

**SUCCESSFUL FIRE DEPARTMENT CONSOLIDATIONS AND THEIR
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COVENTRY FIRE DEPARTMENTS**

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A research project submitted to the Coventry Emergency Services Affiliated Fire Districts
as part of their consolidation efforts.

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Abstract

The problem was that the fire departments involved with the Coventry Emergency Services needed to identify successful consolidations in other communities. The purpose of this research project was to identify that consolidations can be successful as shown from other consolidation efforts around the country. This was an evaluative research project. The research question was:

What are the experiences of other communities that have gone through fire department consolidations?

The procedures involved a review of materials related to experiences of communities that have gone through fire department consolidations.

The research results indicated that fire department consolidations can be successful.

The recommendation of this research was that the departments involved with the Coventry Emergency Services initiative can expect a successful consolidation.

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Introduction

The problem is that the fire departments involved with the Coventry Emergency Services needed to identify successful consolidations in other communities. The purpose of this research project is to identify that consolidations can be successful as shown from other consolidation efforts around the country. This is an evaluative research project. The research question was:

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Background and Significance

Fire protection in the town of Coventry is provided by seven private, non-profit fire districts, which maintain service for all areas of the town. This system of fire protection has been the subject of some criticism over the past years because of the duplication of services and the need for expensive fire apparatus for seven different fire districts (BRW, Inc., 1992, p. B.8-9). The Coventry fire district system evolved from a time when people lived and worked in villages within walking distance of their homes. Employers often let employees leave work to fight fires and the system revolved around volunteers in the community. Today people work miles from the community in which they live and generally live busy lives that lack the availability of time to volunteer on fire departments. This has eroded the volunteer firefighter system. As this lack of volunteer firefighters continued, the fire districts in the town of Coventry were forced to hire career firefighters to maintain service levels to the community, and have become combination fire departments.

In 1989 and 1990 the Coventry Merger Study Committee, composed of members from each fire district, prepared a draft study examining the merger of the seven fire districts into one operating entity. The major findings of the Coventry Merger Study Committee regarding the existing fire district system were levels of service are inconsistent throughout the town; the

majority of fire districts have experienced a decline in the number of available qualified volunteers; the initial manpower response level in most districts is not in accordance with the minimum recommendations of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA); mutual aid is provided by most districts to overcome shortages in manpower or apparatus at any given time, but is also viewed as an instrument to place a disproportionate tax burden on the aiding districts; location of fire stations was predicted on a build as needed basis, but has not been reassessed with the growth of the town; advanced life support is not provided to all residents; fire prevention activities vary from district to district; administrative services are duplicated; training is not consistent; and older, built-out fire districts have no way to increase revenue other than raising taxes (BRW, Inc., 1992, p. B.8-11).

In 1992, during the comprehensive plan study conducted by the town of Coventry, six of the seven fire chiefs had expressed interest in consolidating the existing district system into one system that would remain a public service provided by an entity outside of the Coventry town government (BRW, Inc., 1992, p. B.8-9), for example staying as an independent fire district. The major justification for consolidation included many considerations that were expressed in interviews with the fire chiefs, many of which reflected the findings of the Coventry Merger Study Committee (BRW, Inc., 1992, p. B.8-11).

In March of 2001, was born the *Coventry Emergency Services*, an alliance between the Central Coventry Fire District, the Harris Fire District, the Tiogue Fire District and the Washington Fire District. The alliance was formed for the purpose of providing the most efficient and cost effective emergency services to the taxpayer; combining resources to eliminate duplication of services and equipment; taking down the traditional barriers of district boundary lines and operating as closely as possible as a single entity; establishing one set of standard operational guidelines; combining fire and rescue training programs together as one; and sharing

ideas and interests for the betterment of the fire service in Coventry. As the alliance continued to develop, in June of 2002, it was agreed that it was time to plan a complete consolidation of the four. Work on this planning process has been in progress since that time.

Literature Review

This researcher has reviewed pertinent literature from various sources to identify successful consolidations from around the country. The research question used to complete this literature review was what are the experiences of other communities that have gone through fire department consolidations?

What are the experiences of other communities that have gone through fire department consolidations?

Analysis of a proposed four fire district merger in Ada County, Idaho (ID). In his Executive Fire Officer (EFO) research paper, Curry (1999) identifies:

The primary finding contained in this analysis was that major benefits to taxpayers in increased service levels were possible with no increase in costs. Those service benefits were identified as an increase in staffing and a shift toward specializing chief officer responsibilities. The analysis further revealed that obstacles to the merger from the politicians, chiefs, and others were predictable and must be considered and dealt with through consistent communications. The analysis identified organizational areas that would be impacted and displayed a portrait of the merged organization. (p. 2)

Curry (1999) goes on further to identify indicators for cooperative efforts from the book *Making the Pieces Fit* as “duplication of services, either by function or by geographic location” (p. 12) and “cost comparisons that illustrate a drastic difference in total costs of fire protection for providing similar services” (p. 12).

Curry (1999) also cites from the book other elements that may be present indicating potential merger advantages as:

Services or service levels that are drastically different between agencies; potential loss of revenue through statewide referendums (or other sources); lack of community support; threat of a “hostile” takeover either by another government agency through annexations or the privatization of fire service operations; retirement of a key administrator or chief officer; change of elected officials; labor issues; concerns over ISO ratings; service deficiencies; and long response times. (p. 12)

Carrie Furnace fire and rescue. The Swissvale and Rankin volunteer fire departments of Maryland (MD), chose to pursue a consolidation of their two departments into a new organization called the Carrie Furnace Fire and Rescue (*Swissvale FD Web Page*, Press Release, September 17, 2002).

The press release reports (*Swissvale FD Web Page*, Press Release, September 17, 2002) a steering committee comprised of officers from both departments were working together since June 24, 2002 on ideas and a vision for the new organization. It goes on to say that both departments have had a loss of manpower and income over the last 15-20 years, while both experienced an increase in demand for services.

Both departments had approved the progression of the steering committee’s work as well as allowed the steering committee to file official paperwork for the consolidation. The steering committee’s plan will not increase any cost to either community and it will provide for better fire protection than what each volunteer department could provide on their own (*Swissvale FD Web Page*, Press Release, September 17, 2002).

Consolidations a’ la carte. In his article *Consolidations a’ la carte*, in Fire Chief Magazine (Jensen, 2000), Jensen points out that there were very few fire department

consolidations prior to 1990, but during the '90s the political and economic climate changed so emergency services providers had to seek alternatives to provide services (Jensen, 2000, p. 102). During these days of consolidations, "What does matter is that egos are being set aside and decisions are being made with the end user in mind" (*Fire Chief*, February, 2000, p. 105).

Consolidation of fire protection services in Central Penobscot County. In his EFO research paper, Ellis (2000) looks at consolidation in the Penobscot County area in Maine (ME). Ellis (2000) reports:

Consolidation of fire protection and emergency medical services has been discussed in great detail, however, little or no action has resulted despite the fact that "If the average citizen, taxpayer, was aware of the duplication and high cost of fire service, they would be pushing for consolidation" (Lahaie, 1994, p. 15) (p. 5).

He further goes on to say "As we enter the twenty-first century "traditional methods of providing fire and life safety services to communities are being replaced with innovative service delivery methods. One of the most common methods utilized is regional consolidation" (Boomgaarden, 1996)" (p. 6).

Ellis (2000) goes on to identify successful consolidations. In 1995 the City of Thornton, Colorado (CO) merged with the West Adams County Fire Protection District, saving \$300,000 to \$500,000 per year beginning in 1996. On January 1, 1998, the fire departments of Toronto, North York, Scarborough, Etobicoke, York, and the Borough of East York in Canada, were merged into the Toronto Fire Services (Ellis, 2000).

On the down side, Ellis (2000) reports:

Unfortunately, not all consolidations are successful. Individual circumstances need to be carefully considered before a final decision as whether to consolidate or not is made (Haney, 1998). In California "after almost a year of studying the possibility of

consolidating the fire services of Los Altos, the Los Altos County Fire Protection District, Mountain View and Palo Alto, the conclusion is that it's feasible but not practical" (Domingue, 2000). There were not enough money incentives to gain public support for the consolidation. (p. 22)

““While there are countless success stories, there are unfortunately a few failed attempts. Tragically, most failures are the result of some form of personal sabotage. For this reason, it's important to proceed cautiously and objectively” (Jensen, 2000)” (Ellis, 2000, p. 16).

Feasibility of consolidation between the Sterling Park rescue squad and the Sterling volunteer fire department. In her EFO research paper, Walter (1999) reported on the feasibility of consolidating the Sterling, Virginia (VA) Fire Department and Rescue Squad. In her research she reviewed what occurred with other fire and emergency service agencies involved in a consolidation. Walter's (1999) findings were as follows:

The present-day Tualatin Fire and Rescue Department near Portland, Oregon (OR), is the product of several consolidations of smaller fire and rescue agencies, and has studied the consolidation of other agencies extensively (Tualatin Valley Fire and Rescue [TVFR], 1995, p. ii). The department cites many challenges they experienced in the planning and implementation phases of consolidation, including the merging of administrative staff, the feelings of the department members, political obstacles, differences in operational procedures, changes in organization names, and issues dealing with authority and responsibility (TVFR, 1995). The department also struggled with issues of standardization of equipment, philosophical differences and who will lead the agency after the consolidation (TVFR, 1995). While there were many challenges in the consolidation efforts encountered by Tualatin Valley Fire and Rescue, the agency

concluded that the consolidations were very beneficial and published materials to assist other departments in effective consolidations (TVFR, 1995). (p. 7)

Walter (1999) also reported on the Lexington Fire Department and EMS:

The Lexington, Missouri (MO), Fire Department and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Department investigated the possibility of a consolidation in 1991 (Fischer, 1991). The Lexington agencies noted that a major obstacle in consolidation of the fire and EMS agencies is the attitude of non-cooperation between members of the two agencies (Fischer, 1991). The conclusion of the study of the possible consolidation between the Lexington Fire Department and the Lexington EMS Department was that a consolidation would benefit the organizational and operational efficiency of the departments and the service delivery (Fischer, 1991). (p. 8)

In 1994, the Fernridge Rural Fire Department in Veneta, OR examined the possibility of consolidation with other departments (Walter, 1999). “The study also found that consolidation of the smaller fire departments would be beneficial, although the researcher identified many critical challenges that would have to be overcome” (p. 8).

Walter (1999) also reported that a 1995 study was performed of fire districts in Collier County, Lee County and Manatee County, Florida (FL), reviewing the effects of non-economic factors in consolidations of fire and emergency service organizations. The study found that:

Members of departments facing potential consolidations had negative perceptions concerning cohesion of the groups, standardization of policies and procedures, communications, department loyalty and satisfaction of the department members (Latessa, 1995). The study concluded that many department members believed that increasing the size of an agency through consolidation would provide greater rewards and benefits for members (Latessa, 1995). Lastly, the study noted that there were no negative

perceptions present in the department members concerning fairness of treatment, decision making ability and the level of authority within the consolidated departments (Latessa, 1995). (p. 9)

Finally, Walter (1999) reported on the Edmonton Emergency Response Department in Canada, which had researched consolidation within their agency. According to the study:

Some of the EMS leaders within the EMS department felt that the consolidation was more like a “hostile takeover” or acquisition than a traditional cooperative consolidation, which was not beneficial to the working relationships post-consolidation (Williams, 1995). The creation of a new name for the consolidated organization in Edmonton was perceived as helpful in the merger implementation, however, the organizations were missing tangible actions toward a coordinated and combined agency after the philosophical implementation of the consolidation, resulting in poor perceptions of department members (Williams, 1995, p. 133). (p. 10)

Walter’s (1999) recommendation in her research report was “It is recommended that the Sterling Park Rescue Squad and the Sterling Volunteer Fire Department not actively participate in consolidation efforts at present, however, if financial or other circumstances change in the future, it may be a beneficial step for the agencies” (p. 3).

Feasibility study of consolidation for the Southwest Council of governments. In his EFO research paper, Haney (1998) recognizes:

The fire service today is facing many of the same problems that challenge private industry. The cost of providing services or manufacturing a product must be kept at a minimum while quality and productivity must increase. Taxpayers are demanding accountability from their city leaders while desiring an increase in the quality of life in their neighborhoods. (p. 5)

Haney (1998) further goes on to explain that the Southwest Council of Governments was formed by eight cities in the Ohio (OH) region in 1973, with the intent of coordinating public safety services and functions among the member cities. One of their concerns was that none of the member cities had enough resources on their own to form special teams within one department. With the incidents of hazardous materials activities and the threat of terrorism, it was felt that a regional approach to incident planning would benefit all. He reported that a regional hazardous materials team was formed and served the area very well.

The results of Haney's (1998) research paper concluded:

The majority of the fire chiefs believed there would be expanded opportunities to expand services in their communities and that it would be more cost effective to consolidate. The mayors anticipated improved services following a consolidation. The literature review indicated that the majority of authors were of the opinion that consolidation would increase the depth of services and resources available to the cities in the consolidated fire district. At the same time, they felt that these services could be provided with a cost savings or, at a minimum, with no increase in cost. (p. 19)

Further, Haney (1998) concluded "The majority of fire chiefs felt that the morale of their respective organizations would benefit from a consolidation effort" (p. 20). He made additional note that "The literature review and the chiefs' survey essentially supported the concept of consolidation of fire departments" (p. 24).

Fairfield fire and ems. Both the Fairfield Community Fire Company and the Fairfield Am Vets Community Ambulance Service are located in Adams County, Pennsylvania (PA), about eight miles northwest of the NFA (Sachs, 1999). On July 10, 1999, the Fairfield Community Fire Company and the Fairfield Am Vets Community Ambulance Service concluded 18 months of planning and consolidated into a single organization called Fairfield Fire & EMS (Sachs, 1999).

As Sachs (1999) identified in his article:

The mission of the new, combined Fairfield Fire & EMS is “protect the lives, property and environment in Fairfield and surrounding areas through prevention, public education, emergency response and non-emergency services. We will maintain the highest level of response readiness to deliver firefighting, emergency medical and rescue services in a safe, competent and caring manner, wherever and whenever requested.” This encompasses what the new organization will do for the community, for focusing on either fire or EMS. (p. 2)

Sachs (1999) reported that about six months after the merger, signs of success were very obvious. The merger committee expected a 20% overall budget savings by the end of 1999. From a service standpoint, EMS personnel and firefighters began cross training, which resulted in more personnel available to do firefighting duties and more personnel available to do emergency medical care duties.

Sachs (1999) further reports that at the end of the first fiscal year, the results of the merger continued to be positive. Financially, the savings enabled the new organization to build a new community hall as well as meet all of their fire and EMS operational needs.

Fire department consolidation – why & how to do it ...right. In the book published by VFIS, *Fire Department Consolidation –Why & How To Do It ...Right* (VFIS, 1994), several examples of successful consolidations are cited. For example, in Contra Costa County, California (CA), a consolidation resulted in an immediate reduced tax rate and the addition of a 10% capital improvement program (VFIS, 1994).

Another example is Orange County, FL where a consolidation in the mid-1970s resulted in a successful venture. However, there was no real planning and no working group to work out details (VFIS, 1994). Because of the lack of planning it took years to finalize the consolidation

and much stress on the staff (VFIS, 1994). With proper planning “the Orange County fire consolidation could have been easier and more efficient;” (VFIS, 1994, p. 21).

The Poudre Fire Authority, CO is another example of a successful consolidation (VFIS, 1994). The process actually began in 1980 in the Fort Collins area between Fort Collins and Poudre Valley Fire Protection District (VFIS, 1994). In 1981 the decision was made to proceed with a full consolidation at which time the legal basis was in place (VFIS, 1994). It was reported that the major concerns of both sides was the best interest of the citizens they protect and neither side wanted the agreement to fall apart from a lack of political support (VFIS, 1994). The transition to the new department went smooth and planning was reportedly a critical element in the successful consolidation (VFIS, 1994).

The book also points out two failed consolidation attempts. Downey/Santa Fe Springs, CA and Columbia/Boone County, MO (VFIS, 1994). It was the intent of both locales to pursue a successful consolidation. Local interests and egos took over. Failure ensued as indicated by the following:

However, in both locales, such local interests became subordinated to a different set of interests brought to the fore by employee groups and exacerbated by inadequate support among certain local government officials, shifting the focus of public discussions. (VFIS, 1994, p. 33)

Fire services, a best practices review. In the 1997 report funded by the Minnesota (MN) Legislature, *Fire Services – A Best Practices Review* (Minnesota [MN] Legislature, 1997), the authors reported on a consolidation of the Crystal and New Hope Fire Departments (p. xv).

In mid-1998, the on-call fire departments in the adjoining cities of Crystal and New Hope began operating as a single department called the West Metro Fire – Rescue District (MN

Legislature, 1997, p. xv). In creating a joint fire district, Crystal and New Hope intended to meet their communities' expectations for service without raising property taxes.

Because of the merger, fire and rescue responses are now based on proximity to the three fire stations, not to city boundary lines. Improved first responder service is available because fire fighters equipped and trained to use defibrillators respond when needed by residents of either city. Fire prevention work, including code enforcement in building inspections and fire-safety education, are consistent throughout the district. For the first time in either city, a vehicle replacement program is in place. Cost reductions resulted from unfilled turnover in fire fighter positions, but more significant savings are expected over time as the fire department avoids the costs of replacing three pumpers while maintaining its ISO rating. (MN Legislature, 1997, p. xv)

Fort Lauderdale combined service area alternative. In his EFO research paper, Earle (1998) identified the areas that could benefit from a consolidation or merger as:

Potential for a better Insurance Services Organization rating

Analysis and revised perspective on department and service delivery

Economies of scale for purchases

Philosophy that less government is better government

Elimination of artificial service boundaries

Stronger internal programs such as training

Eliminates duplication of effort

Better utilization of resources

Cost savings

Affords the opportunity to offer expanded or specialized services (p. 16)

Earle (1998) identified successful consolidations in his paper, one of which was Cobb County, Georgia (GA), which until 1971 was serviced by eight independent fire departments. They had realized several advantages through consolidation, one of which was the reduction of their ISO rating from 10 to seven. This benefited homeowners by a 40% reduction in home insurance premiums.

Hutchinson and Reno County fire departments. In his EFO research paper, Frazier (1998) researched the feasibility of consolidating two Kansas (KS) fire departments. Frazier (1998) finds that:

The findings of this research on the feasibility of consolidation between the City of Hutchinson Fire Department and Reno County Fire District #2 reveal that one consolidated fire/rescue department would be more efficient and cost effective although there are some barriers that need to be addressed. The means are available and in place to provide this service provided both governing bodies can reach an equitable interlocal government. Past indifferences, lack of trust, and control issues must be put aside by all involved persons and organizations and must look to the future to what is best for the citizen. (p. ii)

Frazier (1998) also identified factors prompting consolidation. He says that “In the book, *Managing the Fire Service*, the author sites the following reasons as the most influential catalysts for change by cities and counties considering changing the way they provide fire service (I.C.M.A., 1998, p. 418)” (p. 10).

These factors that Frazier (1998) quoted are:

1. Growth in demand for service, especially ambulance and rescue services.
2. Municipal budget constraints and/or contractual labor demands.
3. Not enough volunteers during daylight hours.

4. Pressure to improve the productive use of paid firefighter “downtime”.
5. The complexity of modern firefighting and the length of training volunteers required to meet community fire-safety standards.
6. Economies of scale (some cities are served by as many as six fire departments). (p. 10)

Frazier (1998) also reported that the Orlando, FL region in 1981, combined 16 fire districts into one county fire department named the Orange County Fire and Rescue. Reasons cited for the need to consolidate were the loss of efficiency, cost savings, quality enhancement and more effective service. It was further noted that the Orlando, FL region needed to balance the citizen’s demand for increased service against the demand by the same citizens for reduced cost of government.

Frazier (1998) also cited the Portland, OR metropolitan area that formed a merger between three departments in 1989, after taking a hard look at their operation. The merged department is called the Tualatin Valley Fire and Rescue Department. Duplication was apparent, managers at the middle level were in triplicate and property taxes for fire protection was different throughout the area. In fact, the property tax before the merger was described “by the cities involved as exorbitant” (p. 11).

Frazier (1998) reported on the Miami Valley Fire/EMS alliance:

Although a full departmental consolidation is not always the end result due to political conditions, regional efforts in some areas of the country such as the Miami Valley Fire/EMS alliance formed in 1995 with 30 Ohio departments, have been developed with good success (Alexander, 1996, p. 92). Joint purchasing savings, programming, and increased efficiency has been some of the benefits of the melding of all the agencies into

one large organization, but in this case without the loss of community or department identity. (p. 17)

Frazier (1998) reported on the five-district merger in 1981 in Pasco County, FL:

This service was once fragmented into separate municipalities and districts. In 1980-81 the commission adopted a countywide mill rate for the first time which made it possible for high growth areas or struggling sparsely areas to get necessary equipment and capital improvements needed (Doyle, 1982, p. 321). Over \$500,000 in savings was realized as a result of the merger in 1980 alone. This was a result of bulk purchasing, centralized training, flexibility in manpower and equipment, less administrative costs, and other factors. Most of the savings resulted from the reduction in chief officers salaries, and equipment savings. A reduction in fire service ratings was also obtained reducing rates for thousands of residents and commercial customers (Doyle, 1982, p. 38). (p. 19)

Finally, Frazier (1998) identified the benefits of a consolidation of his department and Fire District #2:

Benefits in service which have proven effective in other departments involved in a consolidation which should also prove effective here would be an increased response capability for Fire District #2 patrons, increased efficiencies for both departments through standardization of training, operating guidelines, and equipment, and the possibility of lowered ISO rating resulting in decreased insurance premiums for residents in Fire District #2. The City of Hutchinson would benefit specifically by having additional flexibility in resources to use during multi incidents and the increased response capabilities for the northern part of the city. (p. 36)

Identifying potential strategies to optimize fire protection services within Florence Township, New Jersey. In his EFO research paper, Kensler (2000) recognized the increased demand on the fire service today:

“With the threat of domestic terrorism and the need for urban search and rescue and other specialized teams, in addition to the standard fire, EMS, and hazmat response, the roles being assumed by the fire service are more unpredictable and less stable” (Rielge, 2000, p. 52). ““Because of their limited resources, small organizations are having difficulty meeting state and federal mandates” (Jensen, 2000, p. 102) “Whether consolidation is carried out for reasons of economy, efficiency or both, you’re certain to experience a period of organizational uncertainty following such transition” (Giorgio, 2000, p. 106). (p. 11)

Finally, Kensler (2000) reports:

Although consolidation efforts do focus on saving money, Jeff Wertz, Co-Executive Director, North Hudson Regionalized Fire & Rescue notes, “the number one charge that we had in putting this (regionalization of the North Hudson Fire & Rescue Department) together is not how much money it was going to save, but will it save lives and provide a better fire protection to our citizens (Eldred, 2000). (p. 15)

Livermore-Pleasanton fire department. The Livermore and Pleasanton Fire Departments, located in CA, formed a Joint Powers Authority (JPA) to oversee their consolidation (JPA, “Staff Summary Report,” November 21, 1997). The JPA (November 21, 1997) report stated the following:

In the first year of consolidation the department had two goals – meet the approved goals of consolidation in the sharing of headquarters staff and resources; and fully integrate the two prior departments into one seamless organization. Staff master planned these goals at

the first of the year and identified 293 tasks in ten theme areas that would have to be done to completely meet our consolidation goals. Of course, these tasks were in addition to on-going operations. (p. 1)

The JPA (November 21, 1997) staff report also identified the core purpose of the consolidation as “To make our community safe for all citizens to live and work through the protection of life, property and the environment” (p. 4). It further goes on to identify core values as commitment to caring, dedicated to safety, dignity and respect for all, integrity and pride, provide solutions, value tradition and evolve with innovation (JPA, November 21, 1997, p. 4).

Menlo Park fire district. Menlo Park Fire District Officials reported pursuing joining forces with the Redwood City Fire Department (Jeffris, 1994). Both departments are in CA. “Such a merger, fire Chief Rick Tye estimated, could save the two departments a total of up to \$725,000 annually” (Jeffris, 1994, p. 1). Chief Tye also went on to say “Losing local control, that’s the most difficult thing in a lot of areas to overcome” (Jeffris, 1994, p. 1). In a report Chief Tye made to the fire district directors, he reported that a merger would enable both departments to relocate stations to provide better fire protection to the city’s they serve (Jeffris, 1994).

North Shore fire department. “In 1994 the North Shore communities of Bayside, Brown Deer, Fox Point, Glendale, River Hills, Shorewood and Whitefish Bay agreed to consolidate their separate, independent fire departments into a single entity that would serve all seven North Shore Communities” (*Village of Bayside Web Page*, “Relocation of a North Shore Fire Department Station to Bayside”, April, 2002, p. 1). These communities are all located in Wisconsin (WI). The article identified the joint effort as the largest consolidation of fire departments in the state and has been used as a model for shared services for other government entities to follow. It also goes on to say “The unified fire department serving all seven communities has eliminated redundancy in capital equipment and facilities and has upgraded the

qualifications of firefighters” (*Village of Bayside Web Page*, “Relocation of a North Shore Fire Department Station to Bayside”, April, 2002, p. 1).

People management: the crucial aspect of mergers and acquisitions. Julie Anderson’s (1999) book *People Management: The Crucial Aspect of Mergers and Acquisitions* discusses the human aspects of mergers, and if they are not addressed properly, can lead to a failure of the merger. Anderson (1999) goes on to say “Human resources (HR) activities are increasingly being held responsible for merger and acquisition failure” (p. 1).

Anderson (1999) indicates the HR weaknesses commonly found in a typical merger process can be grouped as follows:

1. Neglect of psychological issues. The psychological effects of change on people are not given adequate consideration when companies are integrated.
2. Inadequate communications throughout the merger process. Employees are not kept informed during the integration process. Although people fear that their jobs are at stake, they typically have very little reliable information on which to base decisions.
3. Culture clashes between the two organizations. Employees with different values and work styles are frequently required to work together with no structure for resolving differences.
4. Ambiguous company direction and unclear roles and responsibilities. Senior management is typically slow in articulating the vision and mission of the new merged organization. (p. 1)

Potential for consolidation of the Muskegon Township fire department with neighboring jurisdictions. In his EFO research paper, Marentette (1999) describes the potential for the Muskegon Fire Department, in Michigan (MI), to consolidate with neighboring departments. In Marentette’s (1999) research he describes the feasibility study of a neighboring township:

In 1996, the City of Rockford, Michigan and neighboring Plainfield Township hired the Emergency Services Consulting Group of York, Pennsylvania to do a feasibility study on consolidation of their fire departments. The result of the study was the creation of the Rockford-Plainfield Fire Department. The introduction of the Rockford-Plainfield report states, “Many communities like yours have come to realize that the review of administrative and operational programs in the public sector is as essential as it is with private manufacturing or financial programs. Considering alternatives to the traditional approaches is a natural extension of good government”. (p. 12)

Marentette (1999) also points out “Fiscal considerations have historically been, and continue to be, one of the primary motivations for exploring some type of cooperative effort” (p. 15).

Sacramento metropolitan fire district. The American River Fire District and the Sacramento County Fire Protection District, both of CA, received approval on March 21, 2000 to finalize their consolidation into the Sacramento Metropolitan Fire District (SMFD) (*SMFD Web Page*, “SMFD Emerges”, 2000). The merger became official on December 1, 2000. This consolidation was a success story, after two earlier unsuccessful attempts to accomplish the consolidation (*SMFD Web Page*, “SMFD Emerges”, 2000).

Cited in the article *SMFD Emerges* (*SMFD Web Page*, “SMFD Emerges”, 2000), the merger effort was recognized in a CA commission study:

In a recent study of over 2,200 special districts in California, the Little Hoover Commission (Commission on State Government Organization and Economy) singled out American River and Sacramento County Fire Districts as an exemplar case where local government mergers not only make good functional sense, but also result in an “annual savings of \$500,000 in administrative costs” (Sacramento Bee, 5/4/2000). Also noted in

the study, are the efforts to increase public awareness by implementing a citizen's review task force, airing public meetings on TV, regular newsletters, and initiating public Saturday strategy meetings. (*SMFD Web Page*, "SMFD Emerges", 2000, p. 3)

The consolations of consolidation. In his article, *The consolations of consolidation* (Giorgio, 2000), Assistant Chief Robert Giorgio reports on the status of a six independent fire district merger that took place on January 1, 1994. The department is the Cherry Hill Fire Department of Cherry Hill, New Jersey (NJ). After six years of operation, the department has seen a broad range of benefits such as uniform operations of forces, certification-based training, reduction of the overall age of the fleet, a new maintenance facility, streamlined purchasing procedures and an improved fire prevention bureau that has been active in improving the level of public education (Giorgio, 2000).

Specific improvements for the Cherry Hill Department include stronger incident command; higher staffing levels; first responder EMS; an expanded role for volunteers; certification-based training; improved training facilities; a streamlined organization; a newer apparatus fleet; savings on day-to-day supplies; and centralized record keeping (Giorgio, 2000).

Lastly, Giorgio (2000) points out "The true measure of our success is the performance and commitment of our department's members" (p. 115).

Summary of the literature. The literature review gave credence to this research. There are several communities around the country which have completed successful consolidations by utilizing organized and comprehensive consolidation plans.

Procedures

Research Methodology

The desired outcome of this research is to identify that consolidations can be successful as shown from other consolidation efforts around the country. The research project utilized

evaluative research methodology to understand the experiences of several communities around the nation that have gone through fire department consolidations.

The on-line card catalog of the Learning Resource Center (LRC) at the NFA was used to search for materials pertaining to fire department consolidations and mergers. Further, the search engine www.Google.com was utilized also to search for materials pertaining to fire department consolidations and mergers.

A copy of the *Coventry Comprehensive Community Plan* was provided to the researcher from the Coventry planning department personnel at the Coventry Town Hall, Coventry, RI.

A copy of the textbook *Fire Department Consolidation, Why & How To Do It ...Right* (VFIS, 1994) was received by publication request from VFIS in York, PA.

EFO papers were printed in their entirety from the online LRC database.

To understand the experiences of several communities around the nation that have gone through fire department consolidations. Information for question number one was taken from seven online internet sources, two textbooks, two articles from a fire service trade magazine, and eight EFO research papers. The seven online internet sources used were the *Swissvale FD Web Page* ("Press Release," September 17, 2002), *Fairfield Fire & EMS: United They Stand* (Sachs, 1999), *Fire Services – A Best Practices Review* (MN Legislature, 1997), *Livermore-Pleasanton Fire Department Staff Summary Report* (JPA, November 21, 1997), *Menlo Park* (Jeffris, 1994), *Relocation of a North Shore Fire Department Station at Bayside* (*Village of Bayside Web Page*, April, 2002), and *SMFD Emerges* (*SMFD Web Page*, 2000). The two textbooks were *Fire Department Consolidation – Why & How To Do It ... Right* (VFIS, 1994) and *People Management: The Crucial Aspects of Mergers and Acquisitions* (Anderson, 1999). The two articles were *Consolidations a' la carte* (Jensen, 2000) and *The consolations of consolidation* (Giorgio, 2000). The eight EFO research papers were *Analysis of a Proposed Four Fire District*

Merger in Ada County, Idaho (Curry, 1999), Consolidation of Fire Protection Services in Central Penobscot County (Ellis, 2000), Feasibility of Consolidation between the Sterling Park Rescue Squad and Sterling Volunteer Fire Department (Walter, 1999), Feasibility Study of Consolidation for the Southwest Council of Governments (Haney, 1998), Fort Lauderdale Combined Service Area Alternative (Earle, 1998), Hutchinson and Reno County Fire Departments (Frazier, 1998), Identifying Potential Strategies to Optimize Fire Protection Services within Florence Township, New Jersey (Kensler, 2000) and Potential for Consolidation of the Muskegon Township Fire Department with Neighboring Jurisdictions (Marentette, 1999).

Definition of Terms

Combination Fire Department: A fire department staffed by both career and volunteer firefighters.

Consolidation: The act of combining to one body or entity.

Fire District: A political subdivision chartered to provide fire protection services.

Functional Consolidation: Separate fire departments are retained, but one or more duties normally performed by one department are assigned to employees of another department.

ISO: Insurance Services Offices

Joint Powers Authority: Intergovernmental agreement with authority granted to assume specific powers jointly.

Merger: The combining of two or more governmental agencies through a legal process with the output being a single entity.

Mutual Aid: An agreement between fire departments to provide assistance as requested on an incident-by-incident basis (Marentette, 1999).

Results

What are the experiences of other communities that have gone through fire department consolidations? The following experiences of communities around the nation were identified in the literature review.

Curry's (1999) findings are that there are major benefits to the taxpayer in increased service levels with no increase in cost.

The Swissvale and Rankin volunteer fire departments of Maryland reported:

“The steering committee's plan will not increase any cost to either community and it will provide for better fire protection than what each volunteer department could provide on their own.” (*Swissvale FD Web Page*, Press Release, September 17, 2002)

Jensen (2000) points out that during these days of consolidations, “What does matter is that egos are being set aside and decisions are being made with the end user in mind” (Jensen, 2000, p. 105). This is a very important observation because it signifies that consolidations are working and obstacles such as egos that were prevalent in earlier years are being overcome.

Ellis (2000) identifies a successful consolidation in 1995, when the City of Thornton, CO merged with the West Adams County Fire Protection District, saving \$300,000 to \$500,000 per year beginning in 1996. Ellis (2000) also reports that on January 1, 1998, the fire departments of Toronto, North York, Scarborough, Etobicoke, York, and the Borough of East York in Canada, were merged into the Toronto Fire Services, which was deemed a success story.

On the down side, Ellis (2000) reports:

Unfortunately, not all consolidations are successful. Individual circumstances need to be carefully considered before a final decision as whether to consolidate or not is made (Haney, 1998). In California “after almost a year of studying the possibility of consolidating the fire services of Los Altos, the Los Altos County Fire Protection

District, Mountain View and Palo Alto, the conclusion is that it's feasible but not practical" (Domingue, 2000). There were not enough money incentives to gain public support for the consolidation. (p. 22)

At the conclusion of her research, Walter's (1999) recommendation was "It is recommended that the Sterling Park Rescue Squad and the Sterling Volunteer Fire Department not actively participate in consolidation efforts at present" (p. 3).

Walter (1999) reported the present-day Tualatin Fire and Rescue Department near Portland, OR, is the product of several consolidations of smaller fire and rescue agencies. While there were many challenges in the consolidation efforts encountered by Tualatin Valley Fire and Rescue, the agency concluded that the consolidations were very beneficial and published materials to assist other departments in effective consolidations (Walter, 1999).

Walter (1999) also reported on the Lexington Fire Department and EMS:

The Lexington, Missouri, Fire Department and Emergency Medical Services Department investigated the possibility of a consolidation in 1991 (Fischer, 1991). The conclusion of the study of the possible consolidation between the Lexington Fire Department and the Lexington EMS Department was that a consolidation would benefit the organizational and operational efficiency of the departments and the service delivery (Fischer, 1991). (p. 8)

In 1994, the Fernridge Rural Fire Department in Veneta, OR, examined the possibility of consolidation with other departments (Walter, 1999). "The study also found that consolidation of smaller fire departments would be beneficial" (p. 8).

Walter (1999) also reported that a 1995 study of fire districts in Collier County, Lee County and Manatee County, FL found "there were no negative perceptions present in the

department members concerning fairness of treatment, decision making ability and the level of authority within the consolidated departments (Latessa, 1995)” (Walter, 1999, p. 9).

Haney’s (1998) research paper concluded that consolidation of the member departments of the Southwest Council of Governments was feasible and “The majority of the fire chiefs believed there would be expanded opportunities to expand services in their communities and that it would be more cost effective to consolidate. The mayors anticipated improved services following a consolidation” (p. 19).

Of the Fairfield Community Fire Company and the Fairfield Am Vets Community Ambulance Service consolidation, Sachs (1999) reported that after about six months after the merger, signs of success were very obvious. The merger committee expected a 20% overall budget savings by the end of 1999. From a service standpoint, EMS personnel and firefighters began cross training, which resulted in more personnel available to do firefighting duties and more available to do emergency medical care duties.

Sachs (1999) further reports that at the end of the first fiscal year, the results of the merger continued to be positive.

In Contra Costa County, CA, a consolidation resulted in an immediate reduced tax rate and the addition of a 10% capital improvement program (VFIS, 1994).

Another example is Orange County, FL where a consolidation in the mid-1970s resulted in a successful venture (VFIS, 1994).

The Poudre Fire Authority, CO is another example of a successful consolidation (VFIS, 1994). The process actually began in 1980 in the Fort Collins area between Fort Collins and Poudre Valley Fire Protection District (VFIS, 1994). In 1981 the decision was made to proceed with a full consolidation. The transition to the new department went smooth and planning was reportedly a critical element in the successful consolidation (VFIS, 1994).

The book also points out two failed consolidation attempts, Downey/Santa Fe Springs, CA and Columbia/Boone County, MO (VFIS, 1994). It was the intent of both locales to pursue a successful consolidation. However, local interests and egos took over, causing failure of the consolidation attempt (VFIS, 1994).

Fire Services – A Best Practices Review (MN Legislature, 1997), reported on the consolidation that formed the West Metro Fire – Rescue District.

Because of the merger, fire and rescue responses are now based on proximity to the three fire stations, not to city boundary lines. Improved first responder service is available because fire fighters equipped and trained to use defibrillators respond when needed by residents of either city. Fire prevention work, including code enforcement in building inspections and fire-safety education, are consistent throughout the district. For the first time in either city, a vehicle replacement program is in place. Cost reductions resulted from unfilled turnover in fire fighter positions, but more significant savings are expected over time as the fire department avoids the costs of replacing three pumpers while maintaining its ISO rating. (MN Legislature, 1997, p. xv)

Earle (1998) identified successful consolidations in his paper, one of which was Cobb County, GA, which until 1971 was serviced by eight independent fire departments. They had realized several advantages through consolidation, one of which was the reduction of their ISO rating from 10 to seven.

Frazier (1998) researched the feasibility of consolidating two KS fire departments. Frazier (1998) finds that:

The findings of this research on the feasibility of consolidation between the City of Hutchinson Fire Department and Reno County Fire District #2 reveal that one consolidated fire/rescue department would be more efficient and cost effective although

there are some barriers that need to be addressed. The means are available and in place to provide this service provided both governing bodies can reach an equitable interlocal government. Past indifferences, lack of trust, and control issues must be put aside by all involved persons and organizations and must look to the future to what is best for the citizen. (p. ii)

Frazier (1998) also reports that the Orlando, FL region in 1981, combined 16 fire districts into one county fire department named the Orange County Fire and Rescue. It was noted that the Orlando, FL region needed to balance the citizens' demand for increased service against the demand by the same citizens for reduced cost of government (Frazier, 1998). The combination of the 16 fire districts met the citizens' demands.

Frazier (1998) also cited the Portland, OR metropolitan area that formed the Tualatin Valley Fire and Rescue Department, a merger between three departments in 1989 after taking a hard look at their operation. The merger eliminated duplication, reduced managers at the middle level, and created a fair, single property tax for fire protection (Frazier, 1998).

Frazier (1998) reported on the Miami Valley Fire/EMS alliance:

Although a full departmental consolidation is not always the end result due to political conditions, regional efforts in some areas of the country such as the Miami Valley Fire/EMS alliance formed in 1995 with 30 Ohio departments, have been developed with good success (Alexander, 1996, p. 92). Joint purchasing savings, programming, and increased efficiency has been some of the benefits of the melding of all the agencies into one large organization, but in this case without the loss of community or department identity. (p. 17)

Frazier (1998) reported on a five-district merger in 1981 in Pasco County, FL, "Over \$500,000 in savings was realized as a result of the merger in 1980 alone. This was a result of

bulk purchasing, centralized training, flexibility in manpower and equipment, less administrative costs, and other factors” (p.19). “A reduction in fire service ratings was also obtained reducing rates for thousands of residents and commercial customers (Doyle, 1982, p. 38)” (Frazier, 1998, p. 19).

Finally, Frazier (1998) identified the benefits of a consolidation of his department and Fire District #2:

Benefits in service which have proven effective in other departments involved in a consolidation which should also prove effective here would be an increased response capability for Fire District #2 patrons, increased efficiencies for both departments through standardization of training, operating guidelines, and equipment, and the possibility of lowered ISO rating resulting in decreased insurance premiums for residents in Fire District #2. The City of Hutchinson would benefit specifically by having additional flexibility in resources to use during multi incidents and the increased response capabilities for the northern part of the city. (p. 36)

In his EFO research paper, Kensler (2000) reports:

Although consolidation efforts do focus on saving money, Jeff Wertz, Co-Executive Director, North Hudson Regionalized Fire & Rescue notes, “the number one charge that we had in putting this (regionalization of the North Hudson Fire & Rescue Department) together is not how much money it was going to save, but will it save lives and provide a better fire protection to our citizens (Eldred, 2000). (p. 15)

The Livermore and Pleasanton Fire Departments formed a JPA (JPA, “Staff Summary Report,” November 21, 1997) that reported:

In the first year of consolidation the department had two goals – meet the approved goals of consolidation in the sharing of headquarters staff and resources; and fully integrate the

two prior departments into one seamless organization. Staff master planned these goals at the first of the year and identified 293 tasks in ten theme areas that would have to be done to completely meet our consolidation goals. (p. 1)

The JPA (November 21, 1997) staff report indicated success in forwarding their goals and accomplishing their 293 tasks.

Menlo Park Fire District Officials reported pursuing joining forces with the Redwood City Fire Department (Jeffris, 1994). “Such a merger, fire Chief Rick Tye estimated, could save the two departments a total of up to \$725,000 annually” (Jeffris, 1994, p. 1). In a report Chief Tye made to the fire district directors, he reported that a merger would enable both departments to relocate stations to provide better fire protection to the city’s they serve (Jeffris, 1994).

“In 1994 the North Shore communities of Bayside, Brown Deer, Fox Point, Glendale, River Hills, Shorewood and Whitefish Bay agreed to consolidate their separate, independent fire departments into a single entity that would serve all seven North Shore Communities” (*Village of Bayside Web Page*, “Relocation of a North Shore Fire Department Station to Bayside”, April, 2002, p. 1). The article identified the joint effort as the largest consolidation of fire departments in the state and has been used as a model for shared services for other government entities to follow. It also goes on to say “The unified fire department serving all seven communities has eliminated redundancy in capital equipment and facilities and has upgraded the qualifications of firefighters” (*Village of Bayside Web Page*, “Relocation of a North Shore Fire Department Station to Bayside”, April, 2002, p. 1).

Julie Anderson (1999) discusses the human aspects of mergers and if they are not addressed properly, can lead to a failure of the merger. Anderson (1999) goes on to say “Human resources (HR) activities are increasingly being held responsible for merger and acquisition failure” (p. 1).

Anderson (1999) indicates the HR weaknesses commonly found in a typical merger process can be grouped as follows:

1. Neglect of psychological issues. The psychological effects of change on people are not given adequate consideration when companies are integrated.
2. Inadequate communications throughout the merger process. Employees are not kept informed during the integration process. Although people fear that their jobs are at stake, they typically have very little reliable information on which to base decisions.
3. Culture clashes between the two organizations. Employees with different values and work styles are frequently required to work together with no structure for resolving differences.
4. Ambiguous company direction and unclear roles and responsibilities. Senior management is typically slow in articulating the vision and mission of the new merged organization. (p. 1)

Marentette (1999) describes the potential for the Muskegon Fire Department, in MI, to consolidate with neighboring departments. In Marentette's (1999) research he describes the feasibility study of a neighboring township:

In 1996, the City of Rockford, Michigan and neighboring Plainfield Township hired the Emergency Services Consulting Group of York, Pennsylvania to do a feasibility study on consolidation of their fire departments. The result of the study was the creation of the Rockford-Plainfield Fire Department. (p. 12)

The American River Fire District and the Sacramento County Fire Protection District consolidated into the Sacramento Metropolitan Fire District (*SMFD Web Page*, "SMFD Emerges", 2000). The merger became official on December 1, 2000, this being a successful

consolidation after two earlier unsuccessful attempts (*SMFD Web Page*, “SMFD Emerges”, 2000).

Also cited on the SMFD web page in the article *SMFD Emerges*, the merger effort was recognized in a CA commission study.

In a recent study of over 2,200 special districts in California, the Little Hoover Commission (Commission on State Government Organization and Economy) singled out American River and Sacramento County Fire Districts as an exemplar case where local government mergers not only make good functional sense, but also result in an “annual savings of \$500,000 in administrative costs” (Sacramento Bee, 5/4/2000). Also noted in the study, are the efforts to increase public awareness by implementing a citizen’s review task force, airing public meetings on TV, regular newsletters, and initiating public Saturday strategy meetings. (*SMFD Web Page*, “SMFD Emerges”, 2000, p. 3)

Giorgio (2000), reports on the status of a six-fire district merger that formed the Cherry Hill Fire Department of Cherry Hill, NJ. After six years of operation, the department has seen a broad range of benefits such as uniform operations of forces, certification-based training, reduction of the overall age of the fleet, a new maintenance facility, streamlined purchasing procedures and an improved fire prevention bureau that has been active in improving the level of public education (Giorgio, 2000).

Giorgio (2000) points out “The true measure of our success is the performance and commitment of our department’s members” (p. 115).

Discussion

The research results showed that fire department consolidations can be successful.

Examples of successful consolidations were very obvious throughout the literature review. Curry's (1999) findings were that there are major benefits to the taxpayer in increased service levels with no increase in cost.

The Swissvale Fire Department web page identified that "The steering committee's plan will not increase any cost to either community and it will provide for better fire protection than what each volunteer department could provide on their own." (*Swissvale FD Web Page*, Press Release, September 17, 2002).

Ellis (2000) identified a successful consolidation in 1995, when the City of Thornton, CO merged with the West Adams County Fire Protection District, saving \$300,000 to \$500,000 per year beginning in 1996.

Walter (1999) reported the present-day Tualatin Fire and Rescue Department near Portland, OR, is the product of several consolidations of smaller fire and rescue agencies. While there were many challenges in the consolidation efforts encountered by Tualatin Valley Fire and Rescue, the agency concluded that the consolidations were very beneficial and published materials to assist other departments in effective consolidations (Walter, 1999).

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Poudre Valley Fire Protection District (VFIS, 1994). In 1981 the decision was made to proceed with a full consolidation. The transition to the new department went smooth and planning was reportedly a critical element in the successful consolidation (VFIS, 1994).

Similar findings were evident in the MN Legislature report of the West Metro Fire-Rescue District:

Because of the merger, fire and rescue responses are now based on proximity to the three fire stations, not to city boundary lines. Improved first responder service is available because fire fighters equipped and trained to use defibrillators respond when needed by residents of either city. Fire prevention work, including code enforcement in building inspections and fire-safety education, are consistent throughout the district. For the first time in either city, a vehicle replacement program is in place. Cost reductions resulted from unfilled turnover in fire fighter positions, but more significant savings are expected over time as the fire department avoids the costs of replacing three pumpers while maintaining its ISO rating. (MN Legislature, 1997, p. xv)

The Cherry Hill Fire Department of Cherry Hill, NJ was the result of a successful consolidation. After six years of operation, the department has seen a broad range of benefits such as uniform operations of forces, certification-based training, reduction of the overall age of the fleet, a new maintenance facility, streamlined purchasing procedures and an improved fire prevention bureau that has been active in improving the level of public education (Giorgio, 2000).

In reviewing the documents pertaining to the numerous consolidations, it is clear that fire department consolidations can lead to better and more efficient delivery of emergency services to the public. To achieve this success, consolidating fire departments must understand that the public being served should be the primary motivating factor for the consolidation. Further, at all

times, the consolidation should assure that “Appropriate levels of service and rapid response times are critical components to meeting the essential mission of the fire service. That mission is to save lives and protect property and the environment, arising from emergency incidents” (*SMFD Web Page*, “SMFD Emerges”, 2000, p. 2).

The implications of the results for the Coventry fire districts are that a consolidation would result in a successful unified fire service in the town of Coventry.

Implications for the Coventry Consolidation

The Coventry consolidation effort can expect the following benefits from a consolidation.

- 1. All budget formats will be combined into one standardized budget.**
- 2. One collective bargaining agreement with negotiations occurring with one negotiating team instead of negotiating several contracts.**
- 3. Organizational priorities and organizational goals may be developed for universal, consistent implementation for all departments involved.**
- 4. Standard operating procedures will provide for uniform operations of the combined forces.**
- 5. The department’s fleet of apparatus will be improved. Surplus vehicles may be sold. The overall age of the fleet will be reduced, therefore lowering maintenance costs. A uniform fleet maintenance program will be implemented.**
- 6. Streamlined purchasing procedures should save the department money through consistent purchasing oversight.**
- 7. Several levels of fire prevention and fire code enforcement will become consistent, operating under a unified command. This will standardize service to contractors working in town.**

- 8. Stronger incident command: Smaller departments rely upon company officers to operate as incident commanders, which reduces the number of people available to fight a fire. More personnel on-duty with a platoon commander on each shift will allow effective incident command and adequate personnel to fight a fire.**
- 9. Off-duty chief officers will be working for the consolidated department and will be called back to larger scale incidents with pre-determined assignments. This will allow for more effective incident command and safer operations.**
- 10. Expanded role for call personnel: Call personnel previously relegated to their local fire department response area, would now respond to all locations in town and may be assigned pre-determined duties such as rehab, ems, fast team, etc..**
- 11. Expansion of public education programs by sending out company officers and their crews to businesses in town while still having flexibility of other in-service companies to cover alarms. Small departments do not have this capability.**
- 12. Uniform training program with minimum requirements and recertification requirements for all personnel. This provides consistency in training, but more significantly, assures that every person in town will receive service from a firefighter/emt equivalently and adequately trained regardless of which station responds to an alarm.**
- 13. A streamlined organization: The entire staff will fit into an organizational structure that will provide a uniform chain of command with clearly identified job descriptions for each role within the new organization.**
- 14. Opportunities for grant funds will increase. A larger department with a larger population served will make us more eligible for several of the grant**

opportunities that are available, but as smaller departments, we become ineligible.

15. Savings can be expected in professional services such as insurance coverage.

Although the initial expense of a consolidated department is not expected to reduce the total overall operating budgets of the previous independent departments, it's the overall savings in both tax dollars and efficiency over the long term that's the true benefit achieved for the tax-paying public.

Recommendations

This research project identified several communities located throughout the nation that have experienced successful consolidations. In fact, there have been very few consolidation failures, indicating that consolidation attempts typically result in a success story.

The research also identified that the successful consolidations were typically the result of a well-designed consolidation plan. As part of those well designed consolidation plans, critical elements were identified and implemented in order to achieve a successful consolidation.

The research results showed that fire department consolidations can be successful.

This researcher recommends that the town members of the Coventry Emergency Services Alliance complete their planning process and seek approval from the taxpayers of the "alliance" districts to consolidate the four departments into one fire district.

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