

Improving the Efficiency of Fire Services in Seven Southwestern Cuyahoga County
Communities

A Joint Project of Area Majors and Baldwin-Wallace College

All-Firefighters Meeting*

October 18, 2006

Attending Meeting: Jim Astorino, Bernard Benedict, Joe Campagna, Frank Cooper, Tom Cramer, Pierre David, James Dunkle, Michael Florjancic, Chad Gluss, Jon Hanzel, Nick Kashi, Kim Lammers, Dan LaRocco, Greg Lobas, Patrick Mason, Dave McCarthy, Michael Mochan, Tim Nickels, Oscar Skavdahl, Bob Verdile, and Martin Zanotti.

Pierre David gave a short introduction of all the speakers which included; Jim Astorino, Bernard Benedict, Pierre David, and Martin Zanotti. Pierre gave a short PowerPoint presentation with a general overview of the make-up of the Fire Services Regionalization Project he then opened the question and answer period of the night.

Q: Have you come across any major stumbling blocks?

A: There are two issues that will be difficult to overcome. One would be the legal structure of the entity; should it be a district or a council of governments? The second is the financial issues; how will it be funded, who will have ownership, etc.?

Q: What is the maximum amount of cities that could participate?

A: We do not have a limit of cities, but it is best geographically if we limit it to the seven we have now. Strongsville and North Royalton said no to the offer, but it is foreseeable that if this works that other cities will regionalize on their own.

Q: Could Cleveland join?

A: Cleveland would probably make our district too big and they will probably join their own Fire and EMS services which are currently separate.

Q: Why would we have two med controls?

A: We wouldn't, we would have one set of standing orders for both hospital. Some regions have regionalized their protocols.

Q: Has this been done before in Ohio or are we reinventing the wheel?

A: There have been other cities that have done this, but we have an older population. Chief Potts and the Legal Team are polling some areas that have regionalized in Ohio for what worked and what did not work.

Q: Are the other districts in Ohio urban or rural?

A: Mostly rural. It is our uniqueness that is pushing us to do this. We will not be stopping expenses but we will be containing them; our goal is to better utilize our resources.

Q: Man power costs a lot. If you want more men how are we going to contain the costs?

A: We can save costs with equipment. We have seven ladder trucks, with seven cities every few years one of the cities will be purchasing a new truck.

Q: Have you studied the costs? Or are there numbers that we can see?

A: No, not yet but we will. The Finance Team has had a hard time getting a handle of the costs. Each city funds and operates differently and many of the costs have not been directly isolated yet. We believe it will work and in other areas that have regionalized it has worked. We have asked each council to let us see if it could work. If it does not work to its fullest extent there will be some good results of our work like joint dispatches.

Q: You are leaning toward a Board of Directors, how will they be chosen?

A: The legal structure hasn't been decided yet, but it will be a big sell for the city councils to give up the power. We would want professionals running the district/ sitting on the board. We can add into the initial agreement how the board would be set up. We want professionals running the district because if the politicians run it more often the first thing to be cut is the training and that can't happen.

Q: If cities have power to appoint how is that taking the power away?

A: We would set up a system for selecting individuals for the board; there would be qualifications that the people had to meet. We will probably make it that no elected official could be on the board. In other districts they said that the board seat is a position people want to be in.

Q: With the structure of the department, how would the chief position be picked?

A: We don't know yet. The chief will probably be selected by the board with a competitive selection process.

Q: Would we bring in a Chief from the outside?

A: Probably not.

Q: Where is the money coming from?

A: There are two issues with funding. The first is operating and how will it be funding. The second is how do we get there, the start up. There have been some ideas including bill each city for what they are currently paying for fire, taxing, or a hybrid of both during the transition period. One thing is certain; the funding must be an even wash for the voter.

Q: For geographical purposes will buildings be moved?

A: No, we have no intention of closing any stations that would be for the entity itself to decide. We would more likely move apparatus.

Q: So we would have no change in the buildings, no change in the people, just ladder trucks.

A: We don't have enough people to man the trucks we have so we need to call other cities for a ladder truck. The regionalization will be a living process; we will move apparatus around with time. Tonight we are here to inform you on what has happened so far and to hear your questions. We don't have the answers now, but we want to hear your questions so we can know what to look out for.

Q: We will have one district with all these home grown stations. Why make it if there is not going to be any move?

A: Currently the stations have good spacing we would not want to move them now, but as population shifts we may want to.

Q: We need man power, we are under staffed. Where will it come from?

A: With a joint dispatch we would be able to call a truck that has just dropped off a patient and can reach the incident before anyone from the station could. Currently the cities are paying a lot in overtime, we will be able to better utilize time paid.

Q: How many firefighters would be in the district? How many firefighters are there in other cities our size?

A: We don't know how many firefighters there would be, it would depend. Syracuse, a city in our initial study, had similar man power.

Q: We don't buy ladder trucks every year, we need man power.

A: Maybe we won't need as many as we have now; we could cut secretaries, and legal expenses. Everything we say is speculation until the teams further decide.

Q: Ladder trucks seems to be a red herring, we need to better staff.

A: How do we do it as we are now? Let us research the process to see if it would work, let us try.

Q: What if the city says yes, but the union says no?

A: The whole process is so delicate everyone must be happy with it for it to succeed. Our goal is to serve the community the best we can. We believe, if we keep people informed and use their input, we can make everyone happy. There will need to be compromises. It will be a harder sell to the councils than it will be to the firefighters.

Q: Tonight you have given us very basic information. Will we have another meeting and when will it be?

A: We don't have another meeting planned, but we will have other meetings when we have more information to give. The status quo is working, but if you look 10 years down the road will it be working or will it break? We need to try to solve the problem before it is too late. There is no way that this will work without the firefighters support. Mayors will be given a progress report at the end of the year. You can keep informed by going on our web-site and reading the minutes and give us feed back.

Q: How did you reach the January 2008 date and is that achievable?

A: At first I thought "No way," but everyone is working well together and we are moving fast. The date does not mean it will be implemented at that exact time, it only means the analysis process will be finished by that time for the councils to review.

Q: Once given to the councils what will happen?

A: Ordinances will be created to join the district.

Q: No finance aspects?

A: The finance will be written into the contracts that the councils will accept.

Q: When will the unions accept the contracts? There are seven cities, how different are their contracts? Has legal looked at the contracts?

A: The unions will get together to decide contracts.

Q: Each city has a contract; will they all be able to be combined?

A: I am confident we will be able to work something out.

Q: Have the seven union presidents sat down and discussed this?

A: They all have the information and at some point they will.

Q: It will be 14 months until you present this to the firefighters. A lot of contracts aren't settled for a year, how will this work?

A: The contract will not be negotiated. The contract will be created and the cities will accept them the way they are, and there will be a period of adjustment. The contracts are not that far apart, they are similar but with some differences. We need to think optimistic; we can get started on contracts next week if you want us to.

Q: Would the unions consolidate into one local?

A: It might or by stations we haven't decided that yet.

Q: If this does happen will we see regionalized services, city halls, etc? Why start fire?

A: Fire is the most logical because it is the front line and already crosses borders. As the area declines we need to take some first steps to be proactive to the changes. Metro government has been discussed in the past, but no one wants to join with Cleveland. We will start with this step.

Q: There are already mutual agreements. Wouldn't it make more sense to take smaller steps like mutual aid and joint dispatch?

A: That may be what we end up deciding. If the district is implemented it may be in phases or steps.

Q: How was the study funded?

A: We received \$5,000 from the Gund foundation and \$5,000 from each city for the initial study. The process we are going through now has just received a grant from the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service for \$125,000. We feel like we will be able to raise the money through grants to fund the whole research process.

Q: When the money dries up, if we still don't have everything will we be able to use anything we have created so far?

A: If we find that regionalization is not doable the committees would make some kind of recommendation to the city councils for improvements. We have already saved some money because we have not had to hire a lawyer yet because of the volunteer work of Tim Dobeck from Parma. Things are moving smoothly so far. The money is for the plan

not for the implementation of the district. We are optimistic that we can find federal and local funds that will help us implement it.

Q: Have you looked at Louisville and their regional government?

A: No, we will mention it to the Legal Team.

**All of the questions and answers have been paraphrased.*

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.win2pdf.com>.
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.
This page will not be added after purchasing Win2PDF.