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## **Fire Service Consolidation Could Yield Savings in Milwaukee County's South Shore**

*But operational issues produced by different staffing models must be considered*

A new report released today by the Milwaukee-based Public Policy Forum outlines three scenarios for consolidating fire services in Cudahy, South Milwaukee and St. Francis, each of which could generate substantial long-term equipment savings, and two of which could produce sizable annual operating savings.

Three consolidation scenarios are presented for consideration, which differ based on minimum staffing levels at each station location. It is assumed that under each scenario, the consolidated department would have identical governance, command and administrative structures, as well as the same apparatus and equipment. In addition, it is assumed that one of Cudahy's two fire stations could be eliminated under each of the scenarios, so that the three cities collectively would be served by three stations – one each in Cudahy, South Milwaukee and St. Francis.

“Our fiscal analysis estimates that the impacts of a consolidated department could range from a collective added annual operating cost of \$67,000 for one of the three staffing models, to annual operating savings ranging from \$248,000 to \$890,000 for the other two,” says Forum President Rob Henken. “In addition, under each of the scenarios, we estimate that the three cities would save more than \$1.7 million in vehicle replacement costs over the next seven years because of the ability to shrink the size of the collective vehicle fleet.”

With regard to programmatic impacts, the report finds that a consolidated South Shore fire department could improve the quality and uniformity of firefighter/EMS training, reduce dispatch times, and enhance advanced life support services. It also points out, however, that the minimum staffing levels contained in two of the three scenarios may reduce current firefighting capacity. The report notes that the staffing flexibility afforded by a consolidated department may offset that concern, but that is a question that will need to be carefully considered by public safety and elected officials in any consolidation discussions.

“Ideally, a consolidation option will exist for the three cities that can accommodate the need for budget savings *and* maintain – or perhaps enhance – existing levels of service,” adds Henken. “Our analysis shows that when viewed in that context, at least one of the options we have presented is worthy of further consideration.”

The report was initiated by the mayors of the South Shore communities, who asked the Forum to conduct a pair of independent analyses on consolidation options and their associated impacts. A report analyzing the potential creation of an independent consolidated dispatch center to serve the three communities was released last September.

The full report can be downloaded from the Forum’s Web site at [www.publicpolicyforum.org](http://www.publicpolicyforum.org). The report was funded by the three cities and the Greater Milwaukee Committee, with whom the Forum has partnered to facilitate an Intergovernmental Cooperation Council workgroup that is discussing shared services among Milwaukee County’s 19 municipal governments.

Milwaukee-based Public Policy Forum, established in 1913 as a local government watchdog, is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing the effectiveness of government and the development of southeastern Wisconsin through objective research of public policy issues.

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