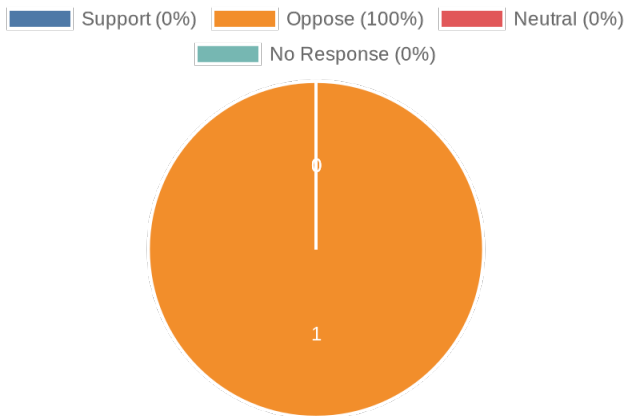


Overall Sentiment



Andrew Meindl

Location:

Submitted At: 3:18pm 12-06-25

E-Comment: Proposed Wauwatosa–West Allis Fire Merger

From: Alderman Andrew Meindl, District 1, Wauwatosa Common Council

I am writing to oppose the proposed fire merger between Wauwatosa and West Allis based on the recently released draft agreement.

As I warned months ago when this body voted to move forward with merger negotiations, that vote effectively (what I believe) made this a done deal. Now that the agreement is public, it confirms my concerns: residents likely have no real understanding of what they are about to be locked into.

This is not a simple service-sharing arrangement. It is a full structural reorganization that would transfer control of our fire and EMS services to a new nonstock corporation with significant fiscal and governance implications.

The following comments are my understanding of the agreements with my estimates.

Automatic Tax Increases Without Council Approval: Under this agreement, annual fire budgets would be automatically approved without a Council vote beginning in 2026. For the first five years, budgets increase automatically by 2.8% annually over the 2025 baseline. After 2030, increases continue indefinitely at up to 4% or CPI + 2%, whichever is lower. Because this entity cannot generate its own revenue, every dollar of these increases falls directly on our property tax levy.

For a home valued at \$300,000, this means approximately \$20 more per year in fire-related property taxes in 2026, compounding annually thereafter. By 2030, the cumulative increase will be significantly higher, and after 2030 those increases continue indefinitely with no meaningful check on costs. Neither city can reduce the base budget even if financial circumstances change, we are required to pay the full mandatory minimum regardless.

Loss of Operational Control: Oversight would shift from Wauwatosa's Police & Fire Commission to a regional Joint Fire Commission that would control hiring, promotions, discipline, and department policies, even when Wauwatosa's elected officials or residents disagree.

Transfer of Public Assets: The agreement requires Wauwatosa to lease all fire stations to the new corporation and allows for potential sale of those facilities, particularly after 2030 in connection with relocations or rebuilds. Once transferred, these assets would be extremely difficult and expensive to reclaim.

Labor Relations Impact: Firefighters and paramedics would become employees of the joint department, with collective bargaining conducted through the regional Fire Commission rather than the City. This is particularly concerning given that Wauwatosa is currently in costly arbitration with our fire union. Residents deserve clarity on how this transition affects ongoing disputes and long-term costs.

Unaddressed Auto-Aid Imbalances: City data provided to me shows that since 2021, Wauwatosa has sent 10,679 calls into Milwaukee versus only 3,674 received back, a nearly 3:1 imbalance. With West Allis, the balance was closer historically but has tilted in recent years, with Wauwatosa providing more aid than receiving in both 2024 and 2025 year-to-date. The merger does not address how combining with West Allis would resolve the ongoing strain from Milwaukee auto-aid demands.

Financial Commitment on Dispatch: The city is committing up to ~\$25,000 in taxpayer dollars from contingency funds to a dispatch service review with McMahon Associates, explicitly to assess and recommend a single dispatch structure for the proposed merged department, even as we consider approving the term sheet that commits us to this merger path. This spending on implementation details before fully approving or vetting the overall agreement raises serious questions about fiscal prudence and the sequencing of decisions.

The Bottom Line: This proposal commits Wauwatosa to a 10-year minimum term with automatic cost escalators, diminished local control, potential loss of public facilities, and unresolved operational pressures, all without adequate public discussion or comprehensive financial analysis showing actual long-term savings for taxpayers. Notably, the City Administrator has stated there will be no public hearing on this matter since it is not legally required. I find it concerning that a non-elected public official is making determinations about whether residents deserve a public hearing on a decision of this magnitude.

I will be voting no at this time.