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New Partnerships Possible in Greater Racine for Fire, Emergency, Parks and Rec Services
Foxconn Development Among Factors Prodding Communities to Mull More Collaboration

As Greater Racine eyes a future that includes the Foxconn development, its residents could benefit if local governments partner to plan and implement needed enhancements to fire, emergency, parks, and recreation services, according to two new reports by the Wisconsin Policy Forum and Center for Governmental Research.

Citing the possibility of increased service demand stemming from Foxconn and corresponding increased costs, as well as other factors (like recent increases in emergency medical services call volumes), the first report concludes greater partnerships are appropriate between the three fire departments serving eastern Racine County.

The second report, focused on parks and recreation, makes specific recommendations for greater regional cooperation in providing those services, including establishing a Greater Racine Park and Recreation Council.

“With the looming development of Foxconn, expensive impending capital needs, and continuous pressures on municipal budgets, this is an atmosphere ripe for a change,” the first report says.

The two reports were produced collaboratively by two of the nation’s leading independent, nonpartisan public policy research organizations: the Forum and Rochester, N.Y.-based Center for Governmental Research, or CGR.

They are meant to delve more deeply into the findings of a [2018 Forum report](#) that first identified three potential areas for greater intergovernmental sharing or consolidation in Greater Racine: fire and EMS, parks and recreation, and public health. WPF partnered with CGR to lead the fire/EMS and parks and recreation studies and it anticipates launching a study on public health service sharing options in 2020.

The reports were commissioned by the Resilient Communities Roundtable, made up of the region’s top elected leaders and administrators. The research is made possible by the support of the Johnson Foundation at Wingspread as part of its “Resilient Communities Initiative” aimed at building resiliency in Greater Racine to improve the social and economic health of all its citizens.

Options explored in the fire and EMS report range from pursuing greater collaboration among the three separate departments to combining all three into a single department, with several intermediate possibilities.

The Foxconn development in Mount Pleasant, in the long term, is expected to grow the region’s population and economy, though it remains unclear by how much. There also are other factors that suggest the time is now to consider greater service sharing:

- There is a trend of fire/EMS call volumes increasing in all three departments studied in the report: Racine, South Shore, and Caledonia.

- It is likely there will be new chiefs in each department in the next five years, as each is at or nearing retirement age.
- The majority of fire stations in the three departments are aging and in need of replacement or upgrade to reach modern standards, particularly for the Racine Fire Department. One station on the border of Mount Pleasant and Caledonia already is shared by the South Shore and Caledonia departments.
- Response times, currently slowed in certain areas due to the location of municipal boundaries, could be shortened under some of the options explored in the report.

The report also explores potential hurdles to greater sharing or consolidation, such as the potential need to reconcile differences between collective bargaining agreements for employees in the three fire departments.

The parks and recreation report similarly suggests a range of options for greater regionalization of parks and recreation services. For example, a potential Greater Racine Park and Recreation Council could have an oversight and coordinating role in planning and possibly sharing the cost of future park development, as well as the provision of recreational services throughout eastern Racine County. The report suggests that Racine County is best-positioned to organize and administer the council as well as future regional parks and recreation planning.

The report also examines areas in which consolidation may not yield benefits. It suggests that park maintenance remain the responsibility of individual municipalities, finding that centralizing it offers little prospect for cost saving or improved service-level efficiency.

Overall, the report finds “there is much to be gained and little to lose from collaborative planning and coordination of parks and recreation enhancements in the Greater Racine region.”

Go [here](#) to read the fire/EMS report and [here](#) to read the parks report.