

# SHARED SERVICE REPORT

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FOR



THE CITIES OF WAUWATOSA AND WEST ALLIS | MILWAUKEE COUNTY, WISCONSIN

August 7, 2025



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# SHARED SERVICE REPORT

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## CITIES OF WAUWATOSA AND WEST ALLIS

MILWAUKEE COUNTY, WISCONSIN

August 7, 2025

McM. No. W4004-04-25-00608

### I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

McMahon was retained by the Cities of Wauwatosa and West Allis, Wisconsin to conduct a study of potential enhancements of shared fire and emergency medical services (EMS) between the two cities. The scope of the project included:

- ◆ Conducting an operational assessment of both fire departments
- ◆ Review service demand levels and the ability to meet those demands
- ◆ Evaluate coordinated fire and EMS operations
- ◆ Evaluate various shared service options
- ◆ Review current and future budgetary constraints
- ◆ Review other issues and opportunities recognized during the analysis

Representatives of both municipalities and fire departments were extremely cooperative in the study process. McMahon reviewed statistics, data and documentation provided by both fire departments and conducted interviews of key stakeholders of the two municipalities and their fire departments.

Both fire departments have a long history of providing exemplary service, while earning the trust and appreciation of their respective communities. Their participation in the county Shared Service Agreement further exemplifies a commitment to interoperability and operational unity, resulting in seamless integration during emergency responses. This foundation of mutual respect and proven collaboration positions them well for any future initiatives aimed at enhancing efficiency and public safety.

Following a comprehensive evaluation of both fire departments, the consulting team analyzed projected funding streams under two scenarios: continued independent operations and a transition to a consolidated entity. The findings reveal a clear financial advantage in favor of a merged organization, reinforcing the strategic and operational benefits of creating a joint department. This data-driven insight provides a compelling foundation for advancing collaborative solutions that enhance service delivery and long-term sustainability

Although there are a few differences between the respective fire departments, overall the fire departments of Wauwatosa and West Allis are similar in both size and level of service. Because their financial challenges are also similar, both agencies have taken measures to keep staffing to minimal levels over time while maintaining their valuable ISO 1 ratings. As a result of these factors, the agencies' main opportunities for savings come in administrative staffing costs that

they will be able to reduce with a single entity. At the same time, the amount of work will largely remain the same. For example, while there can be joint training with one department, the number of front-line employees will remain the same, which will keep training demands relatively similar.

The project recommendations are based on the following points:

- A joint fire department offers the best opportunity to sustain current levels of fire/EMS service for both cities, while maintaining separate departments threatens the current level of service.
- Providing no less than the current service levels was a priority expressed by both city administrations. Recommendations in this report achieve that requirement.
- Annual savings of \$1.3 million in Year 1; \$7 million total savings over first 5 years.
- The main opportunities for savings will come from reduced administrative costs.
- Projected 11 fewer employees in a joint department.
- Additional future savings due to fewer reserve apparatus needed.
- Levy limits benefit joint fire agencies more than individual city departments.
- Levy limits would require \$2 million reduction in costs in year 1 with separate departments: minimal to no reduction with a joint fire department.
- Cost increases will continue; a joint department can better absorb these increases.
- Recent changes to the State Innovation Fund rules offer a greater opportunity for the merged department to be eligible for an Innovation Fund grant.
- Innovation Fund revisions could result in each city being eligible for up to \$4.25 million each annually for up to 5 years.
- Call demand does not allow for reduced front line staffing.
- A consolidated fire department provides opportunities to enhance critical services, including emergency response capabilities, training delivery, EMS program administration, fire and life safety inspections, and the delivery of valuable public outreach programs.
- Unfunded liabilities will need to be addressed before a joint agency assumes liability.
- As the proposed fire and EMS consolidation progresses, establishing a unified dispatch model will be essential to support seamless incident coordination and resource deployment. This will be best achieved by immediately beginning a review of 911 dispatch services with a dedicated review committee.

While full consolidation of the Wauwatosa and West Allis fire departments will produce reductions in operating costs, it also positions the combined entity for increased funding opportunities. Beyond fiscal considerations, the merger is expected to enhance emergency response capabilities across both municipalities. Additionally, the model offers a scalable framework that could encourage future consolidation efforts with other communities across the region.

## II. INTRODUCTION

McMahon Associates, Inc. (McMahon) was retained by the Cities of Wauwatosa and West Allis to develop a comprehensive Shared Service Report (Analysis) utilizing received information from the following sources:

- Documentation and Data Review
- Internal and External Interviews
- On-site Observations
- Relevant State and Municipal Codes

## III. SCOPE OF SERVICES

The Scope of Services centered on evaluating the feasibility and potential impact of establishing a new, consolidated fire department. This included a comprehensive analysis of the advantages and challenges associated with both merging the departments and maintaining their independence. The evaluation encompassed the following key tasks:

- Conduct an operational assessment of each fire department, including recruitment, employee selection, staffing, training, National Incident Management System (NIMS) compliance, and management structure and practices.
- Review service demand levels and the ability to meet those demands.
- Evaluate potential effectiveness and efficiency improvements.
- Evaluate coordinated fire and EMS operations.
- Evaluate current shared services.
- Review budgetary constraints.
- Identify other issues and opportunities recognized during the analysis.

## IV. PROJECT WORK TASKS

To fulfill the objectives established by both cities, the McMahon team conducted a comprehensive evaluation of each fire department's operations. In addition, they analyzed projected growth and financial trends to provide a forward-looking perspective.

As part of this process, McMahon staff engaged with a broad cross-section of leadership from both cities, as well as personnel from each fire department. These interactions were designed to identify key concerns and operational insights related to the delivery of efficient, cost-effective fire services across both communities.

The following presents an overview of the work completed by McMahon during the project:

1. Communicated with the city administrators and chief elected officials to define the scope and mission, discuss the work plans, establish liaison responsibilities, and confirm other general arrangements.
2. Established a Project Team which included stakeholders from both cities, including elected officials, city leadership, fire department administration, and union representatives from both fire department locals.
3. Obtained and reviewed documentation pertaining to this project, including existing fire department documentation, policies and procedures, and call volume statistics. Analysis included a review of the following:
  - Intergovernmental Agreements
  - Development and Growth Plans
  - Wisconsin Statutes and Municipal Codes
  - Economic Development Plans
  - Regional Shared Service Agreements
  - Organizational Structures
  - Current and Anticipated Budget Data
  - Shared Service Agreements
  - Existing Service Contracts
  - Previous Studies
  - Fire Department Policies
  - Response Data
  - Training Records
  - Inspection Records
  - Deployment Strategies
  - Prior ISO Reports
  - Review of Stations
  - Review of Apparatus
  - Review of Equipment
4. Assessed the current fire operations of both fire departments to determine future needs by conducting interviews and on-site observations with representatives of the agencies and other stakeholders. Interviews included the following:
  - Administrators of both Communities
  - Elected Officials
  - Department Heads
  - Police & Fire Commission Members
  - Human Resources Staff
  - Finance Departments
  - Neighboring Departments
  - Both Fire Chiefs
  - Fire Department Command Staffs
  - Training Staffs

- EMS Staffs
  - CRR Staffs
  - Company Officers
  - Fleet Services Staff
5. Reviewed both fire departments' workflows and processes to analyze and develop potential organizational and operational requirements. This review is based on industry standards, including:
    - State of Wisconsin Statutes and Administrative Code
    - National Highway Safety Traffic Administration (NHSTA)
    - Federal Emergency Management Association (FEMA)
    - Local Related Ordinances
    - Commission on Fire Accreditation International (CFAI)
    - Commission on Accreditation of Ambulance Services (CAAS)
    - National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)
  6. Facilitated a Status Meeting to present preliminary findings and obtain feedback from the Project Team.
  7. Developed a comprehensive list of opportunities for enhanced shared fire/EMS services, utilizing the information provided by the documentation received, the interviews, and on-site observations.
  8. Facilitated a Recommendations Meeting to present preliminary recommendations and obtain feedback from the Project Team.
  9. Assembled the Report document. Performed a detailed quality assurance review of the document to ensure that the document meets the expectations of the Project Team and conforms to McMahon's standards.
  10. Prepared and delivered the draft report for review.
  11. Received feedback regarding the content of the draft report and made changes to the report based on returned comments. Produced and delivered the final document copies to the City of Wauwatosa and the City of West Allis.
  12. Presented the findings and recommendations of the report to both cities elected bodies.

## **V. PROJECT FINDINGS**

This section provides a comprehensive overview of the background and historical data surrounding each fire department. It also identifies operational, structural, and organizational similarities among the organizations that may impact the future of both organizations.

**a. Regional Overview, Demographics and Environment**

The Cities of Wauwatosa and West Allis are both located in Milwaukee County, Wisconsin. The communities are situated along the Interstate Highway I-94 corridor just west of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The geographic location of the communities has resulted in a significant number of development and growth opportunities throughout the region over the past decades.

The growth and development in the communities has led to an increased demand for public services. The Cities of Wauwatosa and West Allis both currently operate independent fire departments with deep historical roots. Additionally, each organization participates in the Milwaukee County Shared Service Agreement, which provides various services including automatic aid response to member fire departments within Milwaukee County.

Both municipalities operate their own municipal law enforcement agencies. In addition, both the Wauwatosa Fire Department and the West Allis Fire Departments are dispatched by their respective 911 Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) Dispatch Centers. Each PSAP is primarily operated by their respective local city police department.

Each city is governed by its own elected common council and is managed by a professional administrator. Milwaukee County is governed by a county board and an elected county executive. In addition, Milwaukee County operates a sheriff's department for required law enforcement services.

Currently, property tax is the largest single revenue category for both cities. The amount of property taxes collected are based on the value of the property subject to the tax. The revenue received from the city's property tax, which is approved as part of the annual budget, provides a significant portion of each fire department's budget. Supplemental funds are also provided from Emergency Medical Services (EMS) revenue and various contracts for services.

According to the State of Wisconsin Department of Administration, the population of each community is expected to change over the next few decades. As noted, the City of Wauwatosa is expected to slightly increase population over the next 25 years, while the population of West Allis is predicted to decrease.

| Predicted Population Changes |                    |                    |                    |                    |
|------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| City                         | 2020<br>Population | 2030<br>Population | 2040<br>Population | 2050<br>Population |
| Wauwatosa                    | 48,387             | 49,438             | 49,826             | 49,986             |
| West Allis                   | 60,325             | 58,092             | 55,221             | 52,280             |

[https://doa.wi.gov/Pages/LocalGovtsGrants/Population\\_Projections.aspx](https://doa.wi.gov/Pages/LocalGovtsGrants/Population_Projections.aspx)



## **b. Department Summaries**

The following section identifies the intricacies of each fire department, as well as basic historical background for each department. This overview highlights the broad core distinctions and commonalities of each organization

### **i. City of Wauwatosa**

The City of Wauwatosa is located west of Milwaukee in Milwaukee County. Surrounded by the Menominee River, the Potawatomi and Menominee Indians lived in what now is Wauwatosa until the 1830s when the U.S. Government prepared for land sales.

Credited as the founder of Wauwatosa, Charles Hart built two mills along the river in 1835, icons that would first make the town known as Hart's Mills. Wauwatosa experienced explosive growth in the mid-19th century, made possible by transportation links to Milwaukee and the great influx of German and Irish settlers.

According to the fire department's website, a devastating fire occurred on July 10, 1895 that left many commercial businesses in ruin, but the disaster only spurred new growth in the city. On August 2, 1898 city leaders arranged for the storage of a fire wagon in a local barn. A separate agreement was made with a stable owner to provide horses and a driver at \$1 per call. In 1899, the common council organized the Wauwatosa Fire Department (WFD) and J. D. Warren was sworn in as the first Fire Chief with ten members.

Currently, the city footprint covers 13.1 square miles. The Department serves 49,363 residents from four fire stations. Three of the stations are owned by the City of Wauwatosa. A fourth station, Station 55, is located geographically within the City of Milwaukee and is operated through a lease agreement between cities. The stations are located as follows:

- Station 51: 1601 Underwood Avenue, Wauwatosa 53213
- Station 52: 4187 N. Mayfair Road, Wauwatosa 53222
- Station 53: 10525 Watertown Plank Road, Wauwatosa 53226
- Station 55: 100 N. 64 Street, Milwaukee 53213

Additionally, the department owns and operates a Fire Training Center at 11100 W. Walnut Road in Wauwatosa. This facility is essential for regional training, hosting a Joint Fire Training Academy every spring and fall, and is used by fire departments across Milwaukee and Waukesha Counties under written agreements.

**Wauwatosa Fire Station Map**  
City of Wauwatosa  
Revised on 5/7/2025

**McMAHON**  
ENGINEERS ARCHITECTS

**Legend:**  
 - Stations (Red circle with number)  
 - Wauwatosa Municipal Boundary (Red outline)  
 - Municipal Boundaries (Black outline)  
 - Street Centerlines (Thin black line)  
 - Railroad Lines (Thick black line with cross-ticks)

**Scale:** 0 0.5 1 Miles

**Source:** Milwaukee County, 2025; Waukesha County, 2025.

**Disclaimer:** The property lines, road centerlines lines, and other property information on this drawing were developed or obtained as part of the County Geographic Information System or through the County property tax mapping function. McMAHON does not guarantee this information to be correct, current, or complete. The property and right-of-way information are only intended for use as a general reference and are not intended or suitable for site-specific uses. Any use to the contrary of the above stated uses is the responsibility of the user and such use is

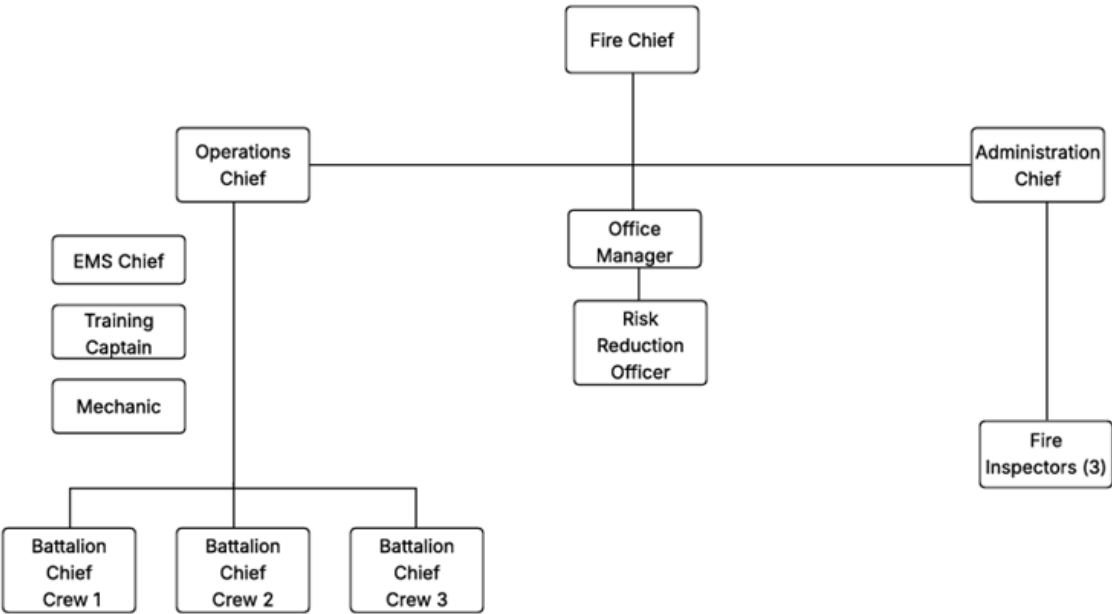
The Department’s 2025 Operating Budget was approved at \$16,346,161, while the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) Budget was approved at \$1,160,500. The following chart identifies the department’s budget history for 2024 & 2025:

| Wauwatosa FD Budget History |                   |            |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|------------|
| Year                        | Operations Budget | CIP Budget |
| 2024                        | 16,538,059        | 126,500    |
| 2025                        | 16,346,161        | 1,160,500  |

The Wauwatosa Fire Department is an all-career agency presently approved for 105 total members. The organization currently has several openings and is not fully staffed. The chart below demonstrates the 2025 approved positions by rank:

| Wauwatosa Approved Positions By Rank |                    |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Rank                                 | Approved Positions |
| Fire Chief                           | 1                  |
| Assistant Chief                      | 2                  |
| Division / Deputy Chief              | 0                  |
| Battalion Chief                      | 5                  |
| Captain                              | 6                  |
| Lieutenant                           | 12                 |
| Engineer                             | 15                 |
| Firefighter                          | 59                 |
| Code Specialist / Inspector          | 2                  |
| Office Assistant (civilian)          | 1                  |
| Mechanic (civilian)                  | 1                  |
| Administrative Manager (civilian)    | 1                  |
| Other - Grant                        | 0                  |
| Other Civilian                       | 0                  |
| TOTAL                                | 105                |

The Wauwatosa Fire Department is led by an appointed Fire Chief, two Assistant Chiefs and two Battalion Chiefs who are assigned to a 40-hour work week. The following chart demonstrates the current organizational structure for the Wauwatosa Fire Department. As noted, field personnel are supervised by an on-duty Battalion Chief who is assigned to a 24-hour shift.

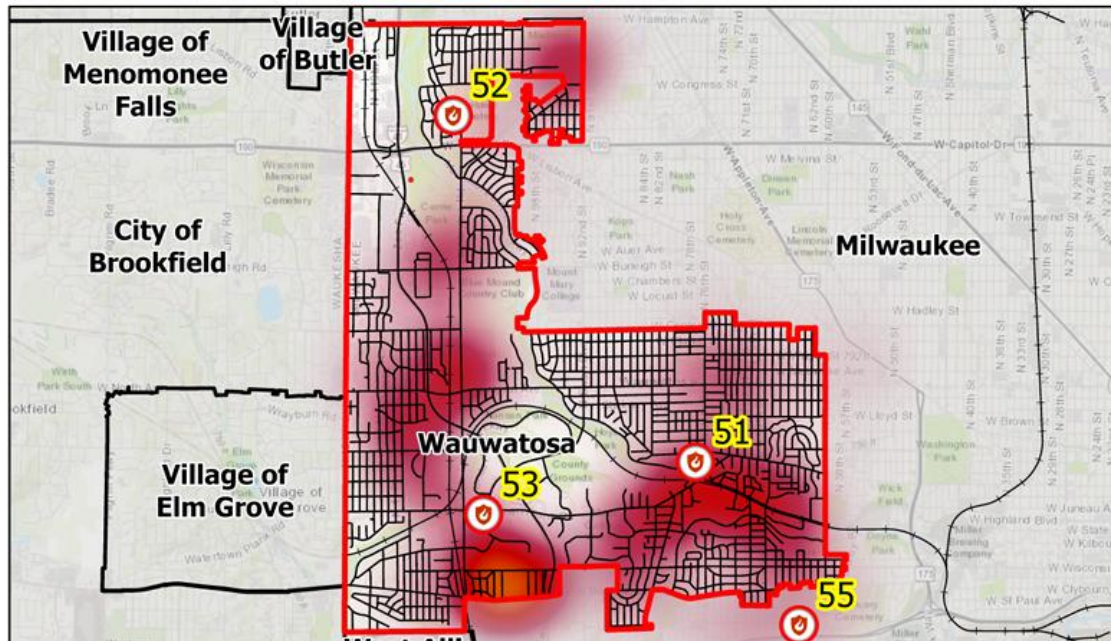


The Wauwatosa Fire Department currently staffs the majority of their fire apparatus with four (4) assigned fire personnel, and two (2) assigned personnel to each staffed ambulance. The exception is Engine 53, which is allowed to be staffed with three (3) personnel during staffing shortages. The following chart identifies current staffing by apparatus:

| Wauwatosa 24-Hour Assigned Staffing |        |          |       |          |         |          |           |          |
|-------------------------------------|--------|----------|-------|----------|---------|----------|-----------|----------|
| Station                             | Engine | Staffing | Truck | Staffing | Med/Amb | Staffing | Battalion | Staffing |
| 51                                  |        |          | 51    | 4        | 51      | 2        | 5         | 1        |
| 52                                  | 52     | 4        |       |          | 52      |          |           |          |
| 53                                  | 53     | 4 or 3   | 53    | 4        | 53      | 2        |           |          |
| 55                                  | 55     | 4        |       |          |         |          |           |          |

The department responded to 10,237 emergency incidents in 2024. In addition to traditional fire suppression and prevention services, the department provides

emergency medical service transport at the paramedic level. The following graphic demonstrates the location of emergency incidents as reported for 2024:



The Wauwatosa Fire Department is a well-respected organization that is strongly supported by the community. The department spearheads several regional training programs that benefit the citizens of Wauwatosa as well as other regional emergency service organizations. As an example, the Joint Fire Training Academy provides various opportunities to unify fireground operations amongst several regional partners.

Fire inspections are accomplished through a combination of two full-time fire inspectors and one part-time inspector. In addition, on-duty fire suppression personnel are assigned to inspect multi-unit housing complexes throughout the response area.

Additionally, the department protects the Milwaukee Regional Medical Center (MRMC), which presents several unique challenges, given the unique occupancies and procedures that are performed on a daily basis. According to their website, the MRMC campus includes Froedtert Hospital, Children's Wisconsin, Medical College of Wisconsin, and Versiti Blood Research Institute. The campus is known for its Level I adult and pediatric trauma centers and its role as a regional destination for advanced medical care.

## **ii. City of West Allis**

West Allis is a city in Milwaukee County, located adjacent to the City of Milwaukee's western boundary. According to the 2010 census, it had a population of 60,411, which makes West Allis the eleventh most populous municipality in Wisconsin and the third most populous municipality in the four-county metropolitan area, behind only the cities of Milwaukee and Waukesha.

West Allis has a mayor-council form of government, with a Common Council of ten alderpersons representing five districts. The Common Council is led by the Mayor. The city administrative officer is appointed by the Common Council. Other officials are appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the Common Council.

The West Allis Fire Department was established in 1906 as a volunteer fire department, largely responding to alarms triggered by the Allis-Chalmers facilities. Initially, the department relied on volunteers, borrowed horses, and basic equipment like chemical wagons and hand-pumping engines. However, the department gradually evolved, adding horse-drawn vehicles in 1907 and becoming fully motorized by 1916. In 1922, the department transitioned to a full-time, paid force. A significant milestone was the construction of a new fire station between 1929 and 1930, considered one of the most modern of its kind at the time, which later became the city's fire administration center.

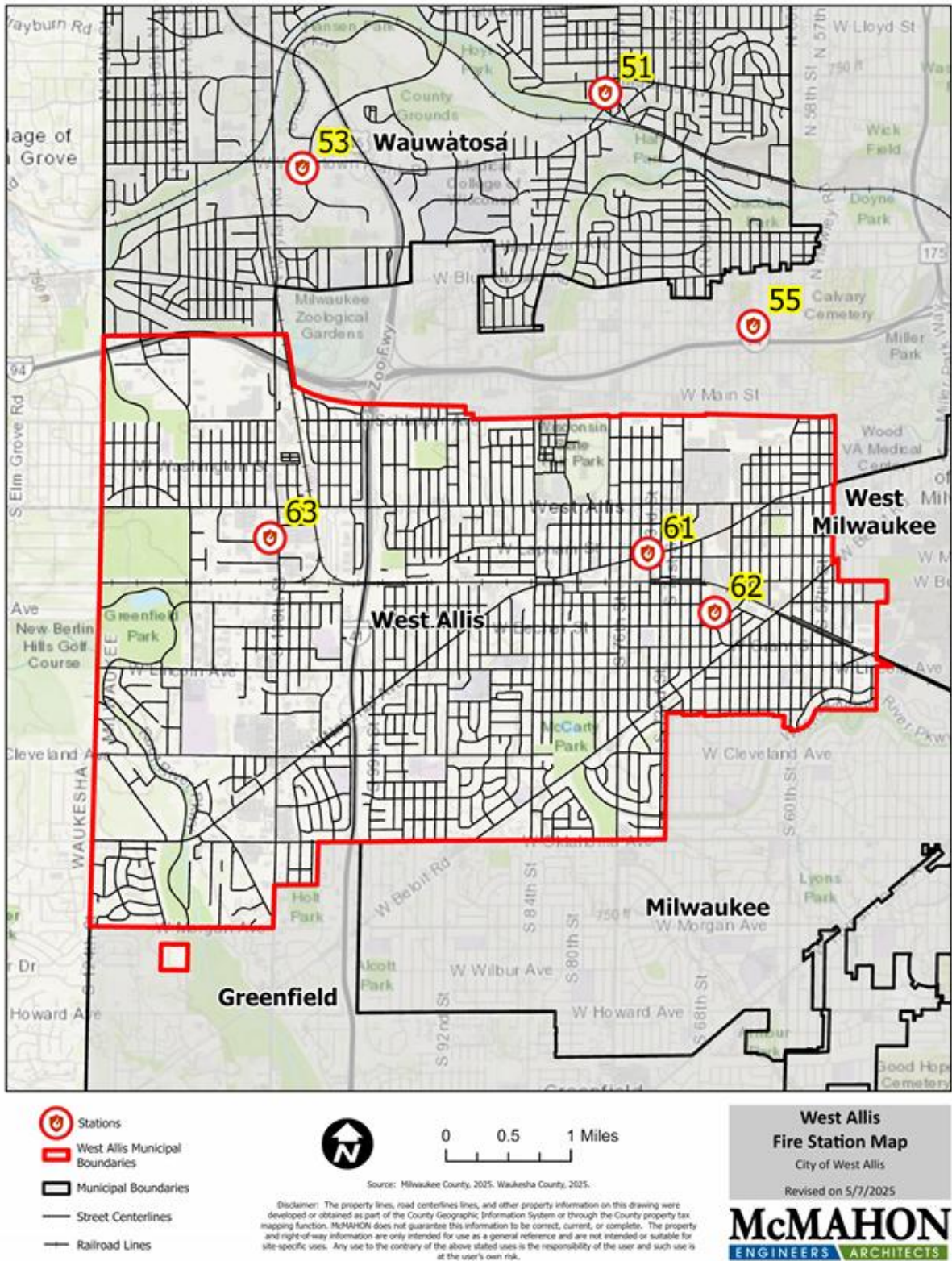
The West Allis Fire Department is governed by the Police and Fire Commission, which is appointed by the mayor and confirmed by the Common Council. This Commission has optional powers in accordance with State Statute 62.13 (6).

Currently, the city footprint covers 11.38 square miles. The Department serves 58,874 residents from three fire stations. All three of the stations are owned by the City of West Allis, and are located as follows:

- Station 61: 7300 W. National Avenue, West Allis, WI 53214
- Station 62: 2040 S. 67<sup>th</sup> Place, West Allis, WI 53219
- Station 63: 10830 West Lapham Street, West Allis, WI 53214



The following map identifies the three (3) West Allis fire station locations:



The Department’s 2025 Operating Budget was approved at \$16,050,470 while the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) Budget was approved at \$869,000. The following chart identifies the department’s budget history for 2024 & 2025:

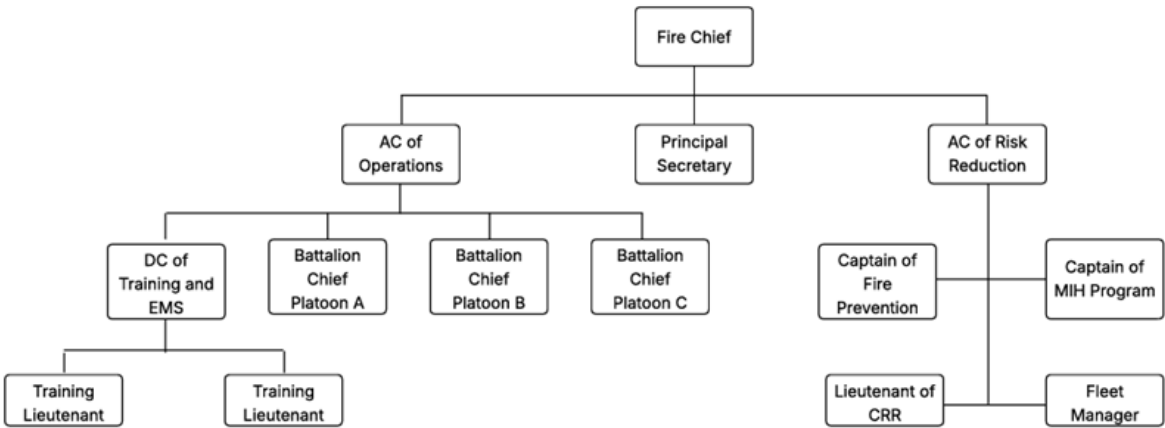
| West Allis FD Budget History |                   |            |
|------------------------------|-------------------|------------|
| Year                         | Operations Budget | CIP Budget |
| 2024                         | 16,050,470        | 869,000    |
| 2025                         | 16,437,582        | 457,000    |

The West Allis Fire Department is an all-career agency currently approved for 102 total members. The organization currently has several openings within its administrative staff and is not fully staffed. The chart below demonstrates the 2025 approved positions by rank:

| West Allis Positions By Rank      |                    |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|
| Rank                              | Approved Positions |
| Fire Chief                        | 1                  |
| Assistant Chief                   | 2                  |
| Division / Deputy Chief           | 2                  |
| Battalion Chief                   | 3                  |
| Captain                           | 10                 |
| Lieutenant                        | 12                 |
| Engineer                          | 12                 |
| Firefighter                       | 51                 |
| Code Specialist / Inspector       | 6                  |
| Office Assistant (civilian)       | 1                  |
| Mechanic (civilian)               | 1                  |
| Administrative Manager (civilian) | 0                  |
| Other - Grant                     | 1                  |
| Other Civilian                    | 0                  |
| TOTAL                             | 102                |



The West Allis Fire Department is currently led by an appointed Interim Fire Chief, two Assistant Chiefs, two Division Chiefs and several staff Captains and Lieutenants who are assigned to a 40-hour work week. The following chart demonstrates the current organizational structure for the West Allis Fire Department. As noted, field personnel are supervised by an on-duty Battalion Chief who is assigned to a 24-hour shift.



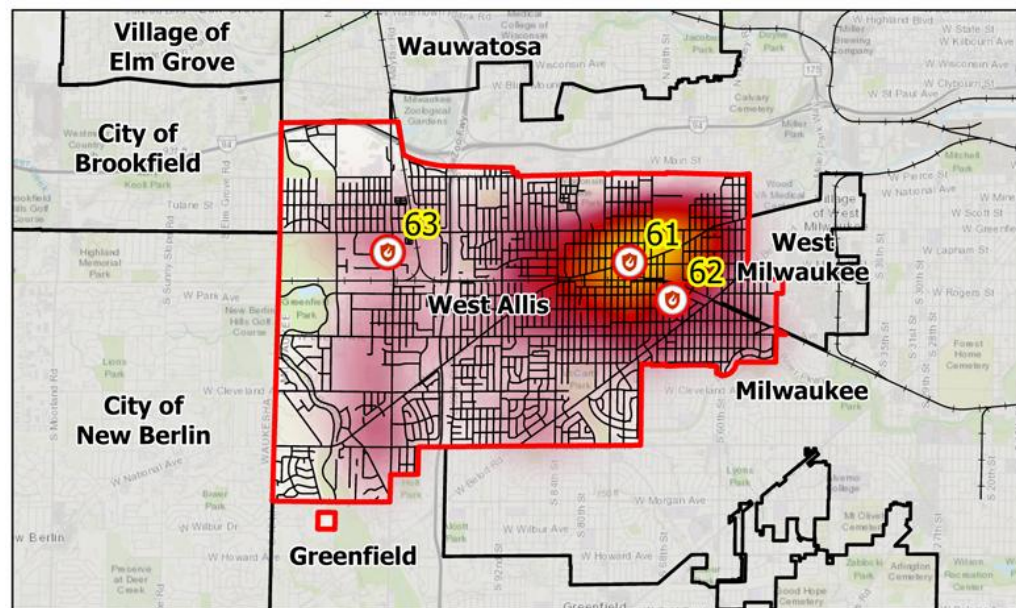
The West Allis Fire Department staffs each fire apparatus with four personnel and assigns two personnel to every active ambulance. One member from Truck 62 is detailed daily to serve as the fire inspector during business hours, returning to Truck 62 after business hours.

The following chart identifies current staffing by apparatus:

| West Allis 24-Hour Assigned Staffing |        |          |       |          |         |          |           |          |
|--------------------------------------|--------|----------|-------|----------|---------|----------|-----------|----------|
| Station                              | Engine | Staffing | Truck | Staffing | Med/Amb | Staffing | Battalion | Staffing |
| 61                                   | 61     | 4        |       |          | 61      | 2        |           |          |
| 62                                   | 62     | 4        | 62    | 4        | A-62    | 2        | 6         | 1        |
| 63                                   | 63     | 4        |       |          | 63      | 2        |           |          |

The department responded to 11,615 emergency incidents in 2024. In addition to traditional fire suppression and prevention services, the department provides emergency medical service transport at the paramedic level.

The following graphic demonstrates the location of emergency incidents as reported for 2024:



The West Allis Fire Department has a rich history and enjoys strong community support. The department's Mobile Integrated Health (MIH) program has earned recognition for significantly reducing substance use disorders and lowering the frequency of emergency responses to high-utilization incidents, demonstrating the effectiveness of this innovative, non-traditional approach. In addition, program funding is provided through a partnership with a local hospital.

The West Allis Fire Department serves a community with a high renter population, estimated by the fire administration to comprise nearly 40% of local residents. In response to this distinct demographic, the department actively develops and delivers Community Risk Reduction (CRR) programs specifically tailored to renters.

Through completing the accreditation process with the Commission on Fire Accreditation International (CFAI) during five separate intervals, the department continues to demonstrate a culture of progress and sustained self-assessment. This continued recognition reflects not only the quality of its operational programs, but also its commitment to staying current, adaptable, and aligned with industry best practices, all key traits in today's dynamic public safety environment.

### c. Departmental Comparisons and Similarities

The consultant team identified many similarities between the City of Wauwatosa and the City of West Allis, as well as their respective fire departments.

As illustrated in the chart below, both communities exhibit a range of core characteristics that closely parallel with one another. These shared attributes not only highlight the fundamental similarities in their community dynamics, but it also demonstrates the similarity within their respective fire department organizational demographics.

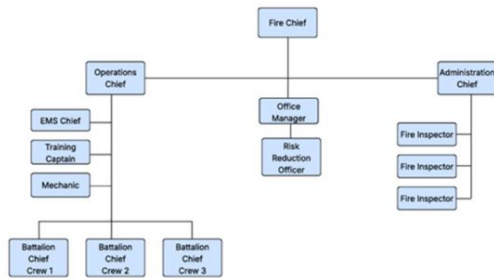
| Organizational Similarities   |              |              |
|-------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Element                       | Wauwatosa    | West Allis   |
| Population                    | 49,363       | 58,874       |
| Square Miles                  | 13.1         | 11.38        |
| Fire Stations                 | 3 (+1)       | 3            |
| 2024 Incident Response Totals | 10,237       | 11,615       |
| 2025 Approved Staff           | 105          | 102          |
| 2025 Approved Budget          | \$16,346,161 | \$16,437,582 |
| Current ISO Classification    | 1            | 1            |

Through a review of both organizations, the consultants found both departments enjoy a motivated and highly qualified workforce. The field personnel all appeared to care deeply for their fire departments and their communities. That said, members from both fire departments expressed concerns regarding a pending consolidation. However, when asked, most members believed consolidation, in some form, is inevitable and the future of fire and EMS services within Milwaukee County will likely be far different than today's model.

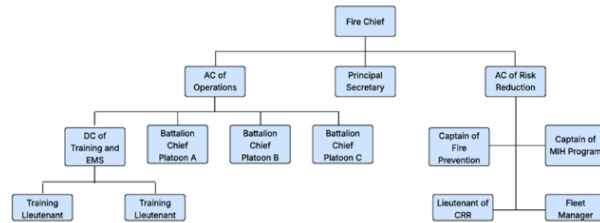
Although both fire departments participate daily within the current Milwaukee County Shared Service Agreement, personnel noted the challenges that arise from separate 911 dispatch centers. Multiple groups interviewed expressed concerns over time delays in emergency call processing and alarm notification time due to individual dispatch centers. It is recommended that further study is completed to provide alternatives, such as a unified fire and EMS dispatch center.

Both fire departments share largely similar organizational frameworks, particularly regarding their overhead and administration functions. While minor distinctions exist within each department's organizational structure, their foundational bases are closely aligned. The following charts provide an overview of both organizations' hierarchy.

## Wauwatosa FD



## West Allis FD



Functionally, the Wauwatosa and West Allis Fire Departments operate in near-identical fashion. Both observe the same operational policies and procedures, with emergency incident operations coordinated through a unified guideline and standardized response process.

Emergency operations within Milwaukee County are unified under a Shared Services Agreement, ensuring consistent coordination across jurisdictions. Both the Wauwatosa and West Allis Fire Departments also participate in a joint hiring process and deliver recruit training through the Joint Fire Training Academy, reinforcing operational alignment and shared professional standards

Identical Emergency Medical Services (EMS) protocols are provided to both departments through a single EMS Authority. All EMS personnel follow the same medical protocols as established by the Milwaukee County Office of Emergency Management EMS Division. This process provides a unified approach to emergency medical procedures, thereby eliminating the challenges of operating and training within dissimilar systems.

Despite such operational alignment, both the Wauwatosa and West Allis Fire Departments face significant challenges in maintaining minimum daily staffing. Unfilled positions are currently offset by assigning overtime, a short-term solution that can be effective but becomes unsustainable over time. Extended reliance on overtime not only strains budgets but also contributes to increased risk of personnel burnout and fatigue, ultimately affecting performance and service reliability.

### **i. 2024 Combined Incident Responses**

In 2024, the Wauwatosa and West Allis Fire Departments jointly responded to 21,852 emergency incidents—a substantial call volume that underscores the critical importance of maintaining a well-equipped and adequately staffed

response force. This demand reinforces the need for reliable personnel coverage to ensure timely, effective service delivery across both communities.

The following chart identifies the combined incident response volume by staffed companies in 2024. For reference, Wauwatosa fire stations are identified as Stations 51, 52, 53, and 55. West Allis fire stations are identified as Stations 61, 62 and 63.

2024 Call Volume by Company

| Station | Engine | Incidents | Truck | Incidents | Med/Amb | Incidents | Battalion | Incidents |
|---------|--------|-----------|-------|-----------|---------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 51      |        |           | 51    | 2157      | 51      | 2358      | 5         | 821       |
| 52      | 52     | 1751      |       |           | 52      | 129       |           |           |
| 53      | 53     | 1815      | 53    | 1380      | 53      | 2264      |           |           |
| 55      | 55     | 1955      |       |           |         |           |           |           |
| 61      | 61     | 2306      |       |           | 61      | 3076      |           |           |
| 62      | 62     | 2242      | 62    | 1710      | A-62    | 2557      | 6         | 762       |
| 63      | 63     | 2386      |       |           | 63      | 2564      |           |           |

Existing fire department units within the Cities of Wauwatosa and West Allis operate at consistently high utilization levels, with most companies routinely managing a considerable volume of incident responses. This sustained demand underscores the necessity of maintaining current deployment levels.

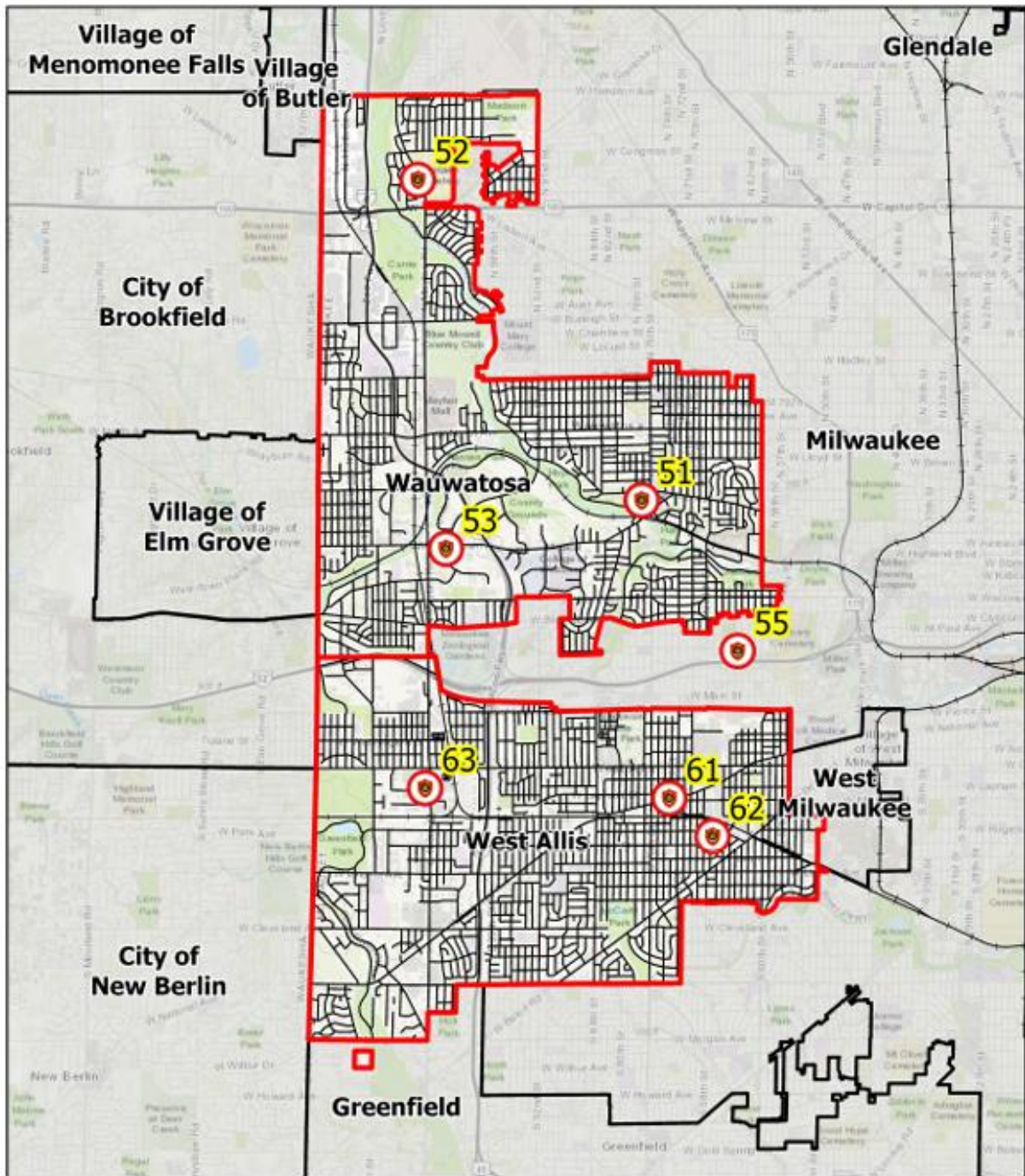
Given the intensity of existing service requirements, consolidating or reducing fire companies is not a viable option without jeopardizing the delivery of critical emergency services and impacting community safety.

ii. Combined Fire Station Locations

Strategic fire station placement plays a vital role in enhancing community safety. Reduced travel times directly increase firefighters’ chances of saving lives and minimizing property damage.

As illustrated below, the current geographic distribution of stations across Wauwatosa and West Allis is complementary, minimizing service area overlap and maximizing coverage. This layout provides efficient resource allocation and apparatus deployment, contributing to faster response times and more resilient emergency service delivery.





- Stations
- Wauwatosa & West Allis Municipal Boundaries
- Municipal Boundaries
- Street Centerlines
- Railroad Lines



0 1 2 Miles

Source: Milwaukee County, 2025; Waukesha County, 2025.

Disclaimer: The property lines, road centerlines lines, and other property information in this drawing were developed or obtained as part of the County Geographic Information System or through the County property tax mapping function. McMAHON does not guarantee this information to be correct, current, or complete. The property and right-of-way information are only intended for use as a general reference and are not intended or suitable for site-specific uses. Any use to the contrary of the above stated uses is the responsibility of the user and such use is at the user's own risk.

### Wauwatosa & West Allis Fire Station Map

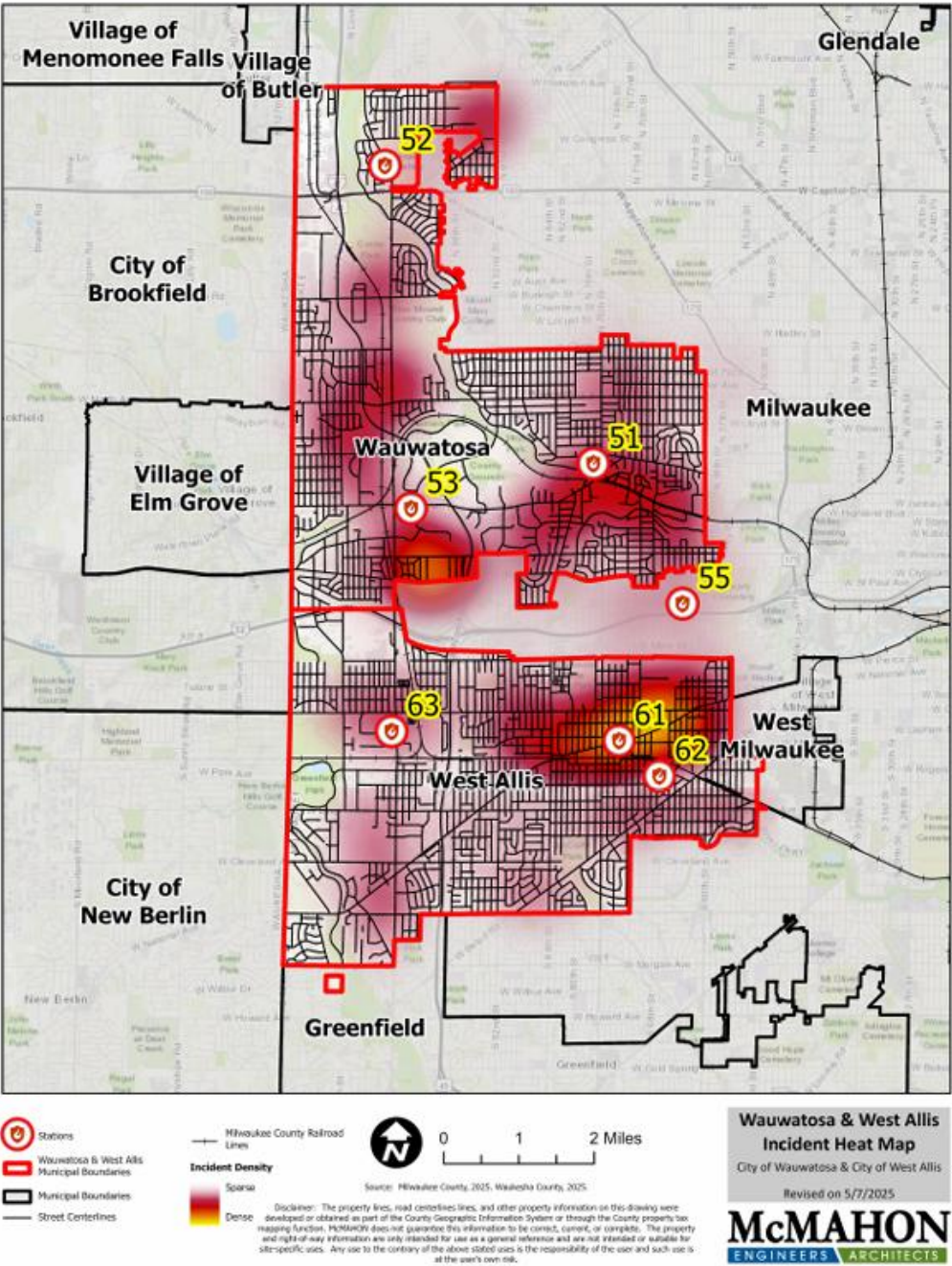
City of Wauwatosa & City of West Allis

Revised on 5/7/2025

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iii. Fire Station Location and Incident Response Areas

As recognized previously, the two fire departments responded to over 21,000 incidents in 2024. This number represents a very high call volume and highlights the necessity of maintaining an adequate response force who is properly positioned for expected emergency incidents. The following heat map demonstrates where those incidents occurred. In addition, the current fire stations are identified to demonstrate that their location provides appropriate coverage.



#### **iv. Insurance Service Office (ISO) Classifications**

Fire and emergency medical service levels can be assessed using multiple benchmarks, with communities often turning to the Insurance Service Office (ISO) Rating as a standardized measure of fire department effectiveness. The ISO rating schedule evaluates the core components of a community's fire suppression system, including emergency communications, water supply, staffing levels, and apparatus readiness. A lower ISO score indicates stronger fire protection capabilities, which may also influence local insurance premiums and community risk assessments.

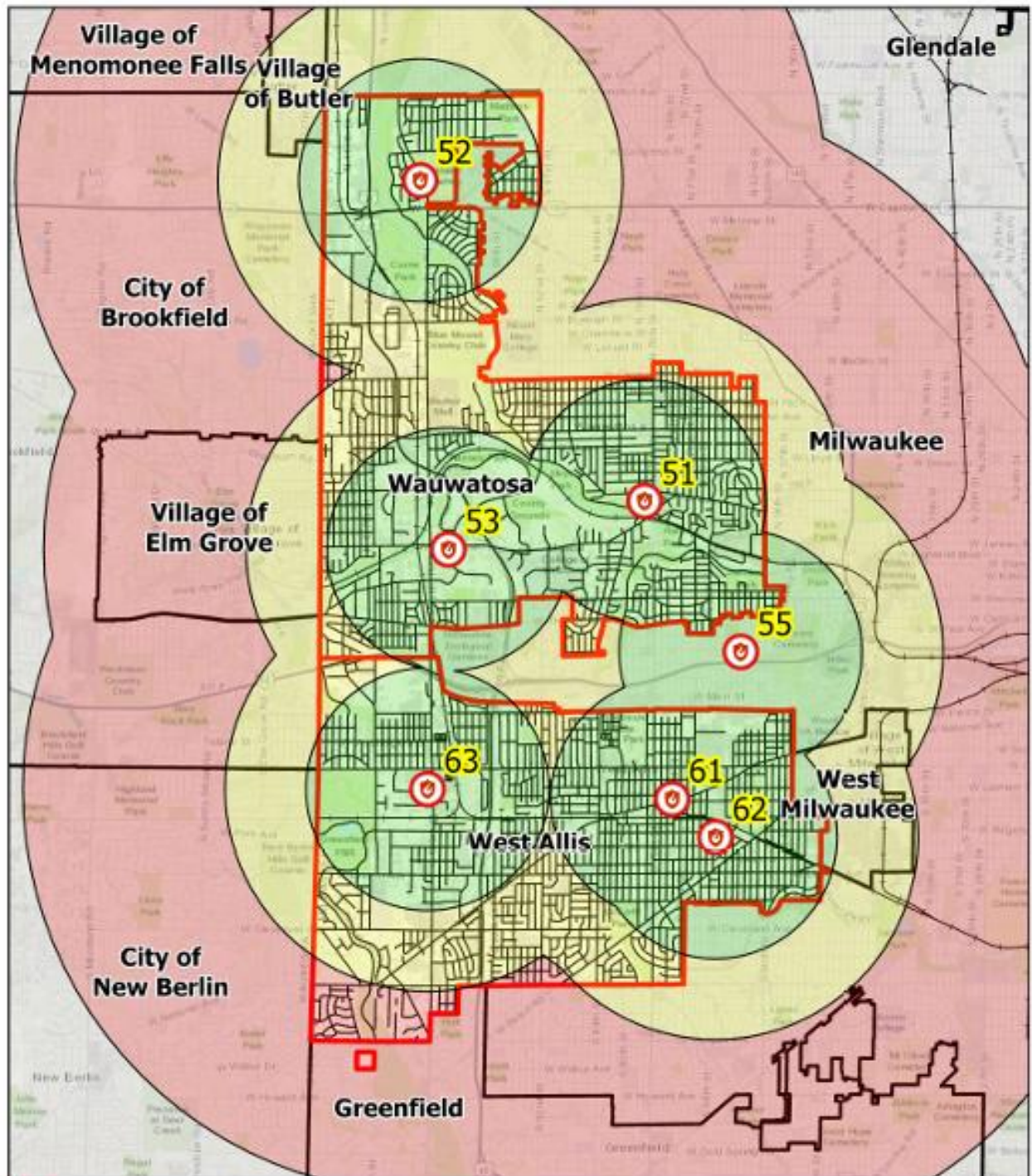
These measured components are translated into a Public Protection Classification (PPC) score ranging from 1 to 10, where Class 1 indicates exemplary fire protection and Class 10 reflects minimal or no recognized protection. This classification serves as a key fire insurance rating tool used by insurance carriers to help determine property insurance premiums, directly linking community fire service capacity to homeowners and business costs.

Both the Wauwatosa and West Allis Fire Departments currently hold an ISO Class 1 designation, the highest possible rating within the Public Protection Classification system. This elite status reflects exceptional performance across emergency response capabilities, infrastructure, and fire suppression systems. At present, only nine fire departments in the State of Wisconsin and just 487 nationwide share this distinction, positioning both agencies among the top-tier fire service organizations in the United States.

ISO standards incorporate defined travel distance benchmarks to assess fire department response coverage based on station locations and assigned apparatus. Currently, ISO evaluates engine companies within a 1.5-mile travel radius and ladder/service companies within a 2.5-mile radius of their assigned stations. These fixed-distance thresholds serve as key criteria for determining adequate coverage and influence a department's Public Protection Classification—ultimately shaping community insurance rates and perceived risk.

Areas beyond a five-mile travel radius from a responding fire station may be subject to a diminished ISO classification, as distance negatively impacts the ability to meet prescribed response benchmarks. As demonstrated in the following chart, both the Wauwatosa and West Allis Fire Departments combined station placements support ISO coverage standards, ensuring that their service areas are supported within the critical five-mile threshold. This strategic positioning can assist in preserving their ISO Class 1 designation and enhances community resilience through optimized response capability.





- Stations
- Wauwatosa & West Allis Municipal Boundaries
- Municipal Boundaries
- Street Centerlines
- Railroad Lines
- Coverage**
- <1.5 Miles
- 1.5 - 2.5 Miles
- 2.5 - 5 Miles



0 1 2 Miles

Source: Milwaukee County, 2025; Waukesha County, 2025.

Disclaimer: The property lines, road centerlines lines, and other property information on this drawing were developed or obtained as part of the County Geographic Information Systems or through the County property tax mapping function. McMAHON does not guarantee this information to be correct, current, or complete. The property and right-of-way information are only intended for use as a general reference and are not intended or suitable for site-specific uses. Any use to the contrary of the above stated uses is the responsibility of the user and such use is at the user's own risk.

### Wauwatosa & West Allis Fire Station Coverage Map

City of Wauwatosa & City of West Allis

Revised on 5/7/2025

**McMAHON**  
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## v. Organizational Structure Comparison

Both cities utilize comparable organizational frameworks. As outlined in the table below, each fire department operates a parallel rank structure to effectively guide and manage operations. This alignment in rank structure reflects a shared philosophy of leadership distribution and operational oversight.

Additionally, the chart below illustrates the expanded capacity achievable through the combination of both workforces. While some administrative roles may overlap, the demand for field positions remains high to effectively manage the substantial workload outlined earlier.

| Current Approved Positions By Rank |           |            |       |
|------------------------------------|-----------|------------|-------|
| Rank                               | Wauwatosa | West Allis | Total |
| Fire Chief                         | 1         | 1          | 2     |
| Assistant Chief                    | 2         | 2          | 4     |
| Division / Deputy Chief            | 0         | 2          | 2     |
| Battalion Chief                    | 5         | 3          | 8     |
| Captain                            | 6         | 10         | 16    |
| Lieutenant                         | 12        | 12         | 24    |
| Engineer                           | 15        | 12         | 27    |
| Firefighter                        | 59        | 51         | 110   |
| Code Specialist / Inspector        | 2         | 6          | 8     |
| Office Assistant (civilian)        | 1         | 1          | 2     |
| Mechanic (civilian)                | 1         | 1          | 2     |
| Administrative Manager (civilian)  | 1         | 0          | 1     |
| Other - Grant                      | 0         | 1          | 1     |
| Other Civilian                     | 0         | 0          | 0     |
| TOTAL                              | 105       | 102        | 207   |

Several support roles, such as code specialists and fire inspectors, may present opportunities to reframe the way these critical functions are delivered. By strategically realigning certain positions, the organization can enhance efficiency and elevate service outcomes.

## vi. Annual Compensation Overview

Both fire departments maintain rank-based salary frameworks. In addition to base pay tied to organizational rank, certain positions receive incremental salary increases based on time served in rank, commonly referred to as “steps.” These step increases are designed to align compensation with tenure, rewarding longevity and experience within each grade. In addition, the use of steps provides a predictable salary progression which allows for more accurate budgeting and resource forecasting.

Additionally, several positions have a salary range that municipalities generally apply differently, including the use of annual performance metrics or departmental budgetary flexibility. However, time-in-grade is commonly a factor influencing compensation movement within these ranges. The following table identifies the compensation strategy currently provided for each fire department in 2025.

| 2025 Salaries By Rank       |                           |                         |                           |                    |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
| Rank                        | Wauwatosa                 |                         | West Allis*               |                    |
| Fire Chief                  | 158,725                   |                         | 129,064                   | 116,168 - 135,512  |
| Assistant Chief             | 124,425 - 130,041         |                         | 106,496 - 124,238         |                    |
| Division Chief              | N/A                       |                         | 91,998 - 107,328          |                    |
| Battalion Chief             | 108,867 - 126,214         |                         | 91,998 - 107,328          |                    |
| Captain                     | 2 steps for first 2 years | 93,766 - 98,783         | 2 steps for first 2 years | 104,365 - 108,859  |
| Lieutenant                  | 2 steps for first 2 years | 87,640 - 89,385         | 2 steps for first 2 years | 98,503 - 102,115   |
| Engineer                    | 2 steps for first 2 years | 83,357 - 85,107         | 971,450                   |                    |
| Firefighter                 | 5 steps for first 5 years | Top Step is 81,059      | 6 Steps for first 6 years | Top Step is 92,639 |
| Paramedic                   | 5% of top FF Pay (81,059) | Additional 4,053 / Year | 4,208                     | 4,208 - 4,490      |
| Probationary                | 53,184                    |                         | 61,654 - 62,817           |                    |
| Code Specialist / Inspector | 88,025                    |                         | Lieutenant Rate Applies   |                    |
| Office Manager              | 77,521                    |                         | 63,336                    |                    |
| Admin Assistant             | 50,835 (CRR)              |                         |                           |                    |
| Mechanic                    | 89,232                    |                         | 79,196                    |                    |
| Civilian                    |                           |                         |                           |                    |
| Other*                      |                           |                         |                           |                    |

\* Listed rates are effective July 1, 2025

This comparative view highlights the similar approach both cities utilize to providing salary compensation for their individual staff. As noted, the fundamental framework is consistent with various difference noted within each rank. Several of these salary ranges are a direct result of negotiated agreements between the city and their respective labor unions.

## vii. Current and Projected Financial Position

The primary objective of this study was to assess the implications of consolidating the Wauwatosa and West Allis Fire Departments. Throughout the process, city leadership from both jurisdictions provided clear guidance to the consultant team: any proposed recommendations must uphold, if not enhance, the current level of fire and emergency medical services. Protecting operational integrity remained a non-negotiable priority, ensuring that fiscal efficiencies would not come at the expense of community safety or service reliability.

As part of the broader analysis, a detailed evaluation was conducted to assess the financial outlook for each city should they choose to maintain independent fire departments. This assessment provides a baseline comparison, allowing decision-makers to understand the fiscal trajectory of remaining separate versus pursuing a consolidated model. The findings are designed to help identify the long-term sustainability, operational efficiency, and potential budgetary impacts of both scenarios.

As demonstrated on the following chart, a separate joint fire department offers an opportunity to increase the joint fire department's property tax levy in a greater amount than would otherwise be available if the individual fire departments were maintained in their respective cities. The state's levy limit law restricts municipalities from raising their property tax levy by more than the rate of increase in net new construction. Meanwhile, joint fire departments may increase their rates by 2% plus the average area consumer price index (CPI), which is also assumed at 2% for this exercise, for a total allowed increase of 4%. Should the departments remain separate, there will be a levy limit shortfall of \$2 million in 2026/year 1 alone, meaning that the departments will have to make expenditure reductions to stay under their state-imposed levy limits.

With a joint department, the levy limit deficit is projected at (\$26,000) for 2026. In other words, the challenge of managing levy limits is a lesser threat under a joint department than it is for two individual municipal departments. For the sake of maintaining the current level of service, a merged arrangement is more financially feasible. It is acknowledged that there may be other revenues available to the respective cities to cover increased costs, but these revenues are relatively minimal, so the assumption is that both cities will likely rely on their property tax levies to cover future cost increases.

It should be noted that some of the assumptions in the financial analysis are going to occur regardless of whether the departments merge. For example, the receipt of ambulance revenues will continue to be a challenge, as fire departments across the country are challenged by virtually stagnant ambulance revenues for Medicare and Medicaid patients. Projected growth in ambulance usage for an aging population will only increase this funding gap regardless of how the agencies are assembled. Similarly, Wauwatosa is gradually losing its revenue from properties owned by Milwaukee County on its west side. By 2034, a prior agreement between Wauwatosa and Milwaukee County will result in those revenues being eliminated, with a notable decrease of \$450,000 in 2028. Revenue assumptions such as this are built into both versions of the five-year analysis.

|   |
|---|
| <b>Summary of Expenditures and Revenues<br/>and Projections of Net Costs: 2026-2030<br/>Combined Agencies - with and without Merger</b> |
|---|

|  | Projected<br>2026  | Projected 5 years<br>2026-2030 |
|--|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| <u>Wauwatosa</u>                                       |                    |                                |
| Expenditures   | 18,356,974         | 98,657,418                     |
| Revenues   | 3,539,037          | 16,251,059                     |
| Net Cost (Levy Impact)                                 | 14,817,937         | 82,406,359                     |
| Projected Levy Limit                                   | 13,285,590         | 14,380,749 *                   |
| Levy (Shortfall)/Surplus due to Levy Limits            | (1,532,348)        | (3,745,075) *                  |
| <u>West Allis</u>                                      |                    |                                |
| Expenditures   | 17,984,098         | 96,717,153                     |
| Revenues   | 4,117,786          | 21,363,139                     |
| Net Cost (Levy Impact)                                 | 13,866,312         | 75,354,014                     |
| Projected Levy Limit                                   | 13,387,779         | 13,739,270 *                   |
| Levy (Shortfall)/Surplus due to Levy Limits            | (478,533)          | (2,585,937) *                  |
| <u>Total - Both Agencies without Merger</u>            |                    |                                |
| Expenditures   | 36,341,073         | 195,374,571                    |
| Revenues   | 7,656,823          | 37,614,197                     |
| Net Cost (Levy Impact)                                 | 28,684,250         | 157,760,374                    |
| Projected Levy Limit                                   | 26,673,368         | 28,120,019 *                   |
| Levy (Shortfall)/Surplus due to Levy Limits            | (2,010,882)        | (6,331,013) *                  |
| <u>Projected Total - Combined Agencies with Merger</u> |                    |                                |
| Expenditures   | 35,052,332         | 188,407,943                    |
| Revenues   | 7,656,823          | 37,614,197                     |
| Net Cost (Levy Impact)                                 | 27,395,509         | 150,793,746                    |
| Projected Levy Limit                                   | 27,368,994         | 32,017,852 *                   |
| Levy (Shortfall)/Surplus due to Levy Limits            | (26,514)           | (930,801) *                    |
| <b>NET ADDITION/(REDUCTION) IN LEVY</b>                | <b>(1,288,741)</b> | <b>(6,966,628)</b>             |
| * = (2030 figure shown; not cumulative)                |                    |                                |

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

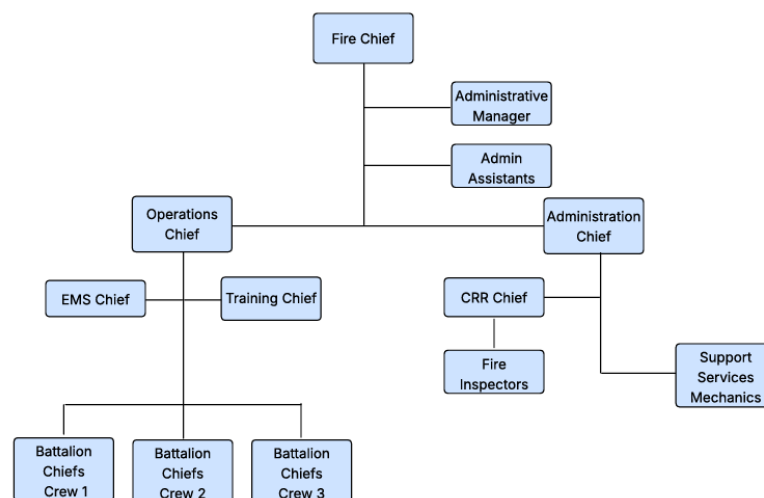
This section outlines targeted recommendations resulting from the key findings and comprehensive analysis presented earlier in the report. The proposed actions are designed to directly address existing challenges, leverage identified opportunities and advance the strategic mission of both organizations.

***Based on the comprehensive analysis and identified operational and financial benefits, the Consulting Team recommends that the City of Wauwatosa Fire Department and the City of West Allis Fire Department formally pursue the consolidation of services into a single, unified fire and EMS organization.***

This recommendation is built upon a set of critical factors that support the continued delivery of high-quality services across both municipalities. Maintaining current service levels was a clear priority expressed by both city administrations, and this recommendation directly responds to that commitment. The following sections detail the key elements that inform and reinforce the above recommendation.

### a. **Recommended Organizational Structure**

To determine the financial impact of a combined fire department, an organizational structure was developed to provide the same, or improved, services from the current model deployed within both communities. The organizational structure crafted for a combined fire department included a realignment of many managerial personnel. By excluding several redundant administrative positions, the consultants were able to craft an organization structure that realigned personnel without the reduction of field personnel.





**b. Combined Rank Structure**

The following chart illustrates the staffing evolution across the Wauwatosa and West Allis Fire Departments, comparing current approved positions, as well as the recommended staffing structure under a proposed consolidated organization.

| Combined Career Position By Rank  |           |            |       |              |            |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|------------|-------|--------------|------------|
| Rank                              | Wauwatosa | West Allis | Total | Consolidated | Difference |
| Fire Chief                        | 1         | 1          | 2     | 1            | (1)        |
| Assistant Chief                   | 2         | 2          | 4     | 2            | (2)        |
| Division / Deputy Chief           | 0         | 2          | 2     | 3            | 1          |
| Battalion Chief                   | 5         | 3          | 8     | 6            | (2)        |
| Captain                           | 6         | 10         | 16    | 15           | (1)        |
| Lieutenant                        | 12        | 12         | 24    | 24           | 0          |
| Engineer                          | 15        | 12         | 27    | 26           | (1)        |
| Firefighter                       | 59        | 51         | 110   | 109          | (1)        |
| Code Specialist / Inspector       | 2         | 6          | 8     | 5            | (3)        |
| Office Assistant (civilian)       | 1         | 1          | 2     | 2            | 0          |
| Mechanic (civilian)               | 1         | 1          | 2     | 2            | 0          |
| Administrative Manager (civilian) | 1         | 0          | 1     | 1            | 0          |
| Other - Grant                     | 0         | 1          | 1     | 0            | (1)        |
| Other Civilian                    | 0         | 0          | 0     | 0            | 0          |
| TOTAL                             | 105       | 102        | 207   | 196          | (11)       |

As demonstrated, the staffing summary indicated that the separate agencies currently total 207 employees. It is projected that a consolidated department would be approximately 196 employees, for a net reduction of 11 employees. It is important to note that field staffing levels remain unchanged ensuring no compromise to frontline service delivery or emergency response capabilities.

With the rate of turnover in the respective departments, it is not projected that any employees will be laid off, as attrition will address these vacancies. However, the savings are real. In the first year alone, it is projected that nearly \$1.3 million will be saved annually with these combined reductions in staffing. Moreover, the cumulative effect of the staffing reductions will provide continued savings, as costs for benefits will continue to rise faster than the rate of revenue growth. Over a period of five years, the cumulative savings of a merged department will total nearly \$7,000,000. Please refer to the financial summary as shown above.

**c. Fire Stations**

The operational side of this shared services analysis indicates that no stations should be closed due to the demands for service that will continue to be placed on these stations. There may be some opportunity for looking at some modernization or consolidation of existing stations, but the apparatus and staffing levels will not be impacted due to continued call demand.

**d. Apparatus Staffing**

Additionally, it is recommended that the consolidated organization maintain full staffing levels across all existing apparatus. As previously identified, the substantial call volumes handled by current units necessitate sustained personnel coverage to ensure response readiness and service continuity. The chart below reaffirms the recommended staffing configuration for each apparatus.

| 24 Hour Assigned Staffing |        |          |       |          |         |          |           |          |
|---------------------------|--------|----------|-------|----------|---------|----------|-----------|----------|
| Station                   | Engine | Staffing | Truck | Staffing | Med/Amb | Staffing | Battalion | Staffing |
| 51                        |        |          | 51    | 4        | 51      | 2        | 5         | 1        |
| 52                        | 52     | 4        |       |          | 52      |          |           |          |
| 53                        | 53     | 4 or 3   | 53    | 4        | 53      | 2        |           |          |
| 55                        | 55     | 4        |       |          |         |          |           |          |
| 61                        | 61     | 4        |       |          | 61      | 2        |           |          |
| 62                        | 62     | 4        | 62    | 4        | A-62    | 2        | 6         | 1        |
| 63                        | 63     | 4        |       |          | 63      | 2        |           |          |

**e. Apparatus**

As part of the organizational analysis, careful consideration was given to the combined apparatus fleet. Findings indicate that consolidating the Wauwatosa and West Allis Fire Departments' fleets presents an opportunity for long-term capital savings. Specifically, by integrating resources and eliminating duplication, the required number of reserve apparatus can be reduced without compromising operational readiness.

There will be savings because fewer reserve apparatus will be needed with a consolidated department. These savings have not been projected in this analysis but over time will come in the way of reduced maintenance costs and insurance.

Due to the age of certain apparatus, it is premature to look at replacements for these items. Any consideration for a type of replacement apparatus will be conducted by a future fire chief based on needs at the time an apparatus is due for replacement. For example, while there are three ladder trucks in the joint front line apparatus inventory, one of the trucks (# 51) is effectively operating as an engine since there is no engine at Station 51. This apparatus may be evaluated in the future as it is scheduled for replacement.

The following chart outlines the potential decrease in current apparatus achievable under the proposed consolidated model.

| Apparatus Worksheet   |           |            |             |        |            |
|-----------------------|-----------|------------|-------------|--------|------------|
| Apparatus             | Wauwatosa | West Allis | Combination | Merged | Difference |
| Engines - Staffed     | 3         | 3          | 6           | 7      | 1          |
| Engines - Reserved    | 2         | 2          | 4           | 2      | (2)        |
| Trucks - Staffed      | 2         | 1          | 3           | 2      | (1)        |
| Trucks - Reserved     | 1         | 1          | 2           | 1      | (1)        |
| Ambulances - Staffed  | 2         | 3          | 5           | 5      | 0          |
| Ambulances - Reserved | 2         | 3          | 5           | 3      | (2)        |



**f. Support Functions**

Because a joint fire department will technically be a separate legal entity, the new joint department will need administrative infrastructure for things such as accounting, payroll, facilities, equipment maintenance, and personnel. Although each municipality accounts for these services somewhat differently, the financial analysis factors in assumptions for these costs into the five-year projections. With that said, it is not unusual for a joint department to contract with one or more of the participating municipalities for these services.

This represents an opportunity for the respective municipalities to be reimbursed for their staff that may continue to provide services to a proposed joint entity. This is a detail that will have to be negotiated between the respective municipalities and the joint fire agency should they choose to proceed.

**g. Unfunded Liabilities**

A final item that is beyond the scope of work in this study but warrants mentioning are unfunded liabilities of the respective fire entities, particularly as they relate to unused paid time off for retirees who leave the service of a joint agency after having worked most of their careers at their municipal entity. The respective cities will need to determine these unfunded liabilities, and how the joint agency will be compensated if it is to assume financial responsibility for these unfunded liabilities. This may also apply to any unfunded health insurance liabilities that the respective municipalities may owe current and former employees. Finally, the replacement of capital costs, particularly fire apparatus, should also be considered part of the unfunded liabilities so that the successor fire agency has adequate funds to replace equipment as it becomes due for replacement.

**h. Innovation Fund**

As this report is being written, the State of Wisconsin Department of Revenue (DOR) has held up the distribution of rules regarding the State Innovation Fund due to changes to the program from the recently enacted Act 15. While details have yet to be released, the reading of Act 15 offers increased opportunity for the cities of Wauwatosa and West Allis to be eligible for the Innovation Fund.

Key among the new rules is the elimination of the mandatory 10% savings. In effect, that rule has been replaced by a requirement that the costs of a merged department cannot exceed 115% of the costs for the year preceding the transfer of the service. This improves the joint department's eligibility for the program but will require a review of the budgets for the costs in the year preceding the transfer to make sure that all applicable costs have been built into that base to avoid exceeding the 115% limit in the merged department's agreement.

The other feature of the new rules is that each participant may be eligible for an annual payment of 25% of the total costs of performing the transferred services in the year preceding the transfer. With each city currently budgeting approximately \$17 million annually for fire and EMS in the 2025 base year, the annual payment under the grant could be over \$4.25 million annually, or somewhere between \$16 million and \$21 million each over the 5 years of the program, depending on funding availability in the Innovation Fund.

The cities will need to monitor the revised DOR rules when they are released. The grant program as revised offers a significant opportunity for each city to benefit from joining fire services. While each city can use these grant funds for their own purposes, given the unknown costs associated with unfunded liabilities in the respective fire departments, these grants assets present an opportunity to fund these future liabilities so that the new joint entity does not assume these future liabilities without proper funding.

## **VII. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

This implementation plan presents a strategic roadmap for consolidating the Wauwatosa and West Allis fire departments through the formation of a new fire district, aligned with applicable state requirements. Additionally, it highlights specific items that would likely require immediate attention due to their complexity or time sensitivity. Finally, the plan identifies opportunities to phase in collaborative initiatives, building momentum toward full consolidation in a structured manner.

### **a. Creation of an Entirely New Combined Fire/EMS District**

Under Wisconsin Statutes Chapter 62.13, cities, towns, and villages are authorized to form a joint fire department. This statutory framework not only permits intergovernmental collaboration but also requires the establishment of a joint board of fire commissioners, composed of representatives from each participating jurisdiction. This governance structure is designed to ensure equitable oversight, shared accountability, and consistent policy application across the joint department.

Provided there is sufficient political will among both cities, the consulting team recommends forming a new, unified fire department under the authority of Wisconsin Statutes Chapter 62.13. Establishing a single department governed by a joint board of fire commissioners would not only satisfy statutory requirements but also enable a coordinated and streamlined organizational structure. Analysis indicates that operating one consolidated department at the recommended staffing levels would yield greater cost efficiency compared to maintaining two independent departments at the same level achieving fiscal savings without compromising service quality.

The formation of a unified fire department should be executed through an intergovernmental agreement between the two participating municipalities. This agreement will serve as the legal framework governing joint operations and must comply with all applicable statutes and regulations—including those outlined in Wisconsin Statutes

Chapter 62.13. While the terms and conditions may be tailored through negotiation, they must ensure equitable representation, clarify operational and financial responsibilities, and establish protocols for governance and accountability across jurisdictions.

In addition to forming a joint fire commission, the consulting team recommends that participating municipalities establish a board of directors to oversee the new joint fire department. This dual-governance structure supports both operational oversight and strategic guidance, ensuring comprehensive leadership across service areas. As with the fire commission, the composition of the board—specifically the number of representatives from each member community—should be collaboratively negotiated and formally outlined in the intergovernmental agreement to reflect equitable participation and shared accountability.

Merging two organizations, whether in private industry, the nonprofit sector, or government, can be accomplished successfully, though it rarely comes without challenges. Fire departments, in particular, present unique complexities due to the deeply rooted traditions that shape their identity and are often fiercely valued by members of each individual department. These cultural dynamics must be acknowledged and thoughtfully addressed to ensure a respectful and effective integration process.

#### **b. Issues for Immediate Consideration**

Creating a fully consolidated department will require involvement and buy-in from citizens, elected officials, and the fire department members, including the union representatives of the two departments. Several issues will need to be addressed early in the consolidation process including:

As the new consolidated fire and EMS organization is developed, it will be essential to determine how core administrative functions, specifically Human Resources (HR), Information Technology (IT), and Financial Administration, will be structured and delivered.

These foundational systems support personnel management, operational continuity, and fiscal accountability. The consulting team recommends initiating a planning process to assess existing capabilities within each municipality, identify opportunities for integration or shared services, and define the optimal model for supporting the organization's long-term administrative needs.

- Immediately begin a review of 911 dispatch services. As the proposed fire and EMS consolidation progresses, establishing a unified dispatch model will be essential to support seamless incident coordination and resource deployment. Given the complexity and jurisdictional implications of modifying existing dispatch processes, the consulting team recommends convening a dedicated review committee without delay. This committee should evaluate current systems, explore integration options, and identify necessary technological, procedural, and governance adjustments to ensure that a single, reliable dispatch platform is in place to serve the consolidated department.

- There are significant differences in the labor agreements in place with the Wauwatosa Firefighters Union and the West Allis Firefighters Union, including dissimilar work schedules and options for retiree insurance. A full consolidation with the creation of a new employer will require a new labor contract to be negotiated between all affected parties.
- There are new requirements for membership in the Wisconsin Retirement Program (WRS) Pension system for new agencies (2.5% vs 2% with Social Security). A plan will be required to address new pension requirements and benefits.
- Identifying the value of assets brought into the new department and creating a mechanism for future capital purchases will be required. The transfer of assets would need to occur between the municipalities and the new department. Additionally, each community will be required to contribute towards future fleet purchases and mechanism to borrow for those purchases may need to be identified. The potential proceeds from a State Innovation Grant may be an option to assist in the funding of these contributions.
- Currently, the fire stations are owned by the individual municipalities. The exception is Wauwatosa's use of Station 55 from the City of Milwaukee. It is recommended that municipal ownership continue, and lease/maintenance agreements be established with the new fire department to outline responsibilities under those agreements.
- In the event of full consolidation, municipalities and labor unions will likely need to negotiate the disposition of accrued but unused sick leave accumulated by firefighters. If such leave is eligible for retirement payout and transferred to the newly consolidated department, the corresponding cash value should also be transferred to ensure fiscal continuity and equity. Once again, proceeds from a potential Innovation Grant may help fund this unfunded liability.
- A comprehensive Public Outreach Plan should be developed to transparently communicate the current challenges facing both cities and their potential implications for public safety. The plan should ensure the community receives clear information about the effects of consolidation versus maintaining independent fire departments.

### **c. Phased-In Implementation Strategy**

To support a smooth transition toward a consolidated fire and EMS organization, there are opportunities to enhance efficiency and service delivery while the overall plan is identified. These collaborative efforts can serve as transitional steps, allowing both fire departments to maintain their distinct operational structures while benefiting from joint resource deployment, coordinated training, and additional shared support functions.

1. Sharing of a Full-Time Training Division: Establishing a joint training division would ease the required workload, elevate instructional consistency, reinforce interoperability, and support sustained performance improvements for personnel in both departments.

Given the frequency of joint incident responses, consolidating training efforts between the Wauwatosa and West Allis Fire Departments presents a clear opportunity to continue standardizing operational policies and training protocols. Additionally, both departments currently operate under the same medical director and follow identical medical protocols—creating a seamless pathway to integrate EMS training content.

2. Sharing of a Support Services Division: The combined apparatus fleet of the Wauwatosa and West Allis Fire Departments provides for an opportunity to establish a dedicated emergency vehicle maintenance division staffed with the current two full-time mechanics. Currently, each department relies on internally trained personnel for basic maintenance while outsourcing complex repairs to external vendors.

Consolidating mechanical resources would increase cost efficiency, improve turnaround time for essential repairs, and elevate the overall reliability of emergency response apparatus. A joint Support Services team would enable consistent maintenance standards, centralized tracking, and provide redundancies.

3. Sharing of a Community Risk Reduction Division: Both departments currently deliver Community Risk Reduction (CRR) programs aimed at minimizing preventable hazards and strengthening public safety. By unifying efforts, the departments can strategically enhance the scope, consistency, and impact of CRR initiatives—ensuring coordinated messaging, targeted outreach, and streamlined program delivery across shared service areas.
4. Sharing of Reserve Fleet of Apparatus: Both Fire Departments maintain reserve engines, ladder trucks, and ambulances to ensure service continuity in the event of front-line mechanical failures. These vehicles play a critical role in sustaining operational readiness. The consulting team has identified that, by implementing a shared reserve model across both departments, the total number of required reserve units could be reduced without compromising response capacity.

Collectively, these recommendations provide a balance between operational integrity and fiscal responsibility. They offer a shared commitment to continuous improvement and provide a practical roadmap for navigating the evolving demands of fire and emergency services. With alignment from leadership and engagement across the workforce from both departments, implementation will not only strengthen service delivery, but it could also elevate public trust and community safety for years to come.

While it is recognized that these recommendations may be difficult for those directly affected, the cost of maintaining the status quo will ultimately exceed the challenges of pursuing thoughtful change. Transitioning to a new model will require both departments

to adapt and realign certain practices, but these changes are essential for strengthening long-term operational resilience, enhancing service delivery, and supporting the collective well-being of the communities served.

The blending of cultures from the organizations that will form the new department is important and must be a priority. The consulting team interviewed an array of members of both the Wauwatosa and West Allis Fire Departments about their thoughts on consolidation. The majority of those interviewed seemed doubtful of the immediate effort but also acknowledged that the needs would be critical sometime in the future. Additionally, when asked what they believed the local fire services would be in 20+ years, almost all agreed a new form of consolidated services was inevitable.

Clear, consistent communication with existing personnel is essential to fostering trust and ensuring a broad understanding of the rationale behind consolidation. The consulting team recommends scheduling ongoing informational meetings to provide staff with updates, address concerns, and highlight both the operational and strategic benefits of forming a unified fire and EMS organization. These sessions should reinforce transparency, encourage dialogue, and offer a platform for staff to engage with leadership throughout the transition.

Early and active involvement of personnel will help mitigate uncertainty, support organizational morale, and empower staff to become champions of the change.

## **VIII. BUDGET**

The estimated budget for implementing the recommended consolidation will depend significantly on the levels of assistance each city requests. Strategic decisions will be necessary to determine which initiatives can be executed using internal resources and which will be better achieved with support. Much of the work on the Implementation Plan will involve the work of the respective city staffs providing in-kind support. Outside assistance may be necessary for work that is more specialized or is beyond the time constraints of city staff.

Again, the actual cost of project management will be based on the actual time spent working on the project. It is difficult to determine how many follow-ups, meetings, and time spent on paperwork will take place. We are estimating each phase to take approximately 3 months and about 8 hours a week on the project.

*Cost Estimate Per Month: \$5,500 to \$8,500*

It would be advisable to budget a minimum of \$150,000 for outside implementation consulting work.

Depending on what is decided with respect to the Dispatch Center, a separate capital budget may also be necessary. Finally, transition costs for establishing a new entity and retrofitting vehicle identification and similar type of work will also need to be budgeted.

## IX. GLOSSARY OF TERMS

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| APPARATUS  | Apparatus is commonly used to describe multiple types of fire trucks or emergency response vehicles like ambulances.  |
| CIP        | Capital Improvement Plan – A short-range plan, usually four to ten years, which identifies capital projects and equipment purchases, provides a planning schedule and identifies options for financing the plan.  |
| CFAI       | Commission of Fire Accreditation International – National Fire accreditation process, which has become a part of the Center of Public Safety Excellence.  |
| CRA        | Community Risk Assessment – A process which identifies the potential and likely risks within a particular community.  |
| CPSE       | Center for Public Safety Excellence – Evaluation process that measures fire departments to established and accepted national standard criteria. The International City /County Management Association and the International Association of Fire Chiefs were both committed to the development of these standards. |
| FEMA       | Federal Emergency Management Agency – A federal government agency responsible for the regulation of disaster management, planning and training.   |
| ICS        | Incident Command System – Nationally accepted system for the management of personnel and resources at large Public Safety incidents.  |
| ISO        | Insurance Services Office Rating Schedule – System used to rate fire departments for insurance rating purposes.   |
| MABAS      | A multi-state mutual aid system for fire, technical rescue, hazardous materials and emergency medical services that is based on a standardized legal agreement.   |
| MUTUAL AID | Mutual aid is utilized frequently in fires that exceed the capabilities of a department's equipment or available manpower to appropriately fight a  |

large fire. Mutual aid requires a specific request for assistance by the incident commander.

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| NFPA      | National Fire Protection Association – An association organized to reduce the burden of fire on the quality of life by advocating scientifically based consensus codes and standards, research and education for fire and related safety issues. |
| NIMS      | National Incident Management System – Nationally accepted program for the management of personnel, resources and equipment at major disaster related incidents.  |
| PRE-PLANS | The documentation fire departments use to plan building response and incident management for target threats or specific hazardous locations.   |
| RMS       | Records Management Systems.  |
| SOG       | Standard Operating Guidelines – Department developed document that establishes parameters for operations and other department functions.   |
| SOP       | Standard Operating Procedures – Department developed document that establishes specific procedures for operations and other functions.   |