

Public Safety, Fire and EMS Services Cost Reduction Strategies

The Department of State, through its Local Government Efficiency program (LGE) has identified a variety of best practices to help municipalities reduce local expenses through consolidation and shared efficiencies. Projects that have successfully lowered costs and improved fire and EMS service delivery include projects regional and local in scope.

Consolidation of Services

- Eliminates duplicative equipment expenditures, operational and administrative costs
- Increases response time per incident
- Efficient deployment of equipment
- Standardized accounting, billing and budgeting reduces time and waste

Fire protection in the Town of North Greenbush is provided by North Greenbush Fire District #1 (Wynantskill Fire Company) and the Defreestville Fire Protection District (Defreestville Fire Company). The Defreestville Fire Protection District dissolved into the North Greenbush Fire District #1 that encompasses the entire town, providing uniform consolidated fire protection and reduced municipal costs. Residents in the Defreestville Fire Protection District and North Greenbush Fire District #1 are realizing savings of \$155.71 and \$22.08 per household, respectively.

The consolidation of the police departments in the Town and Village of Saugerties was approved by voters in March 2010 by a 2 to 1 margin, and took effect on Jan 1, 2011. The Village of Saugerties 2011-12 Fiscal year tax rate equaled \$ 6.76 per \$ 1,000 in assessed property value, which is a decrease of approximately 21% from the 2010-11 Fiscal year. Overall, the tax levy saw a .18% decrease to \$2,089,829 in 2011-12 from \$2,093,584 in 2010-11.

In Suffolk County the Lonelyville and Fair Harbor Fire Districts consolidated into a single fire district named the Fair Harbor Fire District with the territorial boundaries of all of Lonelyville and all of Fair Harbor. This action became effective on May 31, 2011. It is anticipated that this consolidation will increase service delivery efficiencies and have a positive impact on the property tax rate in the new consolidated district.

Consolidation of County EMS Operations

- Eliminates duplicative operational and administrative costs
- Expenditures for equipment are shared rather than duplicated
- Cooperative can provide oversight and quality control
- Flexibility in deployment of responders and equipment reduces response time

In Steuben County, the Towns of Cohocton, Wayland, Atlanta and North Cohocton are studying the feasibility of consolidating their EMS services. In Jefferson County, officials are studying the

best option to improve its emergency medical services system, including the possible creation of a cooperative to provide oversight, quality control and patient billing for participating agencies.

Centralized Communications Centers

- Improved coordination of information and mutual aid service
- Decrease in response time and increase in responders service delivery
- Better management of call volume and functionality
- The predicability of budgeting

Schenectady County, through a fact finding process, reached a consensus to create a Unified Communications Center (UCC) that will receive all emergency calls and dispatch emergency service agencies countywide. Anticipated savings over a four year period is projected to be \$1,706,400.00.

Sharing Equipment

- Avoids duplicative capital expenditures. More cost effective way to meet mandated levels of service.
- May be first step towards functional consolidation of fire departments or districts.
- Municipalities retain independent fire protection services.

The City of Watervliet and the Village of Green Island shared the cost of one new 95-foot aerial ladder truck, avoiding the additional expense that they would have incurred had each one purchased a replacement truck. Watervliet paid for the truck and Green Island paid to equip the truck. This arrangement, a one time savings, has saved Green Island taxpayers \$792,000 and Watervliet taxpayers \$67,000.

Regional Planning

- Regional collaboration on fire protection/EMS services deploys personnel, utilizes equipment and other resources effectively
- Optimizes fire protection capacity based upon population distribution and need
- Sharing equipment tends to reduce individual municipal capital costs over time
- Provides mandated services more efficiently and effectively

Albany County conducted a study of the feasibility of consolidating the number of Public Safety Answering Points (E911), currently 6 primary and 4 secondary locations comprising 42 call taker positions. The county assessed current systems, including staff, equipment and operations, to determine the feasibility and logistics of implementing improvements based on best practices and other dispatch models. Twelve different models were developed with estimated cost savings. The most cost efficient scenario would have every municipality and agency combine

into a single communications center, with all emergency and 10-digit calls coming to a single PSAP. Dispatch operations would also be provided by this central communications center. This scenario will produce total cost savings of \$6,221,775.