The Good, The Bad and The Ugly of Joint Districts

Chief Robert Bates

Mergers and Consolidations

- **Merger** – 2 or more fire departments merge into 1; they form a *Fire District*

- **Collaboration / Consolidation** – operating together while each organization maintains its autonomy
## Consolidation Options

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formal/Contractual</th>
<th>Informal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Co-habitation</td>
<td>Joint Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared equipment</td>
<td>Joint Purchasing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Automatic Aid; First-emergency-first response, closest appropriate unit goes</td>
<td>Adjust runs cards for strategic responses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mutual Aid</td>
<td>Review SOG’s to be more uniform</td>
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**Fire Districts**
505.371 Joint fire district creation.

(A) The boards of township trustees of one or more townships and the legislative authorities of one or more municipal corporations, or the legislative authorities of two or more municipal corporations, or the boards of township trustees of two or more townships, may, by adoption of a joint resolution by a majority of the members of each board of township trustees and by a majority of the members of the legislative authority of each municipal corporation, create a joint fire district comprising the municipal corporations and all or any portions of the townships as are mutually agreed upon. A joint fire district so created shall be given a name different from the name of any participating township or municipal corporation.

505.371 Joint fire district creation.

D) Any municipal corporation or township, or parts of them, may join an existing joint fire district by the adoption of a resolution requesting such membership and upon approval of the board of fire district trustees. Any municipal corporation or township may withdraw from a joint fire district created under this section, by the adoption of a resolution ordering withdrawal. On or after the first day of January of the year following the adoption of the resolution of withdrawal, the municipal corporation or township withdrawing ceases to be a part of such district, and the power of the district to levy a tax upon taxable property in the withdrawing township or municipal corporation terminates, except that the district shall continue to levy and collect taxes for the payment of indebtedness within the territory of the district as it was comprised at the time the indebtedness was incurred.
The reasons, benefits, advantages, disadvantages and challenges to consolidating or merging departments are very similar. The difference is the degree to which these are realized.

Why join or create a fire district?

- Allow direct input and control by multiple political subdivisions
- Save money
- Improve efficiencies
- Improve service
Financial Advantages

- Reduced Cost;
  - long term, short term, *not a given*
- Increased efficiency & Eliminate duplication
  - Staffing, apparatus, services provided and utilized

Operational Advantages

- Standardized policies
- Standardized training
- Standardized Equipment
- Promotes team building
- Improved response/coverage
- Knowledge of area
**Disadvantages**

- Cost Savings; penny wise –vs- pound foolish
- Longer response times to certain areas
- The cost for some residents may increase

**Challenges** those issues and factors, both internal and external, that may increase the difficulty in creating and maintaining a successful fire district
Differing levels of services provided
- ALS vs BLS
- Fire Prevention Activities

Staffing Models
- Volunteer / part-time / career

Perceived/Actual disparities
- Ability (lack of) to achieve consensus

Resistance to Change
- Who’s the Boss?….At all levels

Personnel issues
- Seniority, pay rates, promotions etc.

Attitude

Culture
- Expectations, tolerance, priorities
Personal / Hidden Agendas

- Protection of “Turf”
- Giving up / Loss of Control
- Membership of Board
- Qualifications of staff
- Personal Advancement
- Loss of Power

Pitfalls

- Calculations were incorrect
- Poor Communication
- Personnel issues
- Salary/Wages comparisons
- *Poor Timing*
- *Annexation*
Timing is Key!

**Positive timing**
- Temperature Must be Right
- Right people in the right place at the right time!!!!
- One or more Chiefs are ready to retire
- Change in Demographics
- All parties must buy in and be informed of process

**Negative timing**
- Fire levy failed
- Taxes are too high in one community
- Wrong political setting (inside or outside the organization)

Renaming a Fire District
- Consider utilizing portions of existing department names or community names
- For Example: Salem Morrow Fire District
In closing.....

- A Fire District is a bold step that needs to be implemented by progressive thinkers.
- Politics need to be set aside in a decision making process to form a District such as this, and doing what is right for the betterment of communities needs to be the common goal.
- It is normal for people to fear change.

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