtained through the use of the survey instrument. Results are arranged in response to the research questions. Survey results are summarized in narrative form. Detailed results are shown in Appendix B. A partial list of survey comments is included in Appendix C.

Research Question 1. How do available case studies and other documentation on consolidations relate to a possible consolidation of fire and EMS service in Rock County? Documentation on fire and EMS consolidations is abundant and is generally positive. The literature review revealed several case studies characteristic of Rock County. Motivation for consolidation efforts typically centers on economic need, a desire for operational efficiency, or a need for increased, improved or specialized services. Issues of concern common in most of the cases studied were most often political in nature. Issues often found included the fear of loss of local autonomy, a lack of trust by one or more of the participants, inadequate communication during consolidation efforts, and concerns of affected fire and EMS personnel. Findings demonstrated that consolidations are situation specific and normally vary greatly in degree of cooperation and in organizational structure. However, many similarities were discovered between conditions present in Rock County and those seen in other researched cases. Rock County employs some alternative methods of consolidation currently.

Research Question 2. Would a consolidation of fire and EMS service in Rock County result in overall financial savings to the county? Research shows that consolidation presents financial incentives through economies of scale. The literature review showed that on occasion consolidation is contrived entirely out of economic need. In more examples, service improvements and fiscal accountability collectively made consolidation a logical choice.

When asked whether cost savings would be achieved through consolidation in Rock County, 33 % of the respondents from all three groups agreed to some degree that it would, 15% thought it would not, and 52% were not sure. Regarding duplication of services and savings on capital expenditures, 59% of the total respondents to these statements agreed that consolidation would be beneficial. Little variance was seen between the three groups in the responses to these statements.

When asked about paramedic service, 58% of the respondents agreed that the service should be readily available. Seventy-one percent (71%) felt that a consolidated system should include full-time first responders in all areas of the county. Providing full-time coverage indicates an improvement in service for much of the county. This suggests that respondents either (a) desire a service improvement, or (b) believe that level of service currently exists.

When the elected officials survey group was asked about the cost of a consolidated system, 83% agreed that they would be supportive only if a cost savings could be realized. When asked if they would support a system with service improvements, even if costs were higher, 39% said no, 28% said yes, and 33% were not sure. The group disagreed with a property tax increase with 79% opposed, while 56% of

the group opposed a sales tax increase. The research verified the findings of the literature, which stated that most citizens who support consolidation will do so only if there is no tax increase.

Financial data collected shows that 2002 Rock County fire and EMS department expenditures collectively totaled approximately \$15,928,316. When applied to the county as a whole, this represents a per capita cost of \$103.97. In comparison, the Poudre Fire Authority, serving a similar population of 156,608, reported a per capita cost of \$88.48 in 2001. However, the PDA provides coverage to a 235 square mile area with nine full-time stations and three volunteer stations. Rock County's area is 720 square miles. Rock County departments provide coverage with nine full-time stations and nine stations staffed by combination, paid-on-call, or volunteer personnel.

Cost savings in consolidations are often achieved through elimination of duplicated positions. The research shows that existing staffing do not indicate substantial savings, if any, through reductions in personnel. Existing per capita staffing ratios for the City of Beloit and the City of Janesville Fire Department rank near or below the average of similar cities in both line and staff personnel. Future cost savings would be realized by avoiding duplication of personnel and equipment, through joint purchasing, and through savings in capital expenditures. Initial savings in these areas would be minimal.

When asked how consolidation might affect insurance rates, the survey groups collectively responded 42% not sure, 23% thought they would be reduced, and 35% felt consolidation would not positively influence rates. Documentation from other consolidations showed that insurance ratings normally improved after the consolidation.

However, the amount of savings to the property owners can not be determined until after an Insurance Service Office survey is completed.

This limited research does not show categorically that a consolidated fire and EMS system in Rock County would result in overall financial savings. To accurately predict whether cost reductions would be achieved, desired service levels must first be ascertained, followed by a complete financial analysis.

Research Question 3. Would a consolidation of fire and EMS service in Rock County benefit service delivery or allow for other significant operational advantages? Research from other consolidations shows that one of the primary incentives for consolidation is improved service delivery. When asked if a system should be created that would allow the closest emergency units to respond, regardless of boundaries, 94% of the survey participants agreed. The research shows that this is an area of concern, since the majority of the chiefs (88%), indicated that there were areas adjacent to their coverage area that they could respond to more quickly than the department presently serving that area. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the chiefs reported that they provided service to areas that another department could respond to more quickly. The research indicates that consolidation could be utilized to provide a more logical emergency response agreement.

When the elected and municipal officials were asked if consolidation would reduce response times and have operational advantages, 48% were not sure, 26% said agreed that it would, and 26% disagreed. Of interest to the research, the author received telephone and e-mail communication from several elected official survey recipients expressing concerns relative to their insufficient knowledge of emergency services in the county. However, when responding to survey statements regarding the fire department in

their area of the county, 89% agreed that their department was adequately staffed to meet current emergency needs and risks in the community. This finding correlates with the research of White (2001) in the North Shore case showing that officials are often reluctant to state that their service needs improvement.

The research shows that a consolidation in Rock County would benefit service delivery and have operational advantages in several areas. Personnel, equipment, and facilities could be better utilized through expanded cooperative efforts. Benefits would be seen not only in emergency operations, but also in other routine functions such as training, fire prevention, public education, and administration.

Research Question 4. What political ramifications can be predicted in a consolidation attempt, and does it appear that consolidation would be politically feasible in Rock County at this time? Documentation from numerous sources showed that political issues were prevalent in consolidation attempts. Among those issues are distrust of other communities and a feeling of loss of autonomy. When asked if they felt that consolidation would be accepted politically at this time, 43% of the elected and municipal officials said no, 39% were not sure, and 17% agreed somewhat that it would. The majority of respondents (77%) agreed with a feasibility study of consolidation. Only 10% did not agree to support a study. Several survey respondents who wrote comments reinforced the findings of the research in the areas of concern mentioned. Other comments related to the difficulty in accepting change.

Rock County would face many of the typical political issues that are often found in consolidation efforts. Many similarities were seen between the political issues encountered in the North Shore consolidation and those concerns that were discovered in

Rock County. At this time, research does not suggest that a complete operational consolidation would be politically feasible. It would be appropriate, however, to expand and further develop functional cooperation within the county.

DISCUSSION

Economic need and the desire for operational efficiency are present as an influential factor in most consolidation efforts. That need, or force, must be great enough to overcome the concerns, or forces, associated with the change. Despite the current uncertain fiscal situation in Wisconsin, it does not appear that Rock County as a whole has reached that degree of economic need. When asked in a survey whether the state of the economy has forced changes in their fire department's operating plans that affect service delivery, one-half (50%) of the responding Fire Chiefs said no. One department commented in the survey that they do not receive state aid.

Fire Chiefs are sometimes insulated from the realistic economics of government for various reasons. As shown in this research, fire districts can be an excellent way of improving cooperation between local municipalities. This cooperation presently exists in Rock County with our "single fire department" districts. However, since these fire districts have no taxing authority, they create another layer of insulation between the fire chief and the taxpayer.

During the research a decision was made to assess the opinions of county elected officials. This was done primarily because of their ties to county government and to their constituency. One unexpected aspect of that process was the reaction of some of the officials when questioned about emergency service. Comments and questions were received through telephone conversation and e-mail, as well as in the survey. Several of

the respondents provided very informed and insightful comments. These comments were both supportive and in opposition to consolidation. Some respondents recognized the problem and the value of the research, but felt unqualified to provide opinions on emergency service. Other participants felt it was inappropriate that they were even asked to comment on an issue that they were not associated with. This unanticipated finding of the research reveals, I believe, a significant flaw in our system of communication between emergency service providers and those who pay for that service. In Rock County, the problem of rising costs for providing emergency service is viewed as a problem of cities, villages, and towns. However, everyone in the county pays for those services. Everyone should be concerned and informed. As fire service leaders we need to ensure that the public is informed about what services they are receiving, the level of those services, and what they cost.

The survey results showed that some elected officials are not as well informed as they could be about what their fire department does, but they are trusting and supportive, nonetheless. The vast majority (89%) agreed that their department was adequately staffed to meet current emergency needs and risks in the community. The research of White (2001) in the North Shore case indicated that officials in some of the involved communities did not want to admit that their service needed improvement. Fire and EMS are expensive services, but they should not be considered *priceless*. Fire departments enjoy the support and feeling of loyalty that they receive from the public. But support without accountability can lead to apathy and inefficiency. Continual education and interaction is needed to ensure efficiency and appropriateness of services. In their research, Snook and Johnson (1997) stress the importance of communicating accurate

information and planning. Without communication and feedback from those we serve, how can we decide what is best for them?

In recent years we have seen a trend of public officials taking office with a pledge not to increase taxes. Others vow not to make cuts in essential services. As well intentioned as they might seem, it is obvious that these two principles can not coexist in our current financial state. It is vital, now more than ever, for emergency service administrators to be accountable and fiscally responsible. It is equally important for government at all levels to desire and expect operational efficiency in the delivery of those services. It is with that goal of operational efficiency in mind that the following recommendations are made.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this research project was to identify and analyze the fiscal, operational, and political advantages and disadvantages of a consolidated fire and emergency medical system for Rock County. Using a literature review, a survey of elected and municipal officials, and a series of interviews it was demonstrated that a consolidation in Rock County would benefit service delivery and have operational advantages in several areas. This limited research does not show categorically that a consolidated fire and EMS system in Rock County would result in overall financial savings, or that a complete operational consolidation would be politically feasible. To accurately predict whether cost reductions would be achieved, a detailed financial analysis would need to be completed. It would be appropriate, however, to expand and further develop functional cooperation within the county.

It is recommended that:

1. Rock County conduct a comprehensive analysis to determine what levels of fire, rescue, and emergency medical services are desired. The analysis should consider existing and future risk potential, appropriate acceptable risk, the desired level(s) of service, and current available resource capabilities. Considerations of available resources include locations of facilities, state of equipment, staffing levels, response times, and training levels. Current resource capabilities should be compared to desired capabilities to determine what level of unprotected risk exists. Goals and objectives should be established to address the identified deficiencies.
2. A detailed financial analysis of the existing Rock County fire and EMS system should be completed to determine if an operational consolidation would be financially advantageous, and to determine a cost estimate of the identified desired service levels.
3. Rock County and The City of Janesville should further investigate and pursue possible incentives provided by the State of Wisconsin that would be applicable and beneficial to fire and EMS consolidation efforts.
4. The Janesville Fire Department, collectively with all Rock County fire and EMS departments should continue to pursue and expand cooperative agreements for functional consolidation. Recommended areas of emphasis include emergency operations, training, and fire prevention. Cooperative efforts should accentuate financial and operational efficiency while considering the needs of the entire county.

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