

**Minutes of the Belton City Council
Work Session
February 19, 2020
City Hall Annex
520 Main Street, Belton, Missouri**

Mayor Davis called the work session to order at 1:04 p.m.

Alexa Barton, City Manager, stated the Executive Session is not needed today. Therefore, there will not be a special meeting, only a work session.

Sheldon Gilbert and John Stoffer (via phone) with Emergency Services Consulting International gave a report on a cooperative services fire feasibility study. They presented collaboration and consolidation options between the City of Grandview Fire Department, the City of Belton Fire Department, South Metro Fire Protection District, West Peculiar Fire Protection District, Western Cass Fire Protection District, and Mount Pleasant Fire Protection District. (Exhibit A attached; full document available in the City Clerk's office) A consolidation would create a new Fire Protection District with all entities. It was also presented to consider consolidation of communications and dispatch through Kansas City.

Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:18 p.m.

Andrea Cunningham, City Clerk

Jeff Davis, Mayor

FEASIBLE OPTIONS FOR COLLABORATION/CONSOLIDATION

In this section, ESCI describes several strategies to consider for the future of the fire departments and districts involved in this study.

Option A: Continue with Status Quo

Obviously, continuing with the status quo and discontinuing efforts to pursue consolidation would be a feasible option. In this case, nothing changes, and the individual city fire departments and fire protection districts continue to function independently. The elected officials, organizational leadership, and other policymakers may determine that pursuing consolidation may not be financially viable, too complex, and/or potentially unsupported by the residents, taxpayer, and electorate of their respective jurisdiction. While continuing with the status quo would be the simplest approach, the potential for a more effective and efficient fire protection and EMS delivery system may not be realized.

Option B: Collaboration through an ICA

This option entails the development of an Interlocal Cooperation Agreement that would produce a combined administrative and functional collaboration among two or more of the existing fire departments—but not include an operational component. The advantages and disadvantages of this option have been described previously in this report.

In this case, it would *not* require all organizations in this study to participate. For example, it could begin with an ICA between South Metro FPD and West Peculiar FPD, or between the Belton Fire Department and Grandview Fire Department. The other fire departments/fire districts could subsequently participate in the ICA at a later time.

Implementation Process

- Decisions will need to be made among the leadership as to which jurisdictions would be willing to participate in a collaborative process through an ICA.
- The participating fire departments would need to identify those administrative and functional areas that could be combined to improve efficiency and organizational effectiveness.
- The most practical *Administrative* function would be leadership (Fire Chief and Assistant Fire Chief). Others, such as human resources, legal, and financial may not be feasible.
 - The leadership and policymakers should appoint both a Fire Chief and Assistant Fire Chief to oversee the various functions of the participating fire departments. Typically, these two positions are selected from among the current fire chiefs of the participating organizations. It will be critical the individuals selected for these positions have the requisite administrative and leadership skills to effectively implement and manage the process. Those appointed should not be selected based simply on their current position and rank.

- Potential *Functional* areas to consider for collaboration could include:
 - Fire Prevention (Life Safety) and public education programs.
 - Fire, EMS, and other training programs.
 - Joint EMS quality management/quality improvement programs.
 - Contract for a single Medical Director for all participating departments.
- Appoint representatives from the participating jurisdictions as members of a planning committee that would determine which functional areas to include, as well as all of the details to enable implementation (e.g., employee assignments; office facilities; SOGs and other work rules, etc.). These issues must be addressed prior to entering into a formal collaboration.
 - Identify the financial impact, if any, of Functional Collaboration, and determine the necessity of developing fair and equitable cost sharing among the participants.

This option could be the first step in a formal consolidation process. A collaborative process would not be without its challenges, but could lead to a better relationship among the participating organizations. Initially, an Operational Collaboration would probably not be feasible in the short-term until other issues were resolved (discussed later).

Option C: Formal Consolidation Strategies

As discussed previously in this report, there is more than one option to consider for achieving a legal and formal consolidation. The challenge is to determine which option to pursue, taking into account implementation costs; political issues; community support; taxpayer impact; support from fire department personnel and the bargaining units; and other issues.

Option C-1: Creation of a New Fire Protection District

One of the options would be to create a new FPD whose boundaries would encompass all of the municipal and fire district jurisdictions that chose to participate. This, however, would probably be the most complex and time-consuming of the options. Although feasible, it would likely *not* be the most practical choice.

Option C-2: Fire Protection District Consolidation

With a joint resolution of each district's Board of Directors, two or more current FPD's could begin engagement of the consolidation process. This would effectively create a new fire protection district, but would still require a detailed consolidation plan to address a substantial number of issues in operations, administration, finance, and more.

The logical choice for fire district consolidation would be a merger of the South Metro FPD and West Peculiar FPD. Of the two, SMFPD has the lower property tax rate. Should it be necessary for the new consolidated FPD to have the higher of the two rates, then it would require placing that on the ballot for approval by the electorate. Although Western Cass FPD and Mt. Pleasant FPD could be included in such a consolidation, their participation would be uncertain (discussed later in this report).

Once consolidation of the two districts was accomplished, the cities of Belton and Grandview, and the other FPDs (should they choose to participate) could petition the new fire protection district to annex their jurisdictions into the new FPD boundaries.

Option C-3: Annexation by a Current Fire Protection District

In this option, each of the participating fire protection districts and municipalities would petition a single existing FPD to extend its boundaries for annexation into the district. This option would be the most expeditious for accomplishing a legal consolidation. As with all of the options, this would not be without its challenges and issues.

Other Issues to Consider

Whatever option is selected, the policymakers and leaders will need to consider and address specific issues and concerns. The following addresses the primary issues identified by ESCI.

Mt. Pleasant & Western Cass Fire Protection Districts

Based on a number of interviews and other sources, all indications were that neither Mount Pleasant FPD nor Western Cass FPD would consider merging their jurisdictions into another organization if the result was an increase in the property tax rate for their residents.

WCFPD has the option of continuing with the status quo for fire protection and medical first-response services, but must also ensure that the District continues to receive emergency medical transport. In the case of MPFPD—who currently has no fire department or resources of its own—they must ensure that their community continues to have some form of fire protection, as well as medical transportation services.

Options to Consider for the Fire Districts

Mount Pleasant FPD

Should consolidation occur among the other jurisdictions, there may be a legal requirement for the new organization to honor the existing agreement with Mount Pleasant FPD. Ultimately, this will need to be determined after a review by legal counsel. Regardless of the legal review, ESCI recommends that fire protection and EMS transport services to MPFPD continue uninterrupted.

If at some point the existing agreement expires, or it becomes necessary to develop an agreement with the new organization, ESCI recommends that the costs to provide fire protection are negotiated at a rate that is fair and equitable to both organizations.

The residents of MPFPD are currently provided with EMS transport services from the Belton Fire Department at no direct cost to Mount Pleasant FPD—other than the fees charged to patients. As found in many communities, the amount of cash collected from EMS transports does not produce sufficient revenue to account for the cost of providing 24-hour ALS ambulance service.

ESCI believes that it is the responsibility of the MPFPD Board of Directors to ensure the residents of the District are provided with all necessary emergency services—including EMS transport. ESCI recommends:

- It is recognized that MPFPD does not receive substantial amount of property tax revenue. However, any future agreements should include some level of reimbursement to account for a least a portion of the costs to provide EMS transport services.
- If this occurs, such an agreement should include language that requires MPFPD to be part of the overall EMS delivery system, and that EMS calls within the District receive the same priority as any other EMS call in the new consolidated jurisdiction.

Should MPFPD elect not to provide some reimbursement for EMS transport services, then the dispatch policy of the new organization should require that EMS incidents occurring within the new jurisdiction receive priority over those within the Mount Pleasant FPD. This would only be fair to the taxpayers in the new consolidated jurisdiction that would be paying the full costs of EMS transport services.

Village of Loch Lloyd

As discussed earlier in this report, the Village of Loch Lloyd has previously expressed interest in having the City of Belton build a fire station near their community (one suggestion has been to place it somewhere near the intersection of East 171st Street and Holmes Road).

The Village of Loch Lloyd is located within the Mt. Pleasant Fire Protection District boundaries. However, since it is an incorporated community, the Village could submit a petition for annexation into the new FPD. However, this may not be legally accomplished during an initial consolidation process, as its location is not contiguous with any of the other fire districts beyond MPFPD—but does border the City of Belton. Therefore, Loch Lloyd would probably need to initiate the petition process once the initial consolidation is completed, and so long as Belton is included (an opinion by legal counsel should be sought on this issue).

With regard to the construction and staffing of a new fire station, both historical and projected service-demand in that area does not presently indicate a need. Construction, maintenance, and operation of a new station would be cost-prohibitive and unwarranted, based on ESCI's analyses. Belton Fire Station #1 is located about 4.5 miles southeast of Loch Lloyd, with an estimated travel time of about 8–9 minutes.

Western Cass FPD

Should Western Cass FPD choose not to participate in a consolidation process, the District should consider other options to ensure their community has reliable access to emergency services. In this case, ESCI recommends WCFPD consider the following:

- The District should participate, with the other jurisdictions, in exploring and participating in consolidating emergency communications and dispatch services (describe in more detail later).
- Consider participating in the previously described Administrative Collaboration (but not the Functional Collaboration).
 - Because of its lack of personnel, WCFPD would have little or nothing to contribute to a Functional Collaboration.

- If a formal consolidation process occurs, WCFPD should consider contracting with the new organization for fire protection, medical first-response, emergency medical transport, and other emergency services.
 - Concerning emergency medical transport, the same issues would apply to WCFPD as described in the section regarding the Mt. Pleasant FPD.
- In cooperation with a new consolidated organization, WCFPD should explore the potential and cost for enhanced emergency services to the District. For example:
 - Assign a 10- or 12-hour two-person quick response unit (QRU) during daily peak-demand times at the WCFPD station nearest the area with the highest service demand.
 - The QRU should be in a wildland-type configuration capable of carrying a small booster tank with pumping capacity, and equipped with basic life support equipment and an automated external defibrillator (AED).
 - For WCFPD, data from 2017 indicated that the 12-hour period with the highest service-demand occurred between 1200–2400 hours (noon to midnight), representing nearly 64% of the call volume. The next busiest 12-hour period at WCFPD in 2017 occurred between 0800–1900 hours (8 am–7 pm), and accounted for 62% of the total service-demand.
 - During this same period, the majority of incidents occurred between Thursdays and Sundays, representing 67% of the service-demand of the District.

Consolidation of Emergency Communications & Dispatch Services

Regardless of which option is selected, ESCI recommends that all five of the fire departments/districts involved in this study jointly explore the feasibility of transferring communications and dispatch services to the Kansas City Fire Department Communications Center. This should be done using a collaborative approach, with the intent of *possibly* reducing the costs among the individual jurisdictions. This would require a detailed evaluation and careful planning, and include at least:

- Creation of a temporary communications committee comprised of representatives from each of the fire departments and KCFD.
- An analysis of the technological details and requirements necessary for the communications system to function adequately.
- Development of dispatch and operational policies and procedures.
- Identification of all technological, equipment, and other costs related to transferring services to KCFD; including how the costs would be shared among each of the jurisdictions.
- After determining the costs of technological implementation, negotiate the fee structure for services with the KCFD Communications Center.

Records Management Systems

Four of the five fire departments in this study utilize ImageTrend® as their records management systems to document incidents and other information, with the fifth using ESO Solutions® for their RMS. One of the challenges in this study has been the numerous flaws in the incident data provided by all of the study participants, which prevented ESCI from conducting a number of the various data analyses.

If the jurisdictions move forward with consolidation, the participating fire departments should work cooperatively to determine a single RMS that could interface with the CAD system. At a minimum, the RMS should include the ability to document all incident types; patient-care records; personnel management; training records; occupancies and inspections; and fire and arson investigations.

ESCI Recommendation on Consolidation

If a formal consolidation process is implemented, ESCI recommends **Option C-3: Annexation by a Current Fire Protection District**. However, a number of issues should be addressed prior to moving forward with this process. This will be discussed in detail later in the report.

ESCI concludes that the South Metro Fire Protection District is in the best position for extending its boundaries through the annexation of the other jurisdictions. It must be emphasized that this does *not* suggest that SMFPD is better than any of the other fire departments, fire districts, or their personnel—only that South Metro is the most suited to implement this option, and may have the most likelihood for a successful consolidation.

Other Recommendations

During this study, ESCI made substantial observations of each of the participating fire departments. The following section is a list of recommendations for improvement. Some of these can be applied to a potential consolidation, while others may be applicable to a fire department or group of the participating fire departments.

- Each department should publish an annual report of its service-demand, prevention activities, and other relevant information.
- The Western Cass Fire Protection District should create and implement departmental policies and standard operating guidelines.
- Each department should establish a more robust, cohesive, and engaging social media presence.
 - SMFPD should combine their social media accounts, and ensure independent accounts are managed consistent with department expectations.
 - Each fire department should establish social media policies.
 - Consider publishing and distributing community newsletters to be distributed quarterly; this will be especially important if the consolidation process is going to move forward.
- Consider consolidating resources for additional contract-maintenance services, such as hose testing, SCBA maintenance, and atmospheric monitoring calibration and repair.
- WCFPD and WPPFD should implement medical exams for newly hired firefighters and others that may be assigned to emergency operations and risk management (i.e., fire prevention).
 - These individuals should undergo periodic medical exams.
- WPPFD should reduce the consecutive-hour threshold significantly (no more than 72 hours for full-time employees, and no more than 48 hours for part-time employees).

