



WISCONSIN POLICY FORUM

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Collaboration Could Help Waunakee Area, Middleton EMS Meet Growing Needs

Report outlines options for EMS providers to consider – from going it alone to full consolidation

Amid rapid growth in population and service demands, increased costs appear inevitable for the communities of Middleton and Waunakee to continue providing their residents with high-quality emergency medical services (EMS).

But possible collaboration, or even consolidation, of these services between the two communities could help allay those added costs while potentially improving service levels, a new Wisconsin Policy Forum report finds.

The report was commissioned by Waunakee Area Emergency Medical Services (WAEMS) and Middleton EMS. Both agencies have seen sharp rises in new development and population within their service areas, contributing to a surge in call volumes.

Since their service areas are contiguous, and both agencies are considering the need for new stations in close proximity to one another, officials have discussed whether a collaborative approach should be considered. Such an approach could involve sharing additional staff, vehicles, or a new station – or even merging the two departments into a single consolidated agency.

This report analyzes a range of EMS service sharing or consolidation options for the two agencies. The analysis is designed not to point local officials to specific conclusions, but rather to provide sufficient insights to allow them to deliberate and decide on a course of action that will ensure high-quality and efficient EMS service levels for the foreseeable future.

Our report finds that the option with the most combined costs for the two agencies would be to go it alone and each build a new station. Sharing a new station and possibly an ambulance crew would reduce the combined cost, while fully consolidating the two agencies would reduce it further.

“Whether a full merger is the best approach will be determined, at least in part, by whether local elected officials conclude that the efficiency gains that would be produced by consolidating into a single agency would outweigh any perceived disadvantages related to relinquishing some degree of local control,” the report finds.

Population, utilization trends

Waunakee Area Emergency Medical Services (WAEMS) is an independent public agency with a service area including the village of Waunakee, the village of Dane, the town of Westport, and parts of the towns of Springfield, Dane, and Vienna. The total population served in 2023 was 23,340.

Middleton EMS, meanwhile, is housed in the city of Middleton's government and provides EMS for the city and town of Middleton, and a portion of the town of Springfield. The total population of the jurisdictions it served in 2023 was 33,427.

Both communities have seen significant recent population increases: Over the past decade, the WAEMS service area experienced an increase in population of 3,144 residents (15.6%). The Middleton EMS service area has seen even faster growth, at a total increase of 6,189 residents, or 23%, during that period. This also has led to large increases in property values in these jurisdictions.

These trends, combined with increased EMS utilization rates, have led to a sharp spike in calls for service in these communities. From 2017 to 2024, WAEMS calls for service increased 44%. Middleton EMS saw an even larger increase, at 69%.

As a result, both agencies have made major staffing additions in recent years. WAEMS has added 12 paramedics since 2020 while Middleton EMS has added nine paramedics since 2009 as part of ongoing efforts by both agencies to ramp up full-time staffing.

These agencies also face higher-than-desired travel times to certain high-volume parts of their service areas. These factors are pressuring them to add additional ambulances and station locations. WAEMS is experiencing escalating response time challenges in the south, while Middleton has seen a spike in calls in the northeast, where the two service areas meet. The contiguous nature of those areas leads to significant potential for collaboration.

Five approaches to consider

We developed five hypothetical approaches that Middleton EMS and WAEMS officials and municipal leaders might consider to address their common challenges. The first would involve both agencies building their own new stations, with the combined annual cost for both agencies estimated to be more than \$2.5 million.

The second pair of options involve the agencies collaborating to build and share one new station at a jointly selected location in or near Westport that could serve the southeast portion of the WAEMS service area and the northeast section of the Middleton EMS service area. It could be staffed either with independent ambulance crews, at an estimated combined annual cost of about \$2.2 million, or a single shared ambulance crew, at an estimated annual cost of \$1.9 million.

The final two options call for forming a single consolidated EMS agency to serve the combined service areas of Middleton EMS and WAEMS. The consolidated agency could then either build two new stations with four total ambulance crews, at an estimated combined annual cost of \$1.4 million, or build one new station with five ambulance crews, at an estimated annual cost of \$1.7 million.

If leaders are reluctant to pursue the consolidation options in the near term, a phased approach could be considered. The agencies could begin by sharing a new station and ambulance crew, which would provide both service areas with at least some extra capacity and response time improvement. After that, stakeholders could further assess whether or how soon additional capacity will be required and whether a full-fledged merger of the two agencies would be the best option to secure it. [Click here to read the full report.](#)

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