



Manteno Community Fire Protection District

Decennial Committee Report 2024

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Public Act 102-1088, the Decennial Committee on Local Government Efficiency Act

Governor Pritzker signed Public Act 102-1088, the Decennial Committee on Local Government Efficiency Act, into law on June 10, 2022. Public Act 102-1136, which was enacted on February 10, 2023, clarified the original legislation's requirements. These new laws mandate the formation of a committee to research and document local government effectiveness for all Illinois local government entities (apart from counties and municipalities) that impose a tax.

Its activities and conclusions must be summed up in this report, together with suggestions for improved efficiency and accountability. This comprises, but is not limited to, data collection and analysis as needed to create a report with efficiency recommendations, as well as an examination of the governing statutes, ordinances, rules, procedures, powers, jurisdiction, shared services, intergovernmental agreements, and relationships with other governmental units and the State. Within eighteen months of this committee's formation, the completed report must be sent to the county in they are located.

Fire departments can vary greatly. In Illinois, there are two types of fire service providers; fire departments and fire protection districts. Both provide the same emergency response services and differ only in their governmental structure. They can also vary based on geographic location, area size, how they are funded, revenues, number of employees that are full and or part-time or volunteer, and the value of assets currently on hand in equipment. Broad assumptions or themes regarding consolidation that are frequently discovered in research of this type are included below; these may or may not be relevant to our community, but they are taken into account to ensure a thorough and transparent review process.

With consolidation, there can be no preconceived sides. This should only be implemented as a last resort when all other avenues have been explored and there are not sufficient resources, either financial or personnel, to meet the demands that must be met. Caution is required because consolidation won't always lead to improvements for either district or better service with more value-added services. However, consolidation might be necessary to maintain the specified baseline level of service. Funding rates for consolidation must be comparable and level for both districts to be consistent. In addition, while talking about bigger districts joining forces with smaller ones, caution is needed to prevent the perception this is a form of takeover of power or assets.

Even though economies of scale and greater efficiency are occasionally advantages of consolidation, governmental entities and its users are frequently rather concerned about these possible drawbacks. Potential obstacles and disadvantages may be opposition from the local community, the departments' geographic locations, logistical difficulties, and cultural differences must be taken into account. A seamless transition and sustaining community support during the consolidation process also depend heavily on thorough preparation and communication.

The initiative's guiding principles:

- (1) cannot jeopardize resident health or safety
- (2) cannot result in higher costs for local taxpayers
- (3) cannot over-financially support another community from a different taxing district
- (4) cannot curtail services, unless determined otherwise
- (5) cannot negatively impact emergency response times and service levels
- (6) cannot have a detrimental effect on the reputation of the fire district

The lack of public engagement, national politics, and trust in government are the principal causes for the negative reaction to the new Gotion development. Setting a few key components in order of importance will help to ensure a thorough and effective review.

- **Community Needs and Input:** Understanding the needs and preferences of the communities served by the fire departments is crucial. Conducting surveys, hosting public forums, and engaging with community stakeholders can provide valuable insights into community expectations, concerns, and priorities regarding fire protection and emergency services. It's crucial to have a supportive and active community. This includes an effort to determine the most effective means of educating and engaging.
- **Operational Efficiency and Effectiveness:** Assessing the operational efficiency and effectiveness of the fire departments involved is essential. This includes evaluating response times, coverage areas, staffing levels, training programs, equipment inventories, and budgetary allocations to identify potential areas for improvement and opportunities for streamlining operations through consolidation. It is not appropriate for one community to financially support or appear to subsidize the other financially.
- **Financial Analysis:** Conducting a comprehensive financial analysis is critical to assessing the feasibility and potential benefits of consolidation. This includes evaluating current operating costs, revenue sources, capital expenditures, debt obligations, and potential cost savings or efficiencies that could be realized through consolidation. For many fire departments, their main source of revenue is property taxes. Property taxes are collected by local governments, such as towns, cities, and fire protection districts, in order to fund fire services. These taxes are used to pay for many parts of fire department operations, including as staff, facilities, and equipment.

- **Legal and Regulatory Considerations:** Understanding the legal and regulatory framework governing fire department operations and consolidation is essential. This includes assessing relevant state and local laws, ordinances, labor agreements, and insurance requirements that may impact the consolidation process.
- **Personnel and Organizational Culture:** Evaluating the personnel and organizational culture of the fire departments involved is crucial to identifying potential challenges and opportunities associated with consolidation. This includes assessing workforce demographics, union agreements, leadership structures, and organizational norms and values that may influence the success of consolidation efforts.
- **Stakeholder Engagement and Communication:** Engaging with key stakeholders, including firefighters, union representatives, local officials, and community members, is essential throughout the consolidation process. Open and transparent communication can help build consensus, address concerns, and foster support for consolidation initiatives.
- **Risk Assessment and Contingency Planning:** Conducting a thorough risk assessment is necessary to identify potential risks and challenges associated with consolidation, such as service disruptions, equipment failures, or legal disputes. Developing contingency plans to mitigate these risks and ensure continuity of operations is essential to the success of consolidation efforts.
- **Long-Term Sustainability and Accountability:** Considering the long-term sustainability and accountability of the consolidated fire department is critical. This includes developing clear performance metrics, governance structures, and mechanisms for ongoing evaluation and oversight to ensure that the consolidated department continues to meet the needs of the community effectively and efficiently over time.

If communities are asked if they would want more or faster services, they typically respond in the affirmative without providing any information about how to pay for it. This is because most communities are unaware of the technical intricacies of our services, costs, and results.

The demands of fiscal prudence, limited revenue recovery alternatives, and rising employee costs, as seen through the eyes of elected authorities, raise the bar for the chief and department to accomplish more with less.

Recommendation

There cannot be predetermined sides in consolidation. When all other options are exhausted and there are insufficient funds or personnel resources to meet the necessary demands, this should be the last resort. Consolidation won't always result in better service, more value-added services, or improvements for either district, consequently, caution is necessary. Consolidation could be required, nevertheless, to preserve the intended basic level of service. For both districts to be consistent, funding rates in relation to consolidation must be leveled and equal. Attention must be taken when discussing larger districts merging with smaller districts to avoid the possibility that this may be interpreted as a kind of power grab or resources whether that's revenue, equipment or personnel.

After careful consideration and an open and transparent analysis, it is not recommended we consolidate our fire district at this time. Most all Illinois' Fire Protection Districts are facing rising expenses as a result of personnel shortages, rising labor /pension costs (Union requirements), equipment costs, with an outdated and limited taxpayer funding model. Should the State of Illinois not identify a more sustainable financing source, districts may eventually move toward consolidation. Should the state require all districts consolidate at the county level, the Kankakee County Administration does not have the resources to properly source a

consolidated model either unless the State of Illinois assists. To optimize revenue, both larger and smaller districts will likely be consolidated if required. You'll likely experience a **decrease** in services and a **delay in response times** if you reside in a rural district with a large geographic and rural service area. Taxpayers have greater expectations now than in the past. Certainly, any type of consolidation should not demonstrate one is subsidizing another (getting the better deal).

As previously stated, should the State of Illinois not identify a more sustainable, appropriate and equitable funding source, districts very well may move toward consolidation. Should the state require all districts consolidate at the county level, the Kankakee County Administration does not have the financial resources to properly source a consolidated model unless the State of Illinois provides assistance. It cannot be over stated however, a great deal of conversation must be had with key stakeholders at a macro level or we're just continuing to avoid the real challenges ahead of providing the required safety of our communities. Consolidation ought to be saved for last when the fire districts in Kankakee County reach their breaking point. Though if required, it would be most sensible to think about such consolidation between the Manteno and Bourbonnais Fire Districts, if and when that day comes. These districts are more comparable in a number of ways. Recognizing this, the two districts have already participated in a number of efforts aimed at identifying operational and administrative efficiencies. The efforts that are now underway currently with additional opportunities identified for short and long-term timing which may be found within the table shown below. Since both of our districts have already begun the process of at least increasing their level of cooperation, they would be better prepared should consolidation become required.

Efficiencies Analysis Findings

TASK	FUNCTION	DETAIL	TIMING
Creation of Automatic and Mutual Aid Agreements	Administrative	Automatic aid agreements allow for multiple agencies from surrounding communities to provide immediate responses of manpower and specific apparatus for emergency incidents. Mutual aid agreements allow for agencies to request manpower and specific resources that are beyond an agency's capabilities.	Current and Ongoing
Regional Agreements with CART and MABAS – Illinois	Administrative	CART (combined agency response team) is a resource that can provide apparatus, manpower, and other logistical resources to specialized incidents. These incidents consist of confined space rescues, high-angle rescues, structural collapses, and trench collapses. MABAS – Illinois is a resource that also provides specialized apparatus and manpower for specialized incidents. These types of incidents are generally large-scale operations and MABAS is a direct connection to IEMA/FEMA resources and reimbursements.	Current and Ongoing
Dispatching	Communication	Utilize the county-wide Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) as our dispatching agency. Upon dispatching our agency to 911 calls they monitor our main dispatch channel and document information as it relates to the incident. The PSAP dispatchers are utilized in many ways to assist in monitoring not only the primary radio channels but also the fireground channels and are utilized to communicate with all other agencies that are requested by fire command officers.	Current and Ongoing
Response Plans	Operations/Administrative	Collaborates with local school districts to ensure that the annual school response plans have been updated per state requirements. Implemented recommended police and fire response box cards as they relate to hostile events at school properties. Established response areas with other neighboring jurisdictions to dispatch both agencies for an emergency.	Current and Ongoing

TASK	FUNCTION	DETAIL	TIMING
Training Advisory Board	Training	MABAS 7 Fire Chiefs Association has authorized the establishment of a training advisory board. The current board is made up of fire/EMS representatives from Bourbonnais, Kankakee City, Manteno, and Grant Park. The primary goal of the board is to assist other local agencies in utilizing the Vector/Target Solutions Platform. A secondary goal of the board is to work with representatives from both St. Mary's Hospital and Riverside Hospital to provide EMS training to the county emergency responders.	Current and Ongoing
Fit Testing Machine	Administrative	The fit testing machine allows for Manteno Grant Park & Beecher Fire Districts to complete and meet annual and pre-employment standards. Also are part of MABAS 7 Fit Testing Machine sharing too.	Current and Ongoing
800 Radio System	Communication	The radio system is instrumental in how it communicates with the agency's primary PSAP center. The primary dispatch channel and operations channel are shared among other fire agencies within the county. Utilize other designated channels so that we can communicate with other police agencies including the Illinois State Police and other fire agencies from outside the county.	Current and Ongoing
Response Plans	Administrative	Our agency collaborates with local school districts to ensure that the annual school response plans have been updated per state requirements. Implemented recommended police and fire response box cards as they relate to hostile events at school properties. Established response areas with other neighboring jurisdictions to dispatch both agencies for an emergency.	Current and Ongoing
Collaborative Fuel Purchases	Administrative	The fire district has entered into an agreement with the Village of Manteno for purchasing Fuel several years ago.	Found more competitive terms on own.

TASK	FUNCTION	DETAIL	TIMING
Computer Aided Dispatching	Communication	The fire district utilizes computer-aided dispatching to respond to calls for service. This service allows the responding units to see up-to-date information as it is being inputted into the call logs. The system also allows responders to look at pre-plan info as well. This also allows other agencies who utilize the system to look at our call information as they are responding to our community.	Current and Ongoing
Flow MSP	Administrative	The fire district in addition to several other organizations utilizes an internet pre-planning software program. This program allows other agencies to view each other's inputted pre-plan enroute to an emergency.	Current and Ongoing
Grants	Administrative	The fire district researches and applies for local community grants, state grants, and federal grants when they become available. The fire district has benefitted throughout the years with regional grants. These grants have purchased radios, pagers, and other items.	Current and Ongoing
Data Collaboration	Administrative	Both Manteno and Bourbonnais share the same EMS records report management system. Both Bourbonnais and Manteno, along with several other Kankakee County fire agencies utilize the CAD system provided by the sheriff's office. This is done through an IGA and both Bourbonnais and Manteno due their part to help fund that agreement.	Current and Ongoing
Public Education/Fire Prevention Activities	Public Outreach	Currently the Illinois State Fire Marshal Office and the Red Cross donate smoke alarms to our agency to install in homes that don't have working units currently in them.	Current and Ongoing
Sharing IT Services/Hardware	Administrative	Currently sharing servers with the Kankakee County Sheriff's Office for records and mobiles (Crewforce)	Current and Ongoing
Local Government Cooperation	Administrative	Working with local government bodies with event planning, disaster response, safety training, code enforcement, sharing the command van for police & fire emergencies.	Current and Ongoing
OSHA & Illinois State Fire Marshal's Office	Training & Administrative	OSFM has implemented Target Solutions as a statewide platform for training records and we are already utilizing it for improved efficiency. Allows for improved tracking as well as state & OSHA compliance.	Current and Ongoing

TASK	FUNCTION	DETAIL	TIMING
Administrative Positions	Administrative	The possibility that some administrative positions could be combined. Examples include; shared Human Resources Position between Bourbonnais and Manteno to handle payroll, onboarding of new personnel, insurance claims, etc. A shared billing representative between Bourbonnais and Manteno that submits and receives ambulance and rescue billing receipts. A shared fire inspector and public education officer between Bourbonnais and Manteno.	Potential Short-Term Area of Efficiency
Consortium Testing	Administrative	Full-time testing between the Kankakee County Departments that have full-time testing processes. Shared testing costs could be split between multiple departments instead of each department paying for its testing process individually.	Has been investigated and currently does not provide a savings. Can revisit in the future if the market changes.
Collaboration Opportunities	Administrative	Pursue collaboration between the Village of Bourbonnais, the Village of Manteno, and Kankakee County to adopt similar building codes. This adoption process would make the interpretation and inspection process the same especially if Bourbonnais and Manteno could share a fire inspector position.	Potential Short-Term Areas of Efficiency
Shared Apparatus	Operations	This potential opportunity does allow for costs to be shared among multiple agencies. There are several areas of concern with this concept.	Potential Short-Term Area of Efficiency
Public Education/Fire Prevention Activities	Public Outreach	Currently the Illinois State Fire Marshal Office and the Red Cross donate smoke alarms to our agency to install in homes that don't have working units currently in them.	Potential Short-Term Area of Efficiency
Utilize -Upgrade the Computer Aid Dispatching Options	Comms	Options exist on the computer-aided dispatch system to enable fire and EMS agencies to be proficiently dispatched in an expedient time frame for emergency requests. Resources would be dispatched on the type of incident, available resources, and the address of the event.	Currently not feasible with the current Hospital locations.

Bulk or Group Purchasing	Administrative	Not all agencies utilize the same equipment and/or apparatus. Different agencies utilize different vendors for purchasing. Agencies have different budget years; some agencies have different timeframes for getting service completed or new equipment purchased. Not all agencies are willing to work with other agencies when it comes to bulk/group purchasing.	Investigated and found not efficient Can revisit in the future if the market changes.
Cutting Programs/Services	Public Education/Fire Prevention	One solution is to eliminate all public education and fire prevention programs. Discontinue and/or downgrade the current service levels that we offer.	Potential Long - Term Area of Efficiency
Consolidation	Administrative	Consolidation of fire and emergency medical services would be challenging and complicated in our environment, to put it simply. From where will the funds originate? Only if consolidating does not result in a reduction in the quality of services that are now offered to each community may consolidation be completed. This suggests that in order to meet the demands of every town in the consolidation group, staffing levels may need to be increased and that reducing them is not a viable option. What is the appearance of a consolidated board? How are people chosen for leadership roles?	Potential Long - Term Area of Efficiency
Taxing Body Cooperation	Administrative	Villages & Municipalities have numerous other sources of tax revenue, school district consume most of the real estate tax revenue and fire districts heavily rely on real estate tax revenue; while only receiving a small portion of it and it is not sufficient to fund the districts in the future. Would hope discussions will occur regarding the overall tax burden and sharing to better serve our communities. Why are residents over 60 years of age still contributing to the schools, when they will utilize EMS services more and could contribute more to those services they utilize, thus creating a balance of costs & services utilized	Potential Long - Term Area of Efficiency
State, Local & Business Cooperation	Administrative	43% of our EMS call volume is created by senior living community residents, senior living facilities and public body facilities, while only contributing 3% of the real estate tax revenue to the district. While we are supposed to be an emergency responding agency, we have become a health care agency for the needs of the senior population without adequate funding. This is not sustainable for the future without additional funding or fees.	Potential Long - Term Area of Efficiency
State & Local Government Support	Administrative	Seek support from politicians for additional revenue sources that don't place the burden on the local real estate taxes, such as sharing a potential fireworks tax, sales tax or gambling tax with fire districts. This would assist local services without the burden being placed on the local home & property owners.	Potential Long - Term Area of Efficiency

Conclusion

Lastly, this paper merely scratches the surface of what fire districts are doing now and what might be possible. Currently, fire districts in Kankakee County are set up in size and location to meet the needs of their respective communities according to its size, demands and tax base. This independence (local control & scale) creates improved and immediate accountability from officials as it's their community. With independence comes autonomy and simplicity. Autonomy keeps the focus on the mission statement and simplicity allows for taxes and costs to remain lower. A lack of understanding of how our county's emergency services operate suggests apparently easy solutions will solve our problems. As a result, a vacuum is created and those seeking power and control might develop solutions that fail to meet our long-term goals & objectives. A better understanding is needed by all interested parties if we are to develop the best possible solution.

The Current State of Our Emergent Services

Fire Districts provide and perform more services than they did 20 years ago. This is a fact and not recognized often by constituents. In addition to their understood roles (basic/advanced life support & transport, Haz-mat response, water rescue, wildland fires, technical rescue, fire investigation, and motor vehicle accidents) they have added the roles of public education, preplanning, code enforcement, car seat installs, CPR instruction and numerous other responsibilities that the community has requested. The requests for more service are not matched with an increase in revenue. And now, the state of Illinois is mandating that we provide mental health responses without any revenue source, further complicating the situation.

Local officials and taxpayers call for decreased taxes, but never decreased service. In 2021, there were approximately 32,000 calls for service in Kankakee County. This represents a 31% increase since 2011. If we responded to fewer calls, we would have a decreased need for services, which in turn would lead to lower costs.

Why does our call volume increase each year? As our population ages, our elderly residents experience many additional health issues. Societal shifts have leaned towards being less self-reliant and more dependent on government services. The public drives with less concern for others by utilizing cell phones, driving faster than speed limits & not exercising courtesy

resulting in more motor vehicle accidents. Sadly, the public is less healthy (physically and mentally), which again leads to health emergencies & mental health calls too.

Overall, as a public we dislike advice to follow codes or procedures which were created to prevent injury and death, so often we choose to ignore them. We hear the common refrain “I know what I’m doing” or “I can design safety into the project,” but we cannot change people and their behavior. Codes are developed after a catastrophe occurred, and we resolve to prevent it from happening again. We should learn from the past, but our memories are short as we feel we are smarter than in the past. People are people and we will repeat our mistakes, contributing to the difficulty in controlling our costs.

What is the correct answer? It is difficult to identify. However, before we find the correct answer, we need to educate our public and our government officials about:

1. What do we do?
2. Understanding our day – the calls, preparation, training, etc...
3. Why does it take so many firefighters and/or equipment to combat a fire or a motor vehicle accident?
4. What is “Slack” in the fire service and why it is important?

The Perceived “Low Hanging Fruit”

The public and the elected officials’ views are often not correct, nor realistic. Many of the often-recited comments toward consolidation appear to be easy and/or is low hanging fruit:

- You have too many tower ladders. Look what we can save?
- You should just get rid of all the chiefs.
- Firefighters are always just sitting around.
- We should centralize the firehouses.
- Consolidation will save us money.
- Consolidation will help with recruitment.

Too many ladders – There are five ladder trucks in Kankakee County, but it is based on the buildings and the needs of their respective districts. And we rely on our neighbors to respond with theirs as our staffing will utilize the engines first for fire suppression. We do not have enough staff to get all the ladders in route if needed. And most of the ladders in our county are over 20 years old, so there is not much of a savings if we get rid of them. However, better cooperation among the agencies to share a purchase or resource the next time would be beneficial.

Get rid of the chiefs – Most of the fire chiefs are also firefighters & paramedics and thus responders. Getting rid of responders lessens the overall availability of responders in Kankakee County. There are only several full-time chiefs in Kankakee County, so most are paid on call (thus not very well compensated). You will still need supervision & management, so you just promote full-time firefighter(s) to fill the position which will cost you more money! Regarding full-time chiefs, any county teams (Haz Mat, TRT, Fire Investigation, Inspectors) in which they serve is not compensable whereas a full time or aid on call firefighter would be paid (time & a half). This includes the boards in the county in which the full-time chiefs may serve too. In addition, they perform the administrative functions of the district/department along with their fire/Ems/rescue, public education, inspections, and other multiple roles.

Firefighters are always just sitting around – Spending a 24-hour shift in a Kankakee County firehouse will change this viewpoint. Sitting around is really “slack” which involves availability and redundancy.

Availability – availability ensures we are ready to respond to the next call at a moment’s notice.

Redundancy – is having the resources in place to quickly respond to the next emergency.

Both terms involve being prepared with the proper equipment and necessary training. We have heard the comment “the firefighters are just hanging around.” This is a good thing as it means we are available for your emergency. And with the demands of preparation (mandated training, maintaining proficiency & ensuring the equipment is ready) and on-going calls, they do not just hang around much anymore. In business, availability represents under-utilized resources and would be adjusted to be maximized as they would seek out the identified opportunity. A

business has hours of operation, ours is 24/7. And we must be able to respond to an emergency that we do not know about until the emergency call is made to 911. A business has planned production. If the public would schedule their emergencies, it would make our ability to respond more efficient.

Availability is also determined by the distance to respond and the distance to the hospital. The further away the emergency from the fire station, the longer it takes for the resources to get back into service after the calls are completed. It costs more money when we place stations, equipment, and firefighters equally across an area. And in a less densely populated area, there probably would not be enough tax revenue to cover the costs. A business would consolidate locations and equipment, but in doing this would create a longer response. In addition, when we are 20-25 minutes away from a hospital, it takes the ambulance crew longer to complete the call. So additional resources are needed to meet the demand. It would be more efficient if we were 5 minutes from the hospital. A call for us is not the same as a call for a fire district in closer proximity to the hospital.

Availability is also affected by our neighboring districts/departments staffing levels, call volume and budgets. Our system has worked well as one helps the other when one is busy, it is hoped we are not all busy at the same time. This reciprocation allows us to operate in a smaller capacity vs. operating at the projected maximum community service need.

Redundancy provides us with the ability to handle more than one call at a time. When we run one call, 36% of the time we will run another and another. This has occurred up to 9 calls at a time, but many times it is 2, 3 or 4 (or more) calls in a row. We staff three ambulances, so we can handle three in a row, if we are not responding to an motor vehicle accident, structure fire or other manpower intensive incidents. When we do not have the necessary staffing & equipment to handle the requested volume, we ask our neighbors for assistance. And when they incur an increased service demand, we reciprocate by helping them too. This practice works as our peak demands do not usually occur at the same time. Without this redundancy, we would need 9 ambulances and 54 paramedics to meet that call volume demand vs. the 3 ambulances we do operate and 24 paramedics that we employ now. If we lose this redundancy, the wait times for the next available ambulance may be 30-45 minutes. Without redundancy, we will be forced to triage the 911 calls and respond as the resources become available.

We must remember that redundancy is the enemy of efficiency in the business world, and it is what cost cutting & consolidation efforts focus on to justify the savings. It may be a savings, but is it worth the cost? Many medical emergencies require (such as strokes and traumas (falls, MVA's) require quick responses. Brain injury occurs within 5 minutes of reduced or no oxygen. The first 911 caller receives the service they expected, but what about caller #2, #3, etc. And is the Fire District fulfilling their mission at this point?

Centralize the firehouses – Recent UL studies demonstrate fires are hotter, faster, and more intense than 30 years ago, as fire doubles in size every 17 seconds. 30 years ago, occupants had 17 minutes to escape a house fire. Today, it's 3 to 4 minutes (Russert Davis 2016). Location is response time and response time is life, in both fire/rescue response and Ems. Consolidation will close fire-stations as the greatest cost savings are found in personnel reduction. A one-time savings may be enjoyed by not purchasing new equipment and by reducing the existing equipment available. However, these actions will result in a reduction of service.

Consolidation will save us money – Most of the firefighters and officers in Kankakee County are paid on call. This means they are not full-time and only get paid when they respond. They do not earn benefits (insurance- health, life, dental) nor a pension. When you consolidate, you will lose many of the paid-on-call firefighters who serve their local community and will be forced to replace them with full-time and thus expensive union firefighters who will earn better pay, benefits & a great pension.

Consolidation will help with recruitment – It will not as the fire service is the midst of a nationwide shortage. Pay is the answer to recruitment, which will lead to higher costs and higher taxes. We need to support our local systems, which are the most efficient in managing personnel costs.

The most sustainable cost savings, other than asking the public to not rely on the 911 system so much, is to standardize the fire apparatus and equipment purchases. This follows the Southwest Airlines business model as it seeks cost savings through easier repairs (technicians are trained on one type of plane and parts are only needed for one type of plane). But this contradicts the rules for low-cost bidding, which in the long run raises the overall operational costs at the possibility of short term (if any) savings. And the public thinks joint purchasing will save money, but this

too is a fallacy as the competitive market has created a narrow profit margin for gear and equipment. A diligent manager will obtain greater savings through.

negotiating and seeking quality equipment, then a manager who is always about price. The price story is an easy sell and not usually true.

The Consolidation Discussion & Seeking A Balance

Before you consider an apparent solution, you must understand the complexity of the problem. Otherwise, the proposed solution will create a situation which is much worse. There have been three communities that have been asked by their fire districts for additional funding (referendums) to keep up with demand. They have all failed and failed several times. Why? – their constituents do not want to pay more taxes. Then we need to ask them to decrease their demand for services, but we do not. So, what are the options?

1. Support the current system, working together to create functional consolidation/cooperation/sharing services.
2. Consolidate into a county-wide fire district.
3. Specific cases where some districts/departments consolidate would be beneficial.
4. The local communities combine to provide fire/rescue services and contract with private systems (Riverside, Ascension, out of county service) to provide Ems. We may also consider keeping the fire districts individual and allowing for the Ems to be contracted. We will call this the “Hybrid” model.

Consolidation is not a sustainable goal. It leads to a reduction in service, an inability to serve, a loss in local adaptability to meet the specific local needs and less local leadership. The savings comes in removing “slack” in system. Slack is an available but under-utilized resource and is viewed as inefficiency. But in a 911 system, it represents the next available unit to handle the next unscheduled event that will occur. We would like to think that 911 calls are scheduled and occur one at a time. But this is not the case, as they are always unscheduled and arrive in bunches.

Slack is eliminated as a cost savings, but it is still needed to handle the 911 demands of the community. In Kankakee County, the fire-based Ems districts provide the slack in the county as the private EMS services operate in a business (profit) environment. They are spaced for

efficiency and move around seeking their best use, which is to be busy with calls (thus making money). The first 911 caller gets the available resource; the next 911 caller must wait for another unit to move from another distant location. Time is life, in both fires and Ems emergencies. Slack is the enemy of efficiency but is necessary for an effective 911 system.

What we need is balance

Once the benefit of the initial consolidation (reduction) is enjoyed (if there is one), the benefit is gone, and the service reduction is on-going. We see corporate consolidations occur frequently, so we feel it will work for us as taxpayers. But there are also many that failed, such as Kraft, Kmart, Sears, etc... We may review the GE & Siemens situations to find answers regarding this topic. Both corporations grew into conglomerates, but now want to split as they are worth more individually than that as a large group. Do we want a single aircraft carrier or a fleet of smaller, faster ships? The answer is always changing.

Consolidation will make it more difficult to manage the culture as well as the organizational parts. It becomes more expensive, less responsive, greater union control, less flexible, and less transparent. When you create something bigger, you inherently make it slower. There will be more support layers, more spread out for efficiency (leading to less redundancy & slower response times), priorities will change and be all for one & one for all (rather than local) and individual opinions & viewpoints will mean less as there will be many to consider. Thus, the smaller communities will have less influence. Local fire districts in Kankakee County currently provide a better representation, lower cost structure & accountability of local preferences & services required by their respective communities rather than what can be provided by a county-wide district.

According to Grubb & Lamb (2000) only about 20% of consolidations rarely succeed. They fail to deliver what was promised. **There must be a burden of proof that any good is likely to come of it!**

McKinsey & Co. found nearly 80% of all mergers do not recover the cost involved in a merger. And half lead to either reduced profits or productivity or in some cases both (Fisher, 1994). Consolidation of financial results alone will result in less service. Labor is the largest

constant cost for a fire district. Thus, lowering the number of firefighters/paramedics available will lower the service that can be provided too. There is no way to mitigate this fact.

What questions should we ask to get the needed information to answer the question.

1. How will consolidation affect the quality & delivery of service? This would include the overall service model, station locations, staffing, apparatus, available funding from the local communities).
2. What will consolidation cost? What is the true/demonstratable savings? Is it a short term savings or a long-term savings?
3. If a county-wide district is formed, what will the ability to meet NFPA 1710 & 1221? (Response times & staffing)
4. How to merge the pension funds/obligations? As all are funded at various levels – Kankakee 16%, Manteno 97%). Each would have to provide 100% funding prior to consolidation, otherwise the obligation is shared & not fair).
5. Review the proposed consolidation plan & provide feedback. Boston Consulting Group states 80% do not do consolidation planning & 0% do not set financial goals. The plan must have a strategic plan & objectives (financial & operational). The plan must be detailed, otherwise it is a plan for disaster- “we will worry about it later.” And we must evaluate the goals vs. The proposed outcomes. The need to consolidate should be driven by the needed increase in staffing & service, not financial purposes.
6. What are the advantages & disadvantages to service quality & delivery that may be realized by consolidation? Regarding:
 - Staffing
 - Equipment
 - Stations
 - Education
 - Prevention
 - Grant Writing
 - Training

- Admin Support

7. What lessons can be learned from the successes and the failures of other consolidation efforts? Consider all governmental, non-profit & business consolidations.
8. What is the consolidation contingency plan? What will we do if it does not work as planned?
9. How do we achieve a common real estate tax, so costs are allocated equally? And we must realize that equal taxes will not be equal service as larger areas can afford and will require more service.
10. How do we achieve pay equalization in the consolidated effort? Areas to consider include:
 - Full-time, POC pay, part-time, EMT-B's, paramedics.
 - Benefits
 - CBA's
 - Seniority
 - Pensions
 - Org Chart
11. Will need to adopt county-wide building & life safety codes. This will mean all the villages & cities in Kankakee County will need to agree to adopt and enforce a common code, along with common ordinances. Otherwise, it will be quite confusing to enact & enforce multiple codes.
12. What about the current support system of auto-aid & mutual-aid which is the backbone of our fire system? Consolidation will impede the benefits gained from this reciprocal system.

13. Why can't you run a fire department/district like a business?

In the administrative functions, it is run like a business as we maximize efficiencies, minimize expenses, seek additional sources of revenue, and utilize data to make informed decisions. But operationally, this is more difficult. Here are a few examples:

- A. Emergencies can't be scheduled – we receive numerous emergent calls in a narrow time frame which deplete our resources for the next call. It's easier when 911 calls are made one at a time, but many times this is not the case. If the public could schedule emergencies, then we could better prepare for the demands in the most efficient method possible. It is common during each day for 2 or 3 of our ambulances and 6 of our paramedics/firefighters to be on incidents and not available for the next call. One 911 call does not wait for the next call. 911 calls tend to arrive in bunches. So how do you plan for the efficient use of resources when you don't know what is needed at what time of the day? We utilize our mutual aid (neighboring districts/departments) for redundancy, with the hope they are not busy at the same time. This creates a better utilization of resources while lowering the costs necessary to staff at the needed service level. And we reciprocate to make it work for all of us. When others can't reciprocate, the system is not efficient. With reduced staffing, busier call volumes and underbudgeted districts/departments, this is becoming a growing problem.
- B. We must respond to a broad category of incidents, not just the ones that have revenue streams attached. Business would focus on optimization and delete the non-performing/non-optimal items. When you call 911, anything not an initial crime, traffic issue or business check mostly gets a fire response. Examples of a fire response – building fire, vehicle fire, field fire, motor vehicle accident, gas leak, carbon monoxide poisoning, structural collapse rescue, machinery entrapment.... Or Ems call such as cardiac arrest, difficulty breathing, feeling ill, stroke, diabetic emergency, allergic reaction, and the list goes on. Therefore, we train every day!
- Availability – availability ensures we are ready to respond to the next call at a moment's notice.
 - Redundancy – is having the resources in place to quickly respond to the next emergency. This point was discussed earlier.

- Proximity – “Time is Life” - Placing resources in a central location sounds great from an expense perspective, but if your ambulance and/or fire engine is 20 minutes away, it’s a long way away when you want a quick response. Especially when tissue death can occur within 5 minutes of a heart attack or not breathing, or when a fire doubles in size every 17 seconds with modern materials. We have placed our resources in 2 locations, which maximizes our ability to respond quickly to most of our residents & businesses within our 96.3 square mile district.
 - Proximity, redundancy, and availability are key to optimizing an emergency response, this is counter to corporate resource efficiency.

C. Efficiencies- we seek efficiencies within our scope.:

1. Responses -Auto aid, mutual aid, MABAS, Haz Mat Team, Fire Investigation Team, CART Team, TRT Team.
2. Sharing of Resources – testing equipment, instructors, training academy, computer systems.
3. Cooperating in equipment utilization & purchasing.
4. Protecting 96.3 sq. miles with full-time staffing.
5. Utilizing technology to improve emergency response, patient care and training.
6. Cross training staff to handle fire inspections, public education, and fire prevention activities.

We help our neighboring communities when they are busy and they reciprocate when we are busy, but many times when one fire district/ department is busy so are the others. This may mean the nearest ambulance or fire truck may be up to 30 minutes away! It is not always as simple as it appears.

- D. We respond to non-emergency calls where there is no funding available, and no one else will do it or is not available to do it – lift assists, rescue a pet... Businesses look for ways

to maximize revenue and decrease costs, they would not take on these tasks. We provide services when it does not make business sense to provide the service. We provide fire, rescue & Ems services for the Common Good of all, not just a targeted segment of the community. The 911 needs and/or demands of our community are beginning to stress our ability to provide the services being requested. The funding provided by real estate taxes & fees allocated for those services are not keeping pace with the community's demand for services. And no one wants to pay more – the taxpayer (real estate taxes, fees), the government (Medicare & Medicaid, inadequate social services), the insurance companies (private medical & auto insurance). If it was looked at as a business, they would abandon the business. To us, this is not an option.

- E. We do not balance bill our residents for ambulance calls. This means that we don't ask our residents to pay the remainder of the ambulance invoice that is not covered by their insurance. If a neighboring district/department or a private/hospital ambulance responds, you may be asked to pay the remainder owing. This is a big financial benefit for the residents of our community as we plan to best meet the needs of the community through proper staffing, equipment levels and revenue/cost management.

To discuss & develop sustainable solutions, we must understand the mission of our fire district and the daily demands placed on us to achieve the mission for our community. In 2021., the emergent responses for Kankakee County equated to approximately 32,000 incidents. Although we have provided several examples of why we perform the way we do, it is not all encompassing. The needs of all in Kankakee County need to be considered in seeking the best solution. Let's consider the possible solutions:

Support the current system

Currently, the finances, apparatus & staffing needs are determined by the local fire district boards to meet the local needs. Consolidation will change this model as the population centers will receive greater attention & services. A community chooses its funding level & service level based on the amount currently provided through the real estate taxes. This local determination goes away with consolidation.

Some consolidation efforts should be investigated as it may be beneficial due to resources (staffing, equipment & money) becoming scarce. Consolidation must be viewed as a solution to achieving our objective of improving our fire/Ems service at the best cost for our communities with a thorough understanding, consideration of the unintended consequences and without the malice of power and control. There are efficiencies we should explore and can be developed by working together with Auto Aid responses, boundary responses and some functional consolidation. But the efficiencies the public perceive to be game changers.

(eliminating apparatus or chiefs) will not provide long term nor significant cost savings. The only real savings is found in a reduction of labor which will result in closed stations & reduced service availability for our communities (especially those in the rural areas).

Consolidation will force the local politicians to increase taxes/funding to pay for a consolidated district. And in our current climate, this act would be highly unlikely.

Projected cost: \$23,000,000.00 (approx. in 2022 dollars) this is the current situation with costs, real estate proceeds and ambulance revenues collected in by the fire districts/departments Kankakee County.

Consolidation

Will it be a positive or a negative? The truth to an argument or a story can usually be found in the details. And the consolidation/merger debate needs the truth presented so the best solution can be chosen. Every situation is unique and should be judged by its own merits. Local determination must be respected as local tax revenues are provided by the residents & businesses. If the local determination is to give up control to someone who is not local it should be their choice, but the cost of funding will remain with them in either case. In addition, there is the risk that funding is reallocated from areas with more revenue to areas with less revenue to provide equal service. An area with a larger tax base will subsidize an area with less.

A tactic that will be used by consolidation proponents is to dismantle a fire district through lack of support. It then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy that consolidation is the only choice. The story provided is they can't afford it or will be unable to provide the service any other way. It will appear that there is no opposition as the opposition has been eliminated through attrition or frustration. And without providing a viable plan B in the event a

consolidation vote is unsuccessful, they have created a situation where consolidation is the only alternative, even if it's not the best alternative. The bottom line is who has control and what are their motives. Is it to provide the best service at the lowest cost, or to be king of a kingdom? Either way the cost is borne locally! The bottom line- "its about the money" which equates into control.

Consolidation will lead to increased personnel costs as most of the firefighters in Kankakee County are paid on call and many are not paramedics. So many full-time firefighters/paramedics will need to be hired with a nationwide shortage already in full force. In the cost example, 10 stations would close. There are 24 stations now, the model includes based on the population allocation.

Assumptions:

- Full-time firefighters working 24 hr. shifts – on 24/ off 48
- Riverside Ambulance continues to serve the communities they now serve, but that represents a loss of income for those communities & Riverside Ambulance will continue to balance bill for residents. Most fire districts Ems do not balance bill (which means the resident does not pay the remainder (balance) of the bill after what insurance/Medicare/Medicaid does not cover/pay)
- K3, Brad, Bour, AP & Mant receive ambulance revenue to support operations & do not balance bill residents. Balance billing will be a large cost to our uninsured, underinsured and senior populations.
- All pension obligations are covered by the respective municipalities prior to consolidation.
- There are no capital contributions calculated in these cost assumptions. They will be needed to support on-going operations.

To make consolidation work, we will need to accomplish the following:

1. Trust
2. Equal Participation – create a task force as participation cannot be forced or mandated.
3. Respect the distinct cultures, missions, & traditions
 - i. Identify & respect the differences.

- ii. Integrate the differences, do not ignore them.
 - iii. Morale will be affected by loss of control/voice.
 - iv. Organizational culture & ability to adapt to change will be needed.
4. Communication – open, clear & transparent
 5. Must create & follow a detailed plan! - involves financial, managerial, operational, legal, rebranding, etc...
 6. Establishment of controls to ensure proper representation & yet large enough to be effective.
 7. Build county-wide relationships & commitments (involvement = value = success)
 8. Engagement of the communities on how they feel about emergency services they receive in terms of fire, rescue & EMS.

Projected costs: \$34,537,919.00 (in 2022 dollars) (assuming Riverside Ambulance continues to provide EMS services at no cost/minimal cost to Momence, & limited cost to Otto, St. Anne, K3 Twp & Herscher. Closing 10 stations assumes RMC will continue currently operating as is and firefighter/emt B's & P's are available for hire. In addition, we hope their salaries are adequate due to the nationwide shortage and the pay levels of the Chicagoland area. The new contracts in the Chicagoland area are higher in salary & cost and are not affordable for our county. For a reference to an active consolidated (county) fire district, please view www.unifiedfire.org website for budget, member fees/allocation and policies.

Specific cases where some districts/departments consolidation would be beneficial

There are cases in the county where consolidation would be beneficial. There are contiguous districts/departments where a district can respond quicker due to a fire station located closer to the area served by the other district/department. Some overlap may also be enjoyed in administrative functions creating small cost savings for both agencies. The goal would be to improve the service and gain some cost savings for both agencies. But large, sustainable savings would prove illusionary once the reality of the situation progresses. This illusionary savings is created by not fully understanding the fire/EMS response model as well as the fire/ems business realities involved in ensuring the 911 calls are handled appropriately. Some of the challenges would include equalizing the cost/benefit (tax rate & EAV/services provided) to the taxpayers

involved, blending district/department cultures, and ensuring the needs of the involved communities are met with adequate resources. In our current employment climate and the national paramedic shortage, consolidation may occur simply due to a lack of available resources (paramedics).

The projected costs/benefits would be determined as each case is researched. This alternative would allow for local determination in assessing the merits of a consolidation.

Hybrid

In this model, the County would separate Fire/Rescue & EMS. It would be assumed a private EMS (possibly Riverside Ambulance) would cover the EMS with the EMS Levy currently provided by RE Taxes and the ambulance billing from the calls. This would be a business model and thus efficiency would be the goal. And efficiency will mean a decrease in ambulance availability and service. This model would not lower the cost to the businesses and residents of the county but would allow the fire districts to decrease their dependence on personnel costs by shifting it to the privatization side. And it would provide a better cost allocation as the fees would be borne by the users of the services. This will provide a reduction of the increases of the cost of providing the services to the overall public in the future. But the public that utilizes the Ems (usually the seniors) will pay more.

Projected costs: Undetermined at this time, as the EMS would be bid on, costs will be allocated differently, cba considerations negotiated and local public opinion measured. But the costs will not be less than with the current system. Some consolidation of the fire districts may be encouraged. This may be necessary due to the evaporating availability of Paid on Call/ Volunteer Firefighters. Combining the fire districts in Kankakee County would raise the labor costs exponentially, as well as reduce the services available.

What is the future for emergency services in Kankakee County?

The future will provide challenges, but they can be overcome by working together and using knowledge & data to maximize our resources. We must guard against the so-called experts who purport to know everything but are spewing generalized understanding, perceived ideas or

possess a bias (power, control, labor, employment) with no real basis for truth. Perception is reality to many, but it will not lead to a better serving and more cost-effective emergency service in Kankakee County.

Based on the information provided from this report, it is my recommendation **that we work together to continue to support the current system and cooperate to seek efficiencies in sharing services.** This model/solution is difficult (cooperation) but must be encouraged and supported to provide the greatest level of service to our communities for the funding allocated. This model would bring the greatest cost/benefit to our communities now and in the future. Cooperation, planning & support are the keys to operating success in our service.

The full consolidation alternative & the hybrid alternative will both diminish emergent services and increase the cost to the taxpayers of Kankakee County. Kankakee County doesn't have the necessary tax base overall to support a consolidated fire district due to the rural areas that make up most of the county.

The local district/department determination consideration model should be explored when necessary and appropriate. This will be on a case-by-case basis, rather than on a generalized basis which will create a more equitable solution for the communities involved. The current nationwide staffing crisis, along with inflationary factors will also be a challenge to our staffing & cost models in the future. These pressures will further erode our ability to provide appropriate emergency services in Kankakee County, but we must work together to best serve our communities. **"We are only as good as we all are!"**