

WISCONSIN POLICY FORUM

City of Milton Fire & EMS Options Analysis

April 2021

Background

Fire and emergency medical service (EMS) agencies across Wisconsin are facing intensifying fiscal and service-level challenges that are threatening existing service models and prompting consideration of new approaches. These challenges stem, in part, from the strict property tax levy limits facing Wisconsin municipalities and increasing costs associated with increased calls for service and new service expectations. Recruitment and retention barriers for part-time staff and extra demands created by the pandemic also are exacerbating the challenges for many departments.

The Milton Fire Department has a proud history of providing both fire and emergency medical services for the city of Milton and the townships of Milton, Harmony, Johnstown, Lima, and Koshkonong. However, like many fire and EMS agencies in Wisconsin, it is now struggling to maintain a staffing framework that relies mostly on part-time staff in the face of recruitment and retention challenges.

These challenges prompted the city of Milton to consider options for a full-time staffing framework late last year for the Milton department service area, including the possibility of consolidating with the city of Janesville's department or pursuing such a framework on a stand-alone basis. In response, the townships currently served by the department have decided to also consider their own alternatives, which has prompted city officials to consider both the Janesville consolidation option and the stand-alone option solely for its jurisdiction.

The Wisconsin Policy Forum (WPF) has analyzed fire and EMS service delivery challenges in dozens of departments across Wisconsin. In fact, we have conducted eight comprehensive fire and EMS service sharing studies for municipalities in Milwaukee, Racine, Kenosha, Jefferson, Ozaukee, and La Crosse counties over the past eight years. We are well-equipped to provide policymakers from the city of Milton with objective, expert analysis that will assist them in their consideration of options for their future fire and rescue services with a particular emphasis on fiscal implications.

Proposal

The Wisconsin Policy Forum proposes a study that would explore consolidation and stand-alone options for the city of Milton as it seeks to implement a sustainable staffing and operational framework for the provision of fire and EMS services within its borders. Our analysis would focus specifically on the following:

1. Evaluation of the “Unilateral Consolidation Model” and the “City of Milton Stand Alone Model” developed by Milton officials and considered by its council on March 31, 2021. Included in the evaluation would be review and possible refinement of the preliminary staffing and service assumptions used by city officials to develop the respective models; review and possible refinement of the city’s fiscal analysis of the two models; consideration of whether other viable staffing and service options or sub-options may exist for the city (including fiscal analysis of such options); and pros and cons associated with each option.
2. Analysis of possible equitable cost allocation methodologies for 1) the consolidation model; and 2) the stand-alone model under scenarios in which the townships currently served by the Milton department, some subset of those townships, or other jurisdictions ultimately wish to receive service under that model.

The purpose of the analysis would be to provide city officials with objective analysis and knowledge that can be used to develop a path forward with regard to the provision of fire and EMS services on both a near-term and a long-term basis. It is important to recognize, however, that in light of the need to complete the project by July 1, 2021 to accommodate a potential voter referendum in November, our fiscal and programmatic analysis will be conducted at a high level. Further analysis would be required to actually implement any of the options considered.

To carry out the study, WPF would collect and synthesize data on the Milton fire department’s finances, staffing, equipment/apparatus, and operations from the chief and city staff. In addition, on a more limited basis, we would collect and synthesize similar data on the Janesville fire department to assist us in our consideration of the consolidation model. Interviews would be conducted with fire department and administrative/fiscal officials from both cities. We would analyze this quantitative and qualitative data and use it as the basis for developing insights and options for paths forward. Our deliverable would be a final written report that would be provided to city officials and that would be released to the public and disseminated with their advice and consent.

Our Credentials

WPF’s Board of Directors has committed the organization to conducting research on critical public policy issues facing the state of Wisconsin and its local governments and school districts. In January 2018, we expanded our research capacity and mission via the merger of the Public Policy Forum and the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance. The Wisconsin Policy Forum remains committed to both organizations’ legacies of nonpartisan, independent research and civic education.

Local government financial analysis and efficiency initiatives have been the "bread and butter" of both organizations. Our role in researching fire and EMS service sharing opportunities has received widespread media coverage and praise by policymakers. This is testimony to the talent and experience of our staff resources.

Specific staff assigned to this project will include:

- WPF President Rob Henken. Mr. Henken has led the organization since 2008. He has held several senior fiscal positions in government, including staff director for a U.S. House of Representatives subcommittee, associate staff for the House Appropriations Committee, and Director of County Board Research, Health and Human Services, and Administrative Services for Milwaukee County.
- Contract Researcher Davida Amenta. Ms. Amenta has extensive experience in county government, having held budget, capital planning, and administrative positions at three counties in California and at Milwaukee County. She was the Forum's lead researcher for its analyses of fire/EMS service sharing in southern Milwaukee County, Milwaukee County's South Shore communities, and Kenosha, La Crosse, and Ozaukee counties.
- WPF Fiscal Researcher Ashley Fisher. Ms. Fisher joined the Forum in August 2018 after working as a budget analyst for the Washington State Employment Security Department and a researcher for the state's Office of Program Research. She was the lead researcher for the Forum's Jefferson County EMS service sharing analysis.

Project Timeline and Budget

We would be able to launch the study on or about April 12, 2021, and would aim to deliver the final report by July 1, 2021, with the caveat that meeting that timeline will depend on the availability of staff from Milton and Janesville to promptly answer our questions and respond to our requests for data. We would waive our typical charge for indirect costs given the consistency of this project with our mission. Also, we are assuming limited travel (we would instead conduct and participate in meetings virtually) but we include an in-person presentation at the conclusion of the study.

The total cost would be \$7,650 as detailed in the table below.

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|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Total project cost | \$7,650 |
| <i>Personnel costs</i> | <i>\$7,500</i> |
| Executive Staff @\$125/hr | \$3,000 |
| Research Staff @\$75 hr | \$4,500 |
| <i>Non-personnel costs</i> | <i>\$150</i> |
| Travel | \$150 |
| Printing, design, copying, etc. | \$0 |
| <i>Indirect costs (7.5%)</i> | <i>In-kind</i> |

LETTER OF AGREEMENT

Parties:

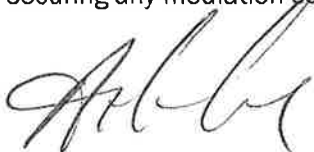
This agreement is between the City of Milton (city) and the Wisconsin Policy Forum (WPF).

Purpose:

The purpose of this agreement is to establish the terms and conditions for work performed by WPF on a research project that will help the city to identify a sustainable staffing and operational framework for fire and emergency medical services. Project details are described in the attached project proposal.

Services and Payments:

- A. WPF shall initiate the project on or around April 12, 2021 and shall deliver a final report on or around July 1, 2021, or by an alternative date mutually determined by the two parties.
- B. City administrators and fire department officials shall have input into the research scope and design and shall have ample opportunity to review the progress of the research and initial research findings. The city understands and acknowledges, however, that WPF is an independent, non-partisan research organization. WPF will conduct its research and analysis in an objective fashion and will report its findings and conclusions based on its own independent analysis of the data.
- C. The city and WPF shall jointly agree to a dissemination plan for the final report. The city shall have sole discretion to disseminate the report among its stakeholders and/or to authorize release of the report to the general public for the first 30 days following submission. After the 30-day period, WPF may release the report to its members and the general public at its discretion.
- D. WPF agrees to provide oral and/or written briefings regarding the progress of its work to the city upon reasonable notice.
- E. The city's share of the project cost is \$7,650. One half (\$3,825) shall be paid upon execution of this agreement and the remaining one half (\$3,825) upon delivery of the draft final report.
- F. Should there be any concerns about the quality or completion of this contract by any of the parties, a mediated discussion can be called for upon written notice by any party. The mediation session is to take place within 5 business days of receipt of letter. If necessary, termination of this contract shall be mutually agreed through mediation. The city shall be responsible for securing any mediation services, costs of which shall be divided equally between the parties.



Al Hulick, Administrator
City of Milton

Date: 4/8/2021



Rob Henken, President
Wisconsin Policy Forum

Date: April 8, 2021