

ONE STEP AHEAD

*Preparing for the Future of Fire and Emergency
Medical Services in Walworth County*



WISCONSIN
POLICY FORUM

ABOUT THE WISCONSIN POLICY FORUM

The Wisconsin Policy Forum was created on January 1, 2018 by the merger of the Milwaukee-based Public Policy Forum and the Madison-based Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance. Throughout their lengthy histories, both organizations engaged in nonpartisan, independent research and civic education on fiscal and policy issues affecting state and local governments and school districts in Wisconsin. WPF is committed to those same activities and that spirit of nonpartisanship.

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report was undertaken to provide citizens and policymakers in Walworth County with information on the state of fire and EMS service provision across the region and an assessment of how future challenges may be addressed. The intent is to support policymakers in identifying whether collective action is needed to resolve challenges, as well as possible opportunities for collaboration.

Report authors would like to thank fire and EMS chiefs and the Walworth County Dispatch Office for their assistance in providing information, and for patiently answering our questions. In addition, we wish to acknowledge and thank Walworth County, which commissioned and provided financial support for this research.



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INTRODUCTION

Fire departments and emergency medical services (EMS) agencies in Walworth County carry a long history of volunteerism and community pride. The City of Delavan Fire Department exemplifies the sense of tradition, with a fifth-generation firefighter serving in its ranks.

In recent years, however, the volunteer model still on display at most of the county's departments has come under duress in the face of a dwindling volunteer base. The decrease in volunteers stems from a variety of factors – including the various demands facing young families today and the training and overall time commitment required of fire and EMS workers. This challenge is not unique to Walworth County but rather has become the norm across Wisconsin and the nation.

Walworth County communities have responded to these changing times. Some have moved to a mix of full-time, part-time, and paid-on-call (POC) volunteer staff, even turning to voters in some instances to exceed property tax levy limits to pay for the increased cost. Others continue with the POC or volunteer model (with some contracting for EMS), while acknowledging that changes are inevitable and advance planning is needed.

Some Walworth County fire departments also are struggling to finance fire apparatus and ambulance replacement costs, which have skyrocketed in recent years. Another common challenge involves the geographic size of response areas, which stretch their response capacity.

In light of these many challenges, the Wisconsin Policy Forum was commissioned by Walworth County and its Fire and EMS Study Committee to conduct an analysis of fire and EMS service provision in the county. The goal was to develop options that would address key challenges, provide a higher level of service, and enhance coordination and collaboration among the county's 15 departments and agencies. We have conducted nearly two dozen similar analyses for counties and municipalities across Wisconsin, and we find here a range of opportunities that could create efficiencies and ensure appropriate service provision in all corners of the county, including rural areas that lack the call volume capacity or resources to shift to a career model.

Data and Methodology

Our major sources of data and information included agency surveys, phone calls, interviews, and publicly available documents.

Every fire and EMS department in Walworth County participated in the study. They are:

- Bloomfield Genoa City Fire and Rescue
- City of Delavan Fire Department
- Town of Delavan Fire and Rescue
- Darien Fire and EMS
- East Troy Fire and Rescue
- Elkhorn Area Fire Department
- Fontana Fire Department
- Lake Geneva Fire Department
- Lauderdale-LaGrange Fire Department
- Town of Lyons Fire Department
- Sharon Fire and Rescue
- Troy Center Fire Department
- Walworth Fire and Rescue
- Whitewater Fire Department
- Williams Bay Fire Department

All research was conducted in 2025. Unless otherwise noted, information presented is for 2024 in order to reflect full calendar year data.



In the pages that follow, we lay out the fire and EMS landscape in Walworth County, providing demographic data and snapshots of each department's operations. We then discuss a range of policy options for decisionmakers and the public to consider, including near-term collaboration opportunities and more intensive long-range possibilities involving greater participation by county government and departmental consolidation. Our intention is not to recommend a single solution, but instead to provide a series of options and a decision-making framework that county and municipal leaders can use to plan for a sustainable future for fire and EMS in Walworth County.



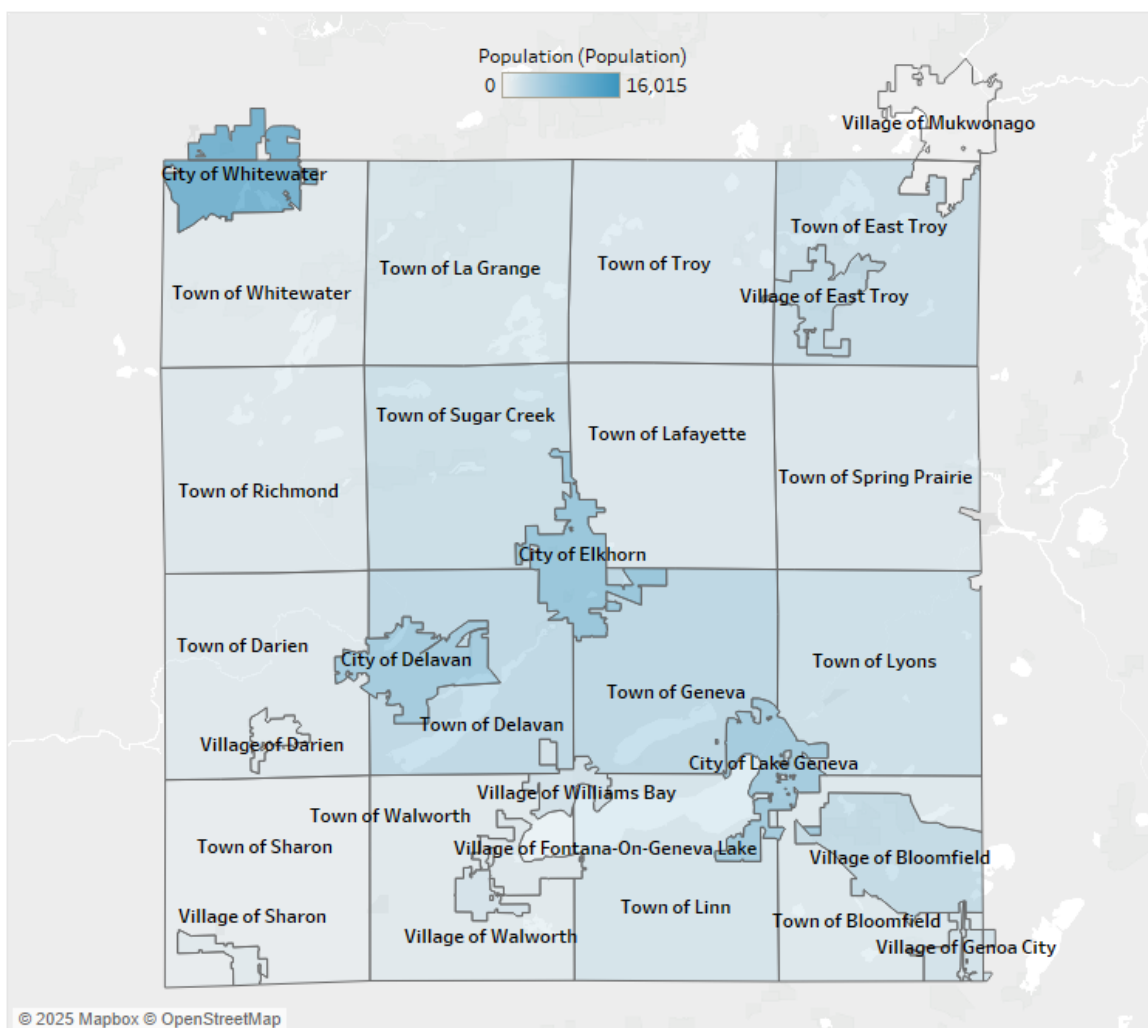
DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC INDICATORS

To plan for the future of fire and EMS in Walworth County, it is important to understand various demographic and economic indicators that may impact service capacity and demands. This section outlines several of those factors and how they are projected to change in the future.

Located in the southeast corner of Wisconsin, Walworth County is surrounded by Rock County to the west, Jefferson and Waukesha counties to the north, Racine and Kenosha counties to the east, and the Illinois state border to the south. Spanning nearly 580 square miles, the county is home to nearly 105,800 people, according to U.S. Census Bureau 2023 estimates. As shown in **Map 1**, much of its population resides in the southern half of the county, particularly in the cities of Elkhorn (10,300 residents), Lake Geneva (8,800), and Delavan (8,800). The city of Whitewater in the northwest corner is home to over 16,000 residents but extends into Jefferson County, as well.

Map 1: Population in Walworth County

Population, by municipality



Source: Wisconsin Department of Administration



The Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA) projects that by 2040, the county's population will shrink by 7% (7,400) from 2020 totals.¹ **Table 1** outlines projected population changes in greater detail, using DOA municipal population estimates from 2024 as the baseline. As shown, nearly all villages, towns, and cities are anticipated to have population declines ranging from -3% to -18%. The largest exceptions are the city of Lake Geneva, with a population growth projection of 11% (920 residents), and the village of East Troy at 26% (1,200) or 433 residents.

One key component of the projection is that seniors age 65 and older will grow as a share of the population, representing 28% (27,600) of residents by 2040 as compared to 20% in 2020. This growth is significant for fire and rescue agencies because senior populations tend to be the heaviest users of EMS.

For additional context, seniors represented 18% of Wisconsin's statewide population in 2020 and are projected to account for 23% by 2040. This means that Walworth County has a somewhat older population than the state overall.

The number of nursing homes and other residential care facilities for seniors or persons with disabilities also can have a sizable impact on EMS call volumes in a community. Walworth County was home to nearly 1,500 such beds in 2024 according to

Table 1: Walworth County Population Projections (2020-2040)

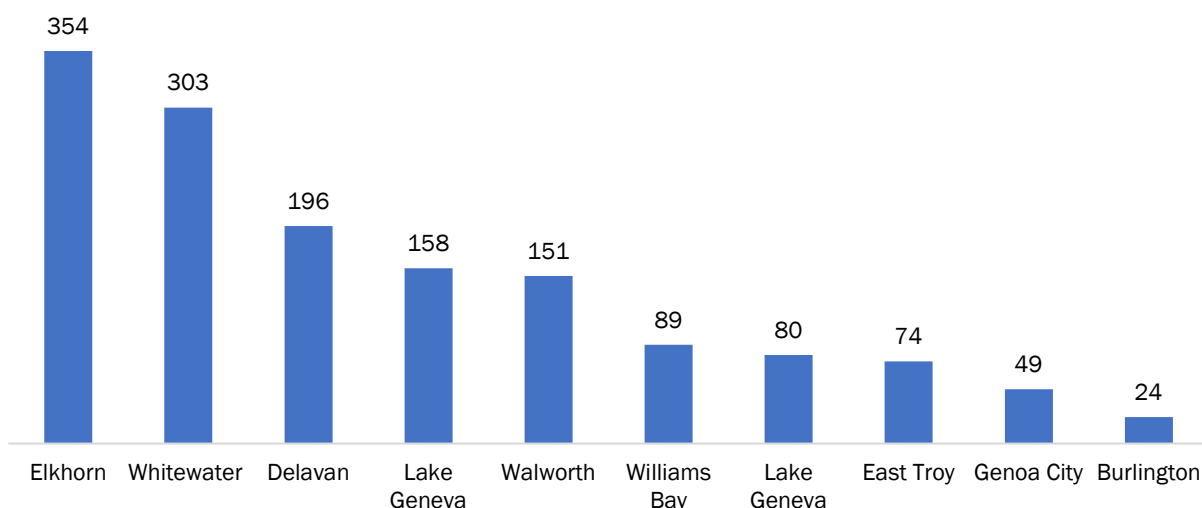
	2020 Population	2040 Projection	% Change
Northern Region			
Village of East Troy	4,687	5,889	26%
Town of East Troy	3,992	3,597	-10%
Town of LaGrange	2,472	2,295	-7%
Village of Mukwonago	222	297	34%
Town of Richmond	1,901	1,732	-9%
Town of Troy	2,355	2,082	-12%
City of Whitewater*	16,137	13,091	-19%
Town of Whitewater	1,433	1,231	-14%
Central Region			
City of Elkhorn	10,247	9,371	-9%
Town of Lafayette	2,039	2,046	0%
Southwest Region			
Village of Darien	1,573	1,353	-14%
Town of Darien	1,651	1,406	-15%
City of Delavan	8,505	7,515	-12%
Town of Delavan	5,273	4,516	-14%
Village of Fontana	1,872	1,814	-3%
Village of Sharon	1,586	1,325	-16%
Town of Sharon	861	713	-17%
Town of Sugar Creek	3,902	3,454	-11%
Village of Walworth	2,759	2,349	-15%
Town of Walworth	1,565	1,303	-17%
Village of Williams Bay	2,953	3,036	3%
Southeast Region			
Village of Bloomfield	4,781	4,421	-8%
Town of Bloomfield	1,778	1,752	-1%
Village of Genoa City*	2,982	2,447	-18%
City of Lake Geneva	8,277	9,197	11%
Town of Lake Geneva	5,390	5,439	1%
Town of Linn	2,687	2,717	1%
Town of Lyons	3,648	3,226	-12%
Town of Spring Prairie	2,123	1,834	-14%
*The full population for the city of Whitewater and the village of Genoa City are shown, not just the portion inside Walworth County borders. Source: Wisconsin Department of Administration			

¹ In contrast to population projections in previous years, the most recent population projections from the Wisconsin Department of Administration do not include gains from "domestic migration," which refers to the movement of individuals



Wisconsin Department of Health Services data. As shown in **Chart 1** on the following page, these beds are distributed across the county, with the largest presence in Elkhorn (350), Whitewater (303), Delavan (200), Lake Geneva (160), and Walworth (150).

Chart 1: Bed capacity for advanced age, memory, or brain trauma residents



Source: Wisconsin Department of Health Services. Only facilities with advanced age, memory, or brain trauma residents are included, as they are the most likely to need EMS support

Additionally, certain types of industries can contribute to service requests, particularly for EMS. As shown in **Table 2**, the total monthly average employment in Walworth County in 2023 was 43,500. Notably, manufacturing held the second largest share of total employment, at 18.8% (8,200 people). This is an industry that may pose higher safety risks. Similarly, trade, transportation, and utilities held a high share of total employment at 18.8% (8,198 people).

Table 2: Walworth County monthly average employment by industry (2023)

Industry	# Employed	% of Total
Education and Health Services	8,705	20.0%
Manufacturing	8,198	18.8%
Trade, Transportation, Utilities	8,067	18.5%
Leisure and Hospitality	7,971	18.3%
Professional and Business Services	3,660	8.4%
Public Administration	2,081	4.8%
Construction	1,854	4.3%
Financial Activities	1,094	2.5%
Other Services	958	2.2%
Natural Resources and Mining	621	1.4%
Information	329	0.8%

from out of state into Wisconsin. DOA's summary of its projections notes that such migration is expected to be negligible given that the Upper Midwest states from which people might be expected to move to Wisconsin are anticipating population declines. Similarly, the department does not anticipate an influx of non-domestic immigrants unless the current political climate changes.



While construction represented only 4.3% of average monthly employment (1,850 people), it is a high-risk industry with employment numbers projected to grow 16.3% (1,100) from 2022 to 2032 across the Southeast Workforce Development Area, which includes Walworth, Kenosha, and Racine counties.

Employment for the entire Southeast Workforce Development Area is anticipated to grow by 9.4% by 2032 across all industries, or 19,800 jobs as compared with 2022. The workday population is an important consideration for fire and EMS agencies, which must be prepared to respond to calls not only from residents, but also from workers and visitors. Similarly, they must be prepared for seasonal surges in demand, which is particularly relevant for Walworth County given the high levels of summer tourism in communities like Lake Geneva.

Property Values

Table 3 shows 2024 commercial property and per capita equalized property values in Walworth County municipalities per the Wisconsin Department of Revenue. These can be helpful data points because they offer context on how much local tax revenue is available to fund local governments and the fire and EMS services they provide. Additionally, communities with higher commercial property values likely face increased service demands from workers and shoppers.

The city of Lake Geneva has the highest commercial assessed value at \$519.3 million, followed by the city of Burlington at \$429 million (though most of the city of Burlington lies in Racine County). Separately, the cities of Whitewater and Delavan have the highest shares of commercial value as compared with total equalized value, at 37.5% and 36.1%, respectively.

Municipalities and towns located on Lake Geneva have a markedly higher overall per capita value than

Table 3: Commercial and per capita equalized values (2024)

	Total Equalized Value (\$billions)	Commercial Value %	Equalized Value per Capita (\$millions)
Town of Linn	\$3.6	11.9%	\$1.3
City of Lake Geneva	\$2.5	15.2%	\$0.3
Village of Fontana	\$2.4	14.0%	\$1.3
Town of Geneva	\$1.8	28.2%	\$0.3
Town of Delavan	\$1.8	18.7%	\$0.3
Village of Williams Bay	\$1.6	0.9%	\$0.5
City of Burlington	\$1.5	4.2%	\$0.1
Town of La Grange	\$1.4	5.1%	\$0.6
Town of East Troy	\$1.3	1.4%	\$0.3
City of Elkhorn	\$1.3	8.6%	\$0.1
City of Delavan	\$1.1	5.3%	\$0.1
City of Whitewater	\$0.9	1.1%	\$0.6
Town of Lyons	\$0.7	6.7%	\$0.2
Village of Bloomfield	\$0.7	13.2%	\$0.4
Town of Sugar Creek	\$0.7	1.4%	\$0.2
Village of East Troy	\$0.6	0.2%	\$0.2
Town of Whitewater	\$0.5	0.4%	\$0.4
Town of Troy	\$0.5	4.0%	\$0.2
Town of La Fayette	\$0.5	1.4%	\$0.2
Town of Spring Prairie	\$0.5	4.7%	\$0.2
Town of Richmond	\$0.5	2.7%	\$0.2
Town of Walworth	\$0.4	6.9%	\$0.2
Village of Walworth	\$0.4	7.4%	\$0.2
Village of Genoa City	\$0.3	54.1%	\$0.1
Town of Darien	\$0.3	22.3%	\$0.2
Town of Bloomfield	\$0.2	34.5%	\$0.04
Village of Darien	\$0.2	13.1%	\$0.1
Town of Sharon	\$0.1	45.2%	\$0.1
Village of Sharon	\$0.1	46.7%	\$0.1

Source: Wisconsin Department of Revenue



most other places in the county, which can be attributed to higher housing values in those areas. For example: the town of Linn's residential value is \$3.5 billion (\$1.3 million per capita), the city of Lake Geneva stands at \$2 billion (\$224,500 per capita), the village of Fontana's is \$2.4 billion (\$1.3 million per capita), and the village of Williams Bay's residential value is \$1.5 billion (\$509,700 per capita).

Summary

While Walworth County is projected to see a decline in overall population over the next 15 years, its senior population is growing, indicating that EMS use may grow in some places over time. Meanwhile, employment is projected to grow in the larger region that includes Walworth County, which also may signal increased demand for EMS and fire response. Still, the data suggest that unlike some regions we have analyzed for fire and EMS collaboration and consolidation, including some in Dane County, most Walworth County leaders should be preparing for steady or modestly higher demand levels as opposed to a surge in call volumes.

We also note that Walworth County consists of a mix of rural and suburban populations with varied property wealth. This indicates varied ability – and perhaps varied willingness – to finance the growing cost of fire and EMS services.



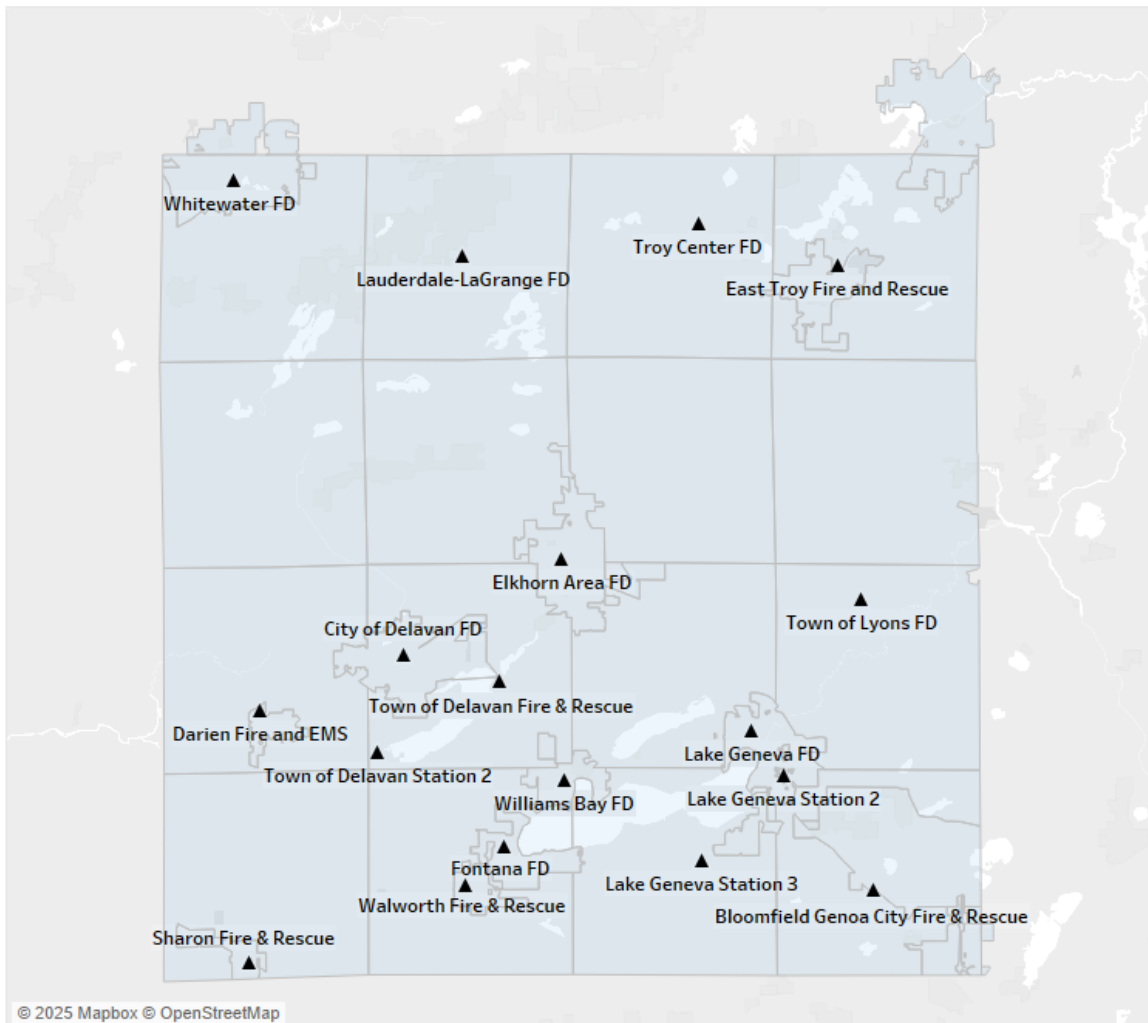
COUNTYWIDE FIRE & EMS LANDSCAPE

In this section, we provide a broad overview of fire services and EMS in Walworth County, including governance and staffing models, call volumes, response times, and ambulances and fire apparatus.

Walworth County residents receive fire services and EMS from 15 departments that operate out of 18 stations. As shown in **Map 2**, the majority of these departments are located in the southern half of the county. The map also shows the geographic boundaries of the cities, villages, and towns in the county. While the municipalities are not specifically labeled, the names of the departments mirror the names of their locations and can serve as identifiers.

Map 2: Walworth County Fire Department Stations

Locations of Fire Stations in Walworth County



Source: Wisconsin Department of Administration



A range of governance and staffing models are used, as shown in **Table 4**.² Most departments are government agencies that operate under a chief, who in turn reports to the municipal governing body. Two departments are non-governmental nonprofit organizations governed by boards of directors.³ Additionally, East Troy Fire and Rescue is an emergency services district that is governed by a commission. Each municipality in the district has two representatives on the commission and pays a portion of district operating costs as determined by a formula.

On the staffing side, eight of the departments use a mixture of full-time and paid-on-call (POC) staff (shown in the table as a Career/POC model). In general, these departments employ a small number of full-time staff who are scheduled for times when the department is busiest. They are complimented by POC personnel who are called in when necessary. Some departments also use part-time employees who are assigned to shifts at the station.

Three departments use a POC model in which staff are paid an hourly wage for the time they spend when they respond to a call. These personnel typically drive to their station to join an ambulance or fire engine when they are paged, rather than being at the station waiting for a call to come in. Two departments use this model but do not pay their responders, who function as true volunteers.

Table 4: Governance and staffing models for Walworth County departments

Region	Governance Model	Staffing Model
Northern Region		
Whitewater Fire/EMS	Government Agency	Career/POC
Lauderdale LaGrange Fire Department	Independent Entity	Volunteer
Troy Center Fire Department	Government Agency	Volunteer
East Troy Fire and Rescue	Emergency Services District	Career/POC
Central Region		
Elkhorn Area Fire Department	Government Agency	Career
Southwest Region		
City of Delavan Fire	Government Agency	POC
Town of Delavan	Government Agency	Career/POC
Darien Fire/EMS	Government Agency	Career/POC
Sharon Fire and Rescue	Government Agency	Career/POC
Williams Bay Fire Dept.	Government Agency	POC
Walworth Fire and Rescue	Government Agency	Career/POC
Southeast Region		
Bloomfield Genoa City Fire & Rescue	Independent Entity	Career/POC
Fontana Fire Department	Government Agency	Career/POC
Lake Geneva Fire Department	Government Agency	Career/POC
Town of Lyons Fire Department	Government Agency	Part-time/POC

² Wisconsin State statutes provide a broad range of options for local jurisdictions to secure the provision of fire services, including via a municipal department, a joint department with other jurisdictions, contracting with a private or nonprofit fire company, and creating a combined protective services department that encompasses both police and fire services. Similarly, ambulance services and EMS may be contracted or locally operated.

³ The Williams Bay Fire Department has historically operated as a nonprofit but is transitioning to a municipal service. That process is expected to conclude in late 2025.



Finally, two departments use a career staffing model, with full-time staff available to respond to calls 24/7. While this is generally considered the optimal model from a service provision standpoint, as staff are at the station and ready to respond as soon as a call comes in, it is also the most expensive option. This approach may not make sense for departments with limited call volumes, and particularly those that typically receive fewer than one or two calls per day.

EMS License Levels

Notably, nearly all residents in Walworth County have access to an advanced life support (ALS) level of EMS, as most departments in the county are licensed by the state at either the paramedic or advanced emergency medical technician (AEMT) levels (see the Appendix for a description of the various types of EMS personnel and the services they are licensed to provide). ALS providers are able to perform various life-saving interventions, including urgent treatment for heart attacks and strokes. Walworth Fire and Rescue is the only department licensed at the EMT Basic level. However, it does provide ALS services when its AEMT-licensed personnel are available.

For a department to operate at a certain license level, at least one person on each ambulance crew must carry that level of license. For example, a department licensed to operate at the paramedic level must have at least one paramedic on each ambulance crew.

Table 5 shows the EMS license levels for each department. Three departments (City of Delavan Fire Department, Williams Bay Fire Department, and Troy Center Fire Department) contract for ambulance services through a neighboring municipal department or a private company, though each also is licensed for EMT Basic or EMR care and can respond to calls at that level if needed. This can

Table 5: EMS license levels and Insurance Services Office (ISO) ratings

Region/Fire Department	EMS License Level	ISO Rating
Northern Region		
Whitewater Fire Dept.	Paramedic	3
Lauderdale LaGrange Fire Dept.	AEMT (flex to paramedic)	8
Troy Center Fire Dept.	AEMT (via East Troy Fire & Rescue) EMR (FD)	9
East Troy Fire & Rescue	AEMT (flex to paramedic)	5 Village/ 8 Town
Central		
Elkhorn Area Fire Dept.	Paramedic	3 City/ 5 Surrounding Area
Southwest Region		
City of Delavan Fire Dept.	Paramedic (via private contractor) EMT-Basic (FD)	3
Town of Delavan Fire and Rescue	Paramedic	6
Darien Fire and EMS	AEMT (flex to paramedic)	5 Village/ 7 Town
Fontana Fire Department	Paramedic	3
Sharon Fire and Rescue	AEMT (flex to paramedic)	5 Village/ 10 Town
Williams Bay Fire Dept.	Paramedic (via the Fontana Fire Department)	4
Walworth Fire and Rescue	EMT Basic (flex to AEMT)	5 Village/ 5Y Town
Southeast		
Bloomfield Genoa City Fire & Rescue	AEMT (flex to paramedic, private contractor)	5
Lake Geneva Fire Dept.	Paramedic	3
Town of Lyons Fire Dept.	AEMT	7

Note: ISO ratings were reported to us by chiefs. It is possible that some departments have service areas that span regions with two ISO ratings, but those were not shared with us.



be particularly beneficial during high acuity calls such as a cardiac arrest, when the administration of basic emergency care while an ambulance is en route can make a difference in patient outcomes. In the case of the city of Delavan, the department also serves as a backup ambulance responder when the private contractor's ambulance is out on a call.

The table reflects both the contracted company and the host department's license level. It should be noted that Williams Bay Fire Department personnel are cross-credentialed, which means they are able to respond with their contracted EMS provider (the Fontana Fire Department) and typically function as Fontana EMS personnel if they are part of an EMS response.

Insurance Services Office Ratings

Insurance Services Office (ISO) ratings, as shown in **Table 5**, are one means of assessing fire department service capabilities. An ISO rating indicates a department's ability to offer fire protection to the communities it serves. Scores range from one to 10, with one indicating an excellent level of fire protection and 10 indicating that minimum standards are not being met. Factors influencing the score include department operations (size, staffing levels, training, and equipment maintenance), access to reliable water supply and other infrastructure considerations, emergency communication systems, and community risk reduction. Ultimately, the scores are factored into commercial and home insurance rates.

Notably, five of the 15 departments in Walworth County carry an ISO rating of three – considered a high level of fire protection – for the parts of their services areas covering their cities. These are the cities of Whitewater, Elkhorn, Delavan, Fontana, and Lake Geneva. A number have good to average ratings, while three have ISO ratings of 7 or below.

We do not share these scores to critique any of the departments. It is not surprising, for example, that departments that rely on POC personnel or volunteers and that lack access to fire hydrants would have lower scores, as these are common factors that rural communities must navigate.

Calls for Service

Table 6 on the next page shows 2024 call volumes for each agency in the county.⁴ An EMS call volume of zero indicates that primary EMS services are being provided by a neighboring department through a contract, as outlined earlier. Individual agency snapshots in the next section provide additional detail regarding the number of calls these departments offer as backup to their contracted provider.

For most departments, EMS calls represent between 73% and 86% of their total call volume. The exception is the more rural department of Sharon, which has an EMS call proportion of 67%.

⁴ For the sake of consistency, the call volumes we cite in Table 6 were those reported to us by departments. There may be discrepancies between the number of calls they reported, and the call volumes documented by dispatch agencies. For example, many departments record calls that utilize both fire and EMS services under each category separately, whereas a dispatch office might record only a single call and not split it across the two categories. Also, call volumes can be artificially inflated if a department sends more than one ambulance or more than one engine to a scene for the same call, but records each ambulance or engine as representing a unique call.



Perhaps unsurprisingly, departments that serve cities with greater population density field the highest call volumes, averaging 38 to 51 fire and EMS calls in a given week. Those on the lower end of the spectrum respond to an average of one to nine calls per week, though some of these reflect only fire calls given that EMS is provided by a neighboring jurisdiction or private ambulance company.

Response Times

Response times to a medical emergency are often tracked in three ways: the time from receiving the call from dispatch to personnel leaving the station, travel time, and total response time from dispatch to arrival at the scene. The time from the dispatch call to arrival is dependent on a number of factors that include whether responders receive a dispatch call while on site at a station or must travel to the station to join a crew; the distance between a station and an incident; and whether an agency has an available response vehicle or must turn to a unit in a neighboring community to respond.

In most cases, departments with full-time responders on duty at the station 24/7 have the best response times. In Walworth County, departments with full-time staff report “turnout times” – i.e. the time between receiving a call and leaving the station – of between 45 seconds and two minutes on average for EMS calls, and one to five minutes on average for fire calls. These same departments reported an average of 4.6 to 8 minutes from dispatch to arrival on scene for EMS, and 4.6 minutes to 12 minutes for fire calls.

Departments that rely solely on volunteer or POC staff for fire responses reported total response times of six to seven minutes and 10 to 12 minutes from the time of dispatch to arrival on scene. The sole POC department that offers EMS – the Town of Lyons Fire Department – reported an average of 11 to 12 minutes from the dispatch call to arrival on scene for both fire and EMS runs.

Departments with a mix of full-time and POC staff also tended to report faster average response times. For fire calls, the average time reported from dispatch to arrival was between 4.5 and 10 minutes. For EMS, departments reported a range of 4.5 to 8 minutes.

We also note that while a few departments were unable to provide their average response times, the ranges gathered from those that could are in alignment with response times we have seen in other studies.

Table 6: Fire and EMS call volumes (2024)

Region/Fire Department	Fire	EMS	Avg. Calls Per Week
Northern Region			
Whitewater Fire Dept.	409	1,556	38
Lauderdale LaGrange Fire Dept.	96	196	6
Troy Center Fire Dept.	81	0	2
East Troy Fire & Rescue	232	1,069	25
Central			
Elkhorn Area Fire Dept.	361	2,292	51
Southwest Region			
City of Delavan Fire Dept.*	316	1,265	30
Town of Delavan Fire and Rescue	265	621	16
Darien Fire and EMS	98	274	7
Fontana Fire Department	213	712	18
Sharon Fire and Rescue	77	159	5
Williams Bay Fire Dept.	123	0	2
Walworth Fire and Rescue	108	383	9
Southeast			
Bloomfield Genoa City Fire & Rescue	164	655	16
Lake Geneva Fire Dept.	751	1,663	46
Town of Lyons Fire Dept.	105	454	11

*The City of Delavan EMS call volume reflects the combined total of EMS calls handled by Medix Ambulance and the fire department.



Dispatch

Walworth County Dispatch serves nearly all fire and EMS agencies in Walworth County. The exceptions are the Lake Geneva and Whitewater departments, each of which is dispatched by their local police department communications center. While some departments reported that there were occasional communication issues with the county dispatch center, those problems are expected to be resolved with the new radio system that has been installed across the county.

Ambulances and Fire Apparatus

The availability of appropriate numbers of ambulances and fire apparatus can make a difference in call response times, as the need to call for additional support from other departments when vehicles are in use can increase wait times. However, in addition to owning a sufficient number of vehicles, departments must have the capacity to assemble crews to operate them when needed.

In Walworth County, nearly all departments own two or three ambulances. This gives them the vehicle capacity to respond when two calls arrive simultaneously. Having multiple vehicles also ensures that response capability can be maintained when one ambulance is out of service for maintenance or repairs. Two departments reported having only one ambulance – Lauderdale-LaGrange Fire and Rescue and Walworth Fire Department.

Most departments have fire apparatus at levels sufficient to meet their response needs, though few have reserve apparatus. Typical apparatus includes fire engines (or pumpers), fire tankers (or tenders), and fire pumper tankers, which combine fire engine and fire tanker capabilities. There are also seven ladder trucks located across the county, at the Elkhorn, East Troy, Fontana, Lake Geneva, town of Darien, and both the city and town of Delavan departments. The box to the right provides brief descriptions of common heavy fire apparatus. Given the rising costs for vehicle purchases – which can range from \$350,000 for ambulances to more than \$2 million for a ladder truck – this may be an area where greater cooperation through vehicle sharing would be beneficial.

Heavy Fire Apparatus

Fire engines (also known as pumpers or pumper engines) carry firefighters, water, pumps, and hoses to a fire scene. An engine typically pumps water from a nearby source, such as a fire hydrant.

Fire tankers (also known as tenders or tender tankers) hold large quantities of water to resupply engines or take the place of hydrants when they are not available at a fire scene.

Brush trucks (also known as grass trucks) are designed to navigate terrains in rural or undeveloped areas. They often include a high-clearance chassis, rugged tires, and specialized suspension systems. They typically carry water tanks, pumps, and foam systems.

A pumper tanker (also known as a pumper tender) combines the features of a pumper and a tanker, which means it can pump water from its own tank while also supplying water to other fire apparatus.

A squad truck carries specialized tools and equipment for tasks beyond firefighting, such as vehicle extrication, technical rescue, hazardous materials incidents, and providing logistical support for large-scale emergencies.

A heavy rescue truck supports complex, technical rescues such as vehicle extrication, structural collapse, and high-angle rescues.

Ladder trucks (also known as aerial apparatus) have a hydraulically operated ladder or platform that can reach elevated areas. They also carry equipment for specialized tasks such as ventilation and search and rescue.



DEPARTMENT SNAPSHOTS

In this section, we provide brief overviews of each department, including a description of their service areas, staffing models, call volumes, and near-term capital spending needs. While broad, these snapshots allow us to identify common challenges and other factors that may lend themselves to collaborative solutions or, conversely, that may serve as barriers to certain options.

Bloomfield Genoa City Fire & Rescue

Bloomfield Genoa City Fire and Rescue serves the town of Bloomfield and the villages of Bloomfield and Genoa City. The department was formed as a nonprofit in 2003 with the merger of the Genoa City and Bloomfield fire departments. The department uses a mixed career/POC model in which five personnel contracted through Metro Paramedic Services provide full-time fire and EMS coverage, and a roster of 22 POC and part-time personnel offer additional support.

Between two and four people are available on a shift 24/7, depending on how many part-time staff sign up to supplement the full-time staff. The part-time personnel sign up for a minimum of 24 hours per month, though some make themselves available for as many as 180 hours per month. Only four of the part-time responders do not sign up for shift schedules and function as POC personnel. Hourly wages are based on certification levels and range from \$17 to \$22 per hour during day shifts on weekdays. On weeknights, weekends, and holidays, the pay range adjusts to \$13.75 per hour to \$19.50. These lower rates reflect a narrower range of duties, as scheduled personnel only respond to calls and do not perform additional station duties during those times.

The village of Bloomfield owns and maintains the station, and the three localities that the department serves share the cost of station repairs. Separately, the department owns its vehicles, though it cannot issue debt to finance vehicle acquisition costs. Instead, the annual budget includes a contribution to a capital fund that is drawn down when needed for ambulance and apparatus purchases. A new ambulance was ordered in 2024 and is slated for arrival mid-year in 2026, while a new fire engine is needed in the next five years. Department officials share that a large donation from a private citizen, combined with the current capital fund balance and other smaller revenue pools, will fund the fire engine replacement.

Bloomfield Genoa City Fire & Rescue	
Staffing Model	Career/POC
	AEMT (flex to paramedic, contracted through Metro Paramedic services)
License Level	
FTEs	5
Part-time/POC Roster	22
2024 Budget	\$829,000
2024 EMS Calls	655
2024 Fire Calls	164
Total 2024 Call Volume	819

City of Delavan Fire Department

The City of Delavan Fire Department uses a POC staffing model to provide EMS first response and backup support as well as fire services to residents of the city of Delavan and the southern part of the town of Richmond. For ambulance transport and paramedic services, the city contracts with Medix Ambulance. The fire department provides EMS backup support by responding to calls that arrive when the Medix ambulance is fielding a simultaneous call.



Medix Ambulance responded to 1,086 EMS calls and an additional 65 calls that were either fire calls or standby requests in 2024, while the city department responded to 179 EMS calls, or 14% of the total call volume. An additional 30 (2.4%) EMS calls in the city were supported by the Town of Delavan Fire Department when the city department could not staff an ambulance.

The department has 47 POC staff and one full-time fire inspector who works normal weekday hours and who also responds to EMS calls while on duty. Thirteen of the 47 responders have EMS licenses or EMS/firefighter credentials, while the majority respond to fire calls only. Department officials share that the average person on the roster has been there for at least 30 years, though they do have some younger responders joining. Volunteer numbers have been relatively steady for decades, though the number of people responding to pages has fallen somewhat over time for certain types of service calls such as lift assists or carbon dioxide alarms. Volunteer responses to working fire calls remain strong. Staff are paid a flat rate of \$25 to \$88 per call, depending on the severity of a fire and whether it occurs during the day or evening.

Looking to the future, department officials share that while the current contract with Medix Ambulance is serving them well, there may come a point when the company is no longer able to staff its ambulance due to competition for staff from public sector EMS agencies.

In regard to capital needs, planned purchases over the next five years include a reserve ambulance, a new squad truck, and a pumper engine. In 2024, the city purchased a new ladder truck for \$1.4 million.

City of Delavan Fire Department	
Staffing Model	POC
License Level	Paramedic
FTEs	1
POC Roster	47
2024 Budget	\$652,200
2024 EMS Calls	1,086 Medix Ambulance / 179 Delavan
2024 Fire Calls	316
Total 2024 Call Volume	1,086 Medix Ambulance / 495 Delavan

Town of Delavan Fire & Rescue

Town of Delavan Fire and Rescue is a municipal fire and EMS department that serves residents of the town of Delavan. The department operates out of two stations located at the northeast and southwest ends of Lake Delavan.

The department moved from a strictly POC to a career/POC model in 2022, using property tax revenues to pay for the addition of full-time staff after voters approved a referendum authorizing town officials to do so. Six full-time personnel staff shifts on a 24/7 basis, and 31 POC personnel provide additional support (including three command staff and five administrative positions).

The department offers 24/7 shift staffing out of its primary station near the town of Delavan hall. Meanwhile, POC members drive to either that station or the one at the southwest end of Delavan Lake to join a fire engine or

Town of Delavan Fire & Rescue	
Staffing Model	Career/POC
License Level	Paramedic
FTEs	6
POC Roster	31
2024 Budget	\$1.5 million
2024 EMS Calls	621
2024 Fire Calls	265
Total 2024 Call Volume	886



ambulance as needed. Some also sign up for scheduled times during which they will be on duty at the primary station, a practice that is known as paid on premise (POP). The department also schedules POP staff at its second station on weekends to help support the higher call volumes during those times. Additionally, there are times when an ambulance or engine leaves without a full crew if a life-threatening emergency is underway; in those circumstances, the POC will bring additional equipment to the scene. POC and POP members receive \$21/hour per call, while POP paramedics receive \$26 per hour. The department has three primary ambulances.

Looking forward, department officials identify a need for increased full-time staffing and hope to grow capacity to four to six personnel on a shift through a future referendum, which would allow for two to three staff per shift at both stations. Additionally, a number of capital costs are planned in the next five years, which would be financed through general obligation bonds. These include an ambulance, a tower ladder, and various equipment and gear including mobile radios, and remodeling of the second fire station to allow it to accommodate full-time shifts. Looking farther out, a pumper/tender and a fire engine will likely be included in a future capital improvement plan.

Darien Fire and EMS

Darien Fire and EMS serves the village and town of Darien with 24/7 coverage provided by full-time personnel and a part-time chief. A roster of 25 POC staff also support the department, primarily by staffing second ambulances when the primary ambulance is on a call, and also by supplementing fire crews.

While the department is budgeted for six full-time positions, only five of them are currently filled with full-time personnel; the remaining position is filled with part-time personnel. Two responders are scheduled per shift to form a full ambulance crew. In the case of fire responses, each person on duty takes an ambulance or fire engine, and POC personnel bring additional apparatus to the scene. POC personnel earn \$17 to \$24 per hour depending on license level.

Notably, the department works closely with the Sharon Fire Department to provide fire and EMS in both service areas through an intergovernmental agreement. The two departments essentially share the six full-time staff employed by Darien Fire and EMS, who respond to EMS calls in both jurisdictions using either a Darien or a Sharon ambulance. The Darien department administers the arrangement, and Sharon pays Darien \$125,000 for its share of the costs. Each department owns its own ambulances, and they trade off whose ambulance is in use under the contract each month. This arrangement allows them to evenly distribute revenues from patient billing. Darien manages and houses the shared ambulance, which moves to the Sharon station for a couple of hours each day. The crew performs station duties while there.

Looking forward, an ambulance and a pumper tanker are due for replacement in the next five years. The village of Darien has a sinking fund that has received regular contributions from the operating budget and that historically has been used to purchase capital equipment, but those funds were spent in recent years. Department officials share that a plan for financing future vehicle

Darien Fire and EMS	
Staffing Model	Career/POC
License Level	AEMT (flex to paramedic)
FTEs	6
POC Roster	25
2024 Budget	\$657,000
2024 EMS Calls	274
2024 Fire Calls	98
Total 2024 Call Volume	372



replacements still needs to be formulated. Additionally, the Darien and Sharon departments are discussing how capital equipment related to their intergovernmental agreement should be financed.

East Troy Fire and Rescue

East Troy Fire and Rescue provides fire services and EMS to the village of East Troy, the towns of East Troy and Spring Prairie, and part of the town of Lafayette. It also provides EMS to the town of Troy.

The department operates under a mixed career/POC/volunteer model. Seven full-time staff provide 24/7 shift coverage, including a full-time fire chief. An additional 35 personnel are POC and are paid an hourly rate of \$16 to \$26, depending on their licensing and certifications. Finally, 10 people volunteer as unpaid firefighters; hourly wages are available only for people who carry EMS licenses or who carry both EMS and fire credentials.

East Troy Fire and Rescue	
Staffing Model	Career/POC/Volunteer
License Level	AEMT
FTEs	7
POC/volunteer roster	45
2024 Budget	\$1,372,000
2024 EMS Calls	1,069
2024 Fire Calls	232
Total 2024 Call Volume*	1,089

* The total call volume reflects all emergency calls responded to. The total does not equal the sum of the separate fire and EMS call volumes because of overlap when both fire and EMS responses were needed.

The department is licensed at the AEMT level. However, it has three full time paramedics and also receives paramedic flex staffing support from the Aurora Health Center. This combination of personnel ensures a paramedic is always available, and the department is currently pursuing a paramedic license level.

A number of vehicle replacements are planned over the next five years. These include a pumper engine, a ladder truck, and two ambulances. Of these, the ladder truck and an ambulance have been ordered and are expected to arrive in 2025. All capital and operating costs are distributed across the municipalities that the department serves.

Elkhorn Area Fire Department

The Elkhorn Area Fire Department is a municipal fire and EMS department serving the city of Elkhorn, the town of Sugar Creek, and portions of the towns of Lafayette and Geneva. The department employs 26 full-time staff, which allows for 24/7 coverage with eight personnel ideally scheduled per shift.

Department officials shared that the shift from a POC model to a career department in recent years was made because its POC roster had become largely inactive. The change was funded through a referendum to exceed state-imposed property tax levy limits and has helped resolve some of the recruitment and retention challenges. However, financing capital replacements remains a challenge.

Elkhorn Area Fire Department	
Staffing Model	Career
License Level	Paramedic
FTEs	26
2024 Budget	\$4.7 million
2024 EMS Calls	2,292
2024 Fire Calls	361
Total 2024 Call Volume	2,653



A fire brush truck and ambulance were scheduled in the capital improvement plan in 2024 and are anticipated to arrive in late 2025 and early 2026, respectively. Additionally, a ladder truck was replaced in 2024. The department is also exploring rehabbing its current station or building a new one that would create better proximity to some of the towns they serve.

Fontana Fire Department

The Fontana Fire Department provides fire services and EMS to the village of Fontana and the town of Walworth, EMS to the village of Williams Bay, and an ALS intercept⁵ to Walworth Fire and Rescue. The department has an automatic aid agreement with Hebron, Illinois – under which both jurisdictions respond to calls in either service area simultaneously – and is working on another with the Town of Delavan Fire and Rescue. The department uses a mixed career/POC model, which has been made possible financially through voter referenda to exceed state property tax levy limits that passed in 2017 and 2022.

Fontana Fire Department	
Staffing Model	Career/POC
License Level	Paramedic
FTEs	13
POC/Part-time Roster	26
2024 Budget	\$2.3 million
2024 EMS Calls	712
2024 Fire Calls	213
Total 2024 Call Volume	925

Thirteen full-time, 14 part-time, and 12 POC staff support the department. Between four and six people are scheduled on shift 24/7, which includes four full-time and up to two part-time or POC staff. The department has capacity to guarantee a paramedic for both first and second ambulances at times when simultaneous calls come in. POC staff earn hourly wages primarily according to length of tenure (\$19.24 to \$21.84), though POC paramedics, captains, and the chief have higher rates that also advance with time (\$20.24 to \$24.96).

Projected capital expenditures in the next five years include two ambulances, a fire engine, and a new station that will provide an additional 50% of square footage for apparatus, training facilities, administration, and full-time staffing. The location of the station is still being determined. While the department will only own one station after the new one is constructed, it plans to house some staff at the Williams Bay station after that facility's renovation for sleeping quarters is completed. The Fontana department's capital purchases are financed through general obligation bonds or cash reserves, and the town of Walworth contributes a portion of the costs based on call volumes.

⁵ An ALS or paramedic intercept refers to a practice in which an ALS-certified responder meets up with a Basic Life Support ambulance crew en route to the hospital to provide an ALS level of care. This timely provision of life-saving care can be very beneficial in terms of patient outcomes.



Lake Geneva Fire Department

The Lake Geneva Fire Department is a municipal fire and EMS department that serves the city of Lake Geneva, the eastern half of the town of Geneva (including Como), and the town of Linn.

As a mixed career/part-time agency, 23 full-time (including two administrative staff) and 26 part-time staff support the department. Five staff are available on shift 24/7 at the Lake Geneva station, and three available 24/7 at the Linn station. A third station, which is not staffed, holds a reserve fire engine that is used as needed by POC personnel. Hourly rates range from \$20 to \$39 per hour, depending on rank, licensing, and tenure. Additionally, uncertified staff are paid just under \$14 per hour while in training.

In 2024, the department added nine full-time positions to support a new, 20-year contract to provide fire and EMS services to the town of Linn. In 2025, the department added three full-time positions. Staffing changes were made possible with existing resources and no need for a referendum. Three additional full-time staff are planned for 2026.

In recent years, the department's service area and call volume have grown due to increased calls from senior living facilities, as well as the loss of private ambulance services from the area over time. In the next five years, the department plans to replace two fire engines and to build a station in the southeast corner of its service area. Capital costs are typically financed by issuing debt or using reserves.

Lake Geneva Fire Department

Staffing Model	Career/part-time
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License Level	Paramedic
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FTEs	23
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Part-time Roster	26
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2025 Budget*	\$5 million
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2024 EMS Calls	1,663
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2024 Fire Calls	751
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Total 2024 Call Volume	2,414
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*Due to the significant operating changes that have occurred since the start of this research project, we use the 2025 budget rather than 2024.

Lauderdale-LaGrange Fire Department

The Lauderdale-LaGrange Fire Department is a nonprofit entity serving the town of LaGrange. A roster of 32 unpaid volunteers supports department operations. The department has automatic aid agreements with the Whitewater and Elkhorn fire departments.

Department officials share that volunteer levels are relatively stable at the moment, with 10 to 12 people easily available for fire responses as well as EMS, but that the roster has been dwindling over time. Looking out three to four years, they foresee a need to structure staffing to ensure an ambulance crew can be assembled to respond to EMS calls during weekdays.

Lauderdale-LaGrange Fire Department

Staffing Model	Volunteer
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License Level	AEMT (flex to paramedic)
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Volunteer Roster	32
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2024 Budget	\$161,000
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2024 EMS Calls	196
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2024 Fire Calls	96
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Total 2024 Call Volume	292
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Notably, the department's revenues through its contract with the town generally pay for services without the need to send a patient a bill. The exceptions may be for a paramedic level run or for the use of certain medications. The department is also unique in that a turnout truck brings fire gear to a scene, which in many cases allows for a faster response time because volunteers do not have to



head to a station first for their gear (although at least one volunteer does head to the station first to pick up the needed apparatus).

The department owns its gear and equipment while the town owns the station and response vehicles. A new fire engine is currently on order, which will be financed by the town of LaGrange.

Town of Lyons Fire Department

The Lyons Fire Department provides fire and EMS services to residents of the town of Lyons and half of the town of Spring Prairie. The department is licensed at the AEMT level and uses a part-time/POC operating model.

A roster of 36 personnel (which includes seven POP only, 11 POP and POC, and 18 POC only) is used to ensure 24/7 shift staffing at the station. Two POP staff are available on Sundays and weekdays during the day as well as round-the-clock on Fridays and Saturdays. Up to three staff sign up to be available on call outside of those times, though incorporating POP staff in the future for weekday evenings may become necessary to maintain service levels.

Department officials shared that while the roster is healthy in numbers, a small group of six to seven people respond to a majority of calls. Of these, most are full-time career staff at other departments in the area. Of the department's four paramedics, two work at other area departments and provide support on their days off. Hourly wages range from \$14 to \$25 for POC personnel, depending on licensing and command staff status. Wages for EMS personnel while scheduled on premise as POP staff range from \$19.50 to \$24.25. Additionally, drivers earn \$13.50 per hour and new trainees on probation earn \$8.00 per hour.

Capital expenditures that are anticipated in the next five years include a fire engine and an ambulance to replace aging equipment. The towns of Lyons and Spring Prairie share the financing of capital costs.

Lyons Fire Department	
Staffing Model	Part-time/POC
License Level	AEMT
Part-time/POC Roster	36
2024 Budget	\$492,300
2024 EMS Calls	454
2024 Fire Calls	105
Total 2024 Call Volume	559

Sharon Fire and Rescue

Sharon Fire and Rescue offers fire services and EMS to the village and town of Sharon. The department is governed by a joint board of directors with members from the village and town of Sharon. It is run by the village of Sharon, though both communities contribute to its operating costs.

The department has a roster of 21 POC personnel and also uses the six career personnel stationed at Darien Fire and EMS, who serve both areas for fire and EMS calls through an intergovernmental agreement (IGA).

The POC roster includes a mix of staff that are EMS-only, fire-only, or cross trained in fire and EMS. Staff are paid between \$8 and \$23 per hour while on a call, depending

Sharon Fire & Rescue	
Staffing Model	Career/POC
License Level	AEMT (flex to paramedic)
FTEs	6
POC Roster	21
2024 Budget	\$293,300
2024 EMS Calls	159
2024 Fire Calls	77
Total 2024 Call Volume	236



on their certifications. The department's seven officers are paid an additional stipend. Given that POC staff work or live across a wide geographic area, it is typical for a fire vehicle to dispatch to a scene and have the full crew of responders meet it there. While POC staffing has been challenging at times, the department has successfully recruited nine staff in the past year through social media and word of mouth.

Department officials share that the agreement with Darien Fire and EMS has done a lot to address staffing issues. As discussed above, under the agreement, each department owns its own ambulances and they switch off each month which ambulance is used. This arrangement allows each department to take a share of revenue from patient billing. Darien manages and houses the shared ambulance, and it moves to the Sharon station for a couple of hours each day, where the crew performs station duties. Sharon has a separate ambulance that may be sent out at the same time as the shared ambulance or to a different scene when two simultaneous calls come in.

The department's operating budget in 2024 was \$293,300, which included a payment of \$125,000 to Darien Fire and EMS for the shared fire and EMS agreement. In the next five years, department officials anticipate needing to replace an ambulance as well as conducting significant rust repair work on a fire tender.

Troy Center Fire Department

The Troy Center Fire Department provides fire services to the town of Troy. EMS services are provided by contract from neighboring East Troy Fire and Rescue, though department staff will respond to critical emergencies to expedite the onset of patient care. The two departments also have an automatic aid agreement for fire calls.

Troy Center Fire Department	
Staffing Model	Volunteer
Volunteer Roster	21
2024 Budget	\$60,000
2024 Fire Calls	81

The department operates with a roster of 21 unpaid volunteers. All members are BLS/AED certified, which means they can offer basic life support and have the ability to administer a defibrillator, and two are licensed EMS providers. Department officials indicate that the volunteer model will not sustain services over the long term. The department's roster has shrunk by 50% over the last 30 years, and only eight to 12 people respond to a majority of calls. Nevertheless, efforts to retain personnel are made by providing meals at trainings and meetings, an annual recognition banquet, and an annual family picnic.

Capital costs are largely financed through a special fund that is supported by town revenues. If the fund is not sufficient to cover apparatus replacement costs, general obligation debt financing is the next option. The department needs to replace a fire tender and a fire engine in the next five years, which it hopes to finance through a grant. The local firefighter's association offers additional support through annual fundraisers that support equipment purchases.



Walworth Fire and Rescue

Walworth Fire and Rescue provides fire and EMS services to the village of Walworth. The department is licensed at the EMT Basic level and can flex up to providing ALS services when AEMT-licensed staff are part of an ambulance crew. Fontana EMS provides a paramedic intercept when needed.

The department has four full-time employees and 24 POC personnel. Between two and four personnel are scheduled each shift, although not all are located at the station. Typically, two full-time staff are on location at the station during weekdays and on the weekends, and one full-time responder is at the station complemented by two POC personnel in the evenings and nights. POC members are paid \$50 to be available during a 12-hour shift, in addition to hourly pay when responding to an incident. The department is currently recruiting part-time employees who would be scheduled at the station for a stipend in addition to hourly call pay.

The staffing model described above is the result of variability in funding and operating models over the past several years. In 2021, Walworth Fire and Rescue became a founding member of a shared services agreement with the Sharon and Darien fire and EMS departments. However, its participation ended in February 2024 after voters turned down a referendum that would have allowed funding for the agreement to continue. Since then, the department has successfully passed two referenda to instead provide additional funds to build in-house capacity, though department officials share that it comes at a higher cost to taxpayers compared to the service sharing model with the Sharon and Darien departments.

Major capital purchases are typically financed through general obligation bonds, though occasional estate gifts and annual fundraising also support ambulance and heavy apparatus purchases. Looking forward, a new ambulance is on order and anticipated to arrive in 2025, while a fire engine will need to be replaced in the next five years. Meanwhile, the department has been renovating its station as a stopgap until a point when it can build one that better supports sleeping quarters and other needs of full-time staff.

Walworth Fire and Rescue	
Staffing Model	Career/POC
License Level	EMT Basic (flex to AEMT)
FTEs	4
POC Roster	24
2024 Budget	\$468,200
2024 EMS Calls	383
2024 Fire Calls	108
Total 2024 Call Volume	491

Whitewater Fire Department

The Whitewater Fire Department is a municipal fire/EMS department that serves the city of Whitewater, the towns of Whitewater and Cold Spring, and parts of the towns of Richmond, Lima, and Koshkonong. Its service area spans Walworth, Jefferson, and Rock counties. The department uses a mixed career/POC staffing model and is licensed as a paramedic-level responder.

In 2024, the department had 15.5 full-time staff, including a chief, an assistant chief, a full-time fire inspector, and 12 personnel licensed at the firefighter/EMT or firefighter/paramedic levels.

Whitewater Fire Department	
Staffing Model	Career/POC
License Level	Paramedic
FTEs	15.5
POC Roster	16
2024 Budget	\$1.4 million
2024 EMS Calls	1,556
2024 Fire Calls	409
Total 2024 Call Volume	1,965



Additionally, there is one part-time EMS chief. A roster of 16 POC personnel offer additional support by filling open shifts. The department’s shift staffing is a minimum of four staff per day working 24-hour shifts, in addition to the administrative staff previously listed, who work 40-hour weeks. A chief officer is on call during nights and on weekends. Five personnel are available on weekends through the use of POP staff. Shift pay for POP staff ranges from \$16 to \$22, depending on license levels, and POC staff earn a flat rate of \$30 per hour.

Three positions were recently added using funds from a successful referendum in the spring of 2025. Those positions are anticipated to be filled in early 2026, which will bring total FTEs to 18.5 and increase daytime staffing to five personnel per shift. These positions are not included in the table above, as we sought to use 2024 data for all of our snapshots for the sake of comparison. The additional positions were pursued following recommendations from a staffing analysis by an outside consultant. That study had also recommended upgrading the part-time EMS chief position to full-time, though for now the position will remain part-time.

Looking forward, the only capital cost currently planned is remounting an ambulance, which involves transferring the module used to care for patients to a different vehicle chassis. Additionally, the department is in the process of adding a dorm area with six private rooms and a remodeled bathroom area to its station, which up until 2023 was a volunteer firehouse with no need for sleeping quarters. Recent capital costs have included replacing and outfitting an engine, replacing an ambulance, remounting a separate ambulance, and replacing a ladder truck and outfitting a ladder tower.

Williams Bay Fire Department

The Williams Bay Fire Department is a nonprofit organization that provides fire services to the village of Williams Bay. While the nonprofit owns its land as well as the station and assets held in accounts under its name, the village purchases and owns all other assets such as supplies, equipment, and ambulances and fire apparatus. A process to transition the department to a municipal service is currently underway and may be complete by late 2025.

Williams Bay Fire Department	
Staffing Model	POC
License Level	Paramedic (via the Fontana Fire Dept.)
POC Roster	17
2024 Budget	\$100,000
2024 Fire Call Volume	123

A roster of 17 POC personnel respond to calls and are provided a stipend of \$17.50 per hour for their services. Department officials share that between four and six people respond to a majority of calls and that sustaining services in the future could prove challenging if the roster declines.

Paramedic-level EMS response is provided under contract by the Fontana Fire Department, which assigns staff to the Williams Bay station during the day. Additionally, five of the Williams Bay Fire Department members carry EMS licenses. These staff are cross-credentialed with the Fontana Fire Department and can serve on the Fontana ambulance as part of its crew.

At present, the department is considering how to finance a possible station renovation that would allow for round-the-clock fire and EMS staffing by building a station addition with space for six beds. Such a renovation, if approved, would be debt financed by the village (although the fire department owns the building). The village also finances heavy apparatus replacements as needed.



OUR OBSERVATIONS ON THE STATE OF FIRE AND EMS IN WALWORTH COUNTY

Typically, service sharing analyses conducted by the Wisconsin Policy Forum begin by exploring the current service landscape and operating challenges facing participating departments. Then, in partnership with stakeholders, we develop a range of options to address those challenges ranging from enhanced collaboration to more in-depth service sharing approaches. The goal is to improve service quality and operational efficiency for all departments, and to stabilize service provision for those facing the most significant challenges. While reducing current costs can sometimes be an outcome of certain options, the primary goal is to ensure quality service provision and reduce the cost of needed upgrades through intergovernmental collaboration.

Our analysis of fire and EMS in Walworth County follows this approach, but some unique challenges emerged as we collected data and interviewed chiefs. In particular, we found that several departments already had addressed their foremost staffing and operational challenges in recent years, in some cases by pursuing the types of collaboration we would have recommended. There are also collaborative efforts underway between some departments that are awaiting the results of studies by other entities.

Indeed, we already see a range of approaches being undertaken in Walworth County to address the staffing and financial challenges that have become the norm for fire and EMS agencies that rely on paid-on-call or volunteer staff. Some have shifted from a POC model to a full-time or hybrid staffing model and successfully garnered voter approval to pay for the added cost. Others have entered into contracts with neighboring departments or private providers for EMS while maintaining fire services under a POC or volunteer model. There are also some that have consolidated with a larger department or are sharing share staff via an intergovernmental agreement. Finally, a handful of departments are operating as they have for decades, either through volunteer or POC support for both fire and EMS response, or through a mix of full-time contractor and POC support.

Notably, despite the progress that has been made, there are still several departments whose operations look reasonably sound on paper, but whose service quality and stability appears shakier upon further analysis. We also see sizable capital needs – including both expensive vehicle purchases and station renovations or replacements – that many departments are struggling to finance. These challenges present opportunities for additional collaboration that could benefit all departments, including those that are enjoying relative stability for now.

Below we categorize the Walworth County departments based on our assessment of the severity of the fiscal and operational challenges they face. The stability of their staffing models over the next five to 10 years is the primary factor we considered in categorizing each department, as current staffing levels and future staffing challenges reflect both operational and fiscal capacity and are essential to service quality.⁶ We acknowledge, however, that other factors also impact stability, such

⁶ We note that call response times and minimum staffing expectations as outlined in National Fire Protection Association standards 1710 and 1720 are additional metrics that local officials may turn to as a means of assessing the stability of their departments.



as heavy reliance on mutual aid or tenuous contractual or service sharing relationships with private providers or nearby departments. We speak to those factors in the descriptions below. We emphasize that our categorizations reflect a very high-level assessment of each department's current operational capacity and challenges based on our review of survey responses and our interviews with chiefs, and they are intended only to provide broad insights for municipal and county officials and departments. As time passes, what is written here may become less relevant should operating models, leadership, or other changes take place that resolve any challenges identified.

High Level of Stability

These are departments that have sustained or shifted to full-time or a mix of full-time, part-time, and POC staff. They include the **Town of Delavan Fire Department, Fontana Fire Department, Lake Geneva Fire Department, East Troy Fire and Rescue, Elkhorn Area Fire Department,** and the **Whitewater Fire Department.** Several of these departments financed their enhanced staffing models through successful referenda, though some also benefit from revenue streams from contracts to provide service in neighboring municipalities.

Even with sustainable staffing models in place, there are indicators that the sizes of the Elkhorn and Fontana service areas have reached maximum capacity from a service perspective (at least with existing stations and crews). Specifically, the geographic expanse of those service areas is such that a neighboring department might be able to provide the fastest response to some parts of the area. Additional funding for more staff or stations might address these challenges, and could possibly create opportunities for additional contracting or consolidation and the resources that larger services areas offer.

Medium Level of Stability

Walworth Fire and Rescue has some full-time staff that are supplemented by a dwindling POC roster. Department officials estimate more full-time staff will be needed in the future to sustain fire services. Basic EMS services are provided by the department, which receives supplemental ALS intercept services from the Fontana Fire Department, so that aspect of the department's operations appears to be stable.

The **Town of Lyons Fire Department** has a roster of eight part-time and 35 POC staff. The department can generally support its current call volume as well as respond to mutual aid requests. However, with only six to seven people who respond to a majority of calls, the department may face sizable service challenges in the future should its most active members retire or otherwise leave service.⁷

⁷ The Lake Geneva Fire Department's 2024 annual report indicates that the department provided mutual aid to its neighboring communities 337 times that year. When subtracting mutual aid calls to the Town of Linn Fire Department, which was in the process of consolidating with Lake Geneva, we find that 186 mutual aid calls were provided to neighboring departments. While we do not have a specific breakdown, local officials may find value in further assessing the degree to which the Lyons department requested mutual aid from the Lake Geneva department that year, as it can be an indicator of whether adjustments to the current service model are needed. Such assessment also may be appropriate for Bloomfield Genoa City Fire and Rescue (as discussed below), which is similarly located in close proximity to the Lake Geneva department and would logically turn to it for mutual aid if its current service model is under stress.



The **Sharon** and **Darien** fire departments cooperate through an intergovernmental agreement that has stabilized EMS and fire service provision in the area through shared, full-time personnel. The two departments also cross-credential staff with one another to ensure seamless support for fire and EMS service provision. The two people on each shift form an ambulance crew, and when a call comes in requiring a fire engine and an ambulance, each drives a vehicle and POC personnel meet them on scene to complete the crews. Still, department officials share that while the agreement has been effective in responding to their challenges, its sustainability will depend on the health of the political relationship between the two communities.

The **City of Delavan Fire Department** contracts with a private ambulance service for most advanced life service (ALS) responses but also responds when a second ambulance is needed. Fire services are provided by POC staff with adequate numbers to respond to calls. However, most staff are nearing retirement and department officials express concern about the long-term viability of the EMS contractor due to a competitive labor market. Already, the contractor does not have capacity to respond to simultaneous calls. As a result, the fire department fields roughly 14% of all EMS calls annually and when it cannot respond, neighboring departments have been called upon for mutual aid. The Town of Delavan Fire Department, for example, fielded between 30 and 50 EMS mutual aid calls from the city department in each of the last two years and has indicated that this level of response is higher than mutual aid is designed to address.

Bloomfield Genoa City Fire and Rescue uses a private contractor that provides five full-time staff for fire and EMS coverage. A roster of 22 POC personnel sign up for shifts as available. This department appears to have a stable operating model with between two and four people on a shift, yet some of our interviewees have cited occasions when the department has sent two-person fire crews for fire responses, which is an unadvisable practice. They add that the department often requests mutual aid but does not have the capacity to provide it when asked. These factors – which we cannot independently verify – would be indicators that the current model is stretched too thin and may require additional resources. On the other hand, department officials shared that while they do have a practice of sending two people to a fire scene, they do so to get the heavy apparatus there quickly while POC staff are concurrently traveling to the scene to complete the crew.

Low Level of Stability

A number of smaller departments in Walworth County use a POC or volunteer model which department officials generally acknowledge may become unsustainable over the long term. Planning for the future now is recommended, so that no area finds itself suddenly without service and no plan in place. This kind of circumstance puts undue pressure on neighboring departments, which may be able to provide occasional mutual aid but do not have capacity to become a full replacement service on short notice. **We emphasize that placement in this category does not indicate inadequate or poor service levels. Rather, it is to point out that the operating model does not appear stable when looking to the future.**

The **Williams Bay Fire Department** has a stable EMS situation in light of its contract to receive EMS coverage from the Fontana Fire Department. Its ability to provide fire services long-term is questionable, however, due to a shrinking POC roster.

The **Troy Center Fire Department** receives EMS through a contract with the East Troy Fire Department, which appears to convey stability in that area. The department is in the early stages of

considering how to replace its volunteer model for fire services, however, and is engaged in a service consolidation study with East Troy Fire and Rescue.

The **Lauderdale LaGrange Fire Department** has a relatively stable volunteer structure, with sufficient volunteers available for a fire or EMS response. Even so, the roster has been dwindling and the department anticipates needing to change its operating structure within the next five years to ensure sufficient EMS capacity during weekday hours.

Summary and Additional Observations

It is likely that as the gap grows between departments with sustainable and uncertain operating models, more pressure will be put on larger departments to fill coverage and capacity gaps and more agencies may need to compete for a limited pool of paid staff. However, mutual aid is not designed to support failing departments, as it puts significant strain on the provider department's ability to handle its own calls. Long-range planning is needed to ensure seamless service provision and to prevent both undue burden on neighboring departments and unacceptably lengthy response times.

Our data analysis and interviews with the leader of each Walworth County department also produced some general observations about the state of fire protection services and EMS in the county.

- **Recruitment and retention are challenges that stretch across all departments, from career to volunteer.** Departments compete with other agencies within the county or the southeast Wisconsin region for paramedics in particular. Smaller departments that use POC and volunteer personnel typically see the greatest challenges, as family and other employment commitments increasingly seem to be discouraging younger generations from undertaking the training and devoting the time to such service.
- **Capital needs are a major challenge for several departments.** Not only are most departments facing steep vehicle replacement costs in the near future, but many have exhausted their reserves and sinking funds and therefore lack the financial capacity to undertake these replacements. Also, several departments are planning major station overhauls, station replacements, or new stations without having a plan in place to finance them. As we will discuss below, this situation lends itself to collaborative solutions given that the county already has too many vehicles and stations when considered as a whole.
- **The number of departments could be reduced.** Stations are reasonably positioned across the county given the spread of rural and suburban populated areas, with most stations existing in the southern half of the county. That said, we observe that it may be superfluous for 15 departments to serve a county with a population of 106,000 residents, notwithstanding the higher number of summer tourists.

Additionally, service area borders have been in flux over time as larger departments have taken over service for towns or portions of towns. This may result in some residents of the jurisdictions that are assuming new providers not being served by the closest available responder. Also, as departments that relinquish service see their responsibilities shrink, they may also see revenues shrink or may encounter additional operational challenges.



Some departments also indicated that as their service areas expand, or should they have the option of expanding in the future due to annexation or intergovernmental agreement, they lack the capacity to effectively serve those new areas. For example, the Town of Lyons Fire Department, which according to officials is nearing the maximum volume of calls they can appropriately handle, receives a significant portion of calls from a part of their service area that is closer to the Lake Geneva Fire Department. Interviewees from other larger departments shared that they are at capacity and an additional station in their service areas would improve response times or support the possibility of taking on response areas from departments that may be struggling. However, financial constraints or other factors preclude them from considering additional stations at this time. These factors suggest that a reordering of service areas may be prudent from a service and fiscal standpoint where possible, particularly given the steep cost of building stations and the reality that the county already may have too many fire and EMS stations and providers based on its population and call volumes.

- **Medical direction could be unified.** Currently, medical direction for EMS in Walworth County is fragmented across three providers. This may mean that training, protocols, and operational procedures are not consistent among all of the county's EMS responders, which can hamper mutual aid, discourage the sharing of staff, and create confusion at a scene when paramedics from different departments are operating under different protocols or training. Options to address these challenges include a single medical director for the entire county, or a collaboration across the three current medical directors to create a standard set of protocols and training benchmarks.
- **Dispatch could be consolidated.** Dispatch is provided by the Walworth County Dispatch Center for nearly all agencies across the county. The exceptions are the Lake Geneva and Whitewater fire departments, each of which is dispatched by their local police department communications center. County and local leaders already have identified a full unification of dispatch services countywide as an opportunity for service improvement and have begun exploring options.
- **Response times can vary greatly between departments.** Generally speaking, departments with at least some career staff have faster response times for fire calls (4.6 minutes to 12 minutes as compared to 10 to 12 minutes for departments relying solely on POC or volunteer personnel). Because most POC and volunteer departments contract for EMS, we do not see the wide gap in EMS response times that we have seen in other counties, although the Town of Lyons Fire Department, a POC department that handles its own EMS, reported an average of 12 minutes from dispatch to arrival on scene for EMS calls.
- **Apparatus is plentiful.** Nearly all departments have two or three ambulances, though two departments in more rural areas have only one. Most departments have fire apparatus at levels sufficient to meet their response needs, though few have reserve apparatus. There are seven ladder trucks in the county, with four in the southwest quadrant, one at Elkhorn Area Fire Department, one at East Troy Fire and Rescue, and one at Lake Geneva Fire Department, which would appear to be too many for a county this size. Additionally, it appears that some smaller departments – particularly those partially or fully relying on POC or volunteer personnel – may have more heavy fire apparatus than they could possibly utilize in light of their staff capacity.



- **Service sharing and consolidation are already happening and likely will need to continue.** Recent agreements between the Darien and Sharon departments and Linn and Lake Geneva departments appear to be working well and should serve as a model for others. This is particularly the case because as departments have sought to transform from POC to full-time or hybrid staffing models, they have largely turned to voters to support the change through referenda. While this has been successful in some jurisdictions, it may not be in others, which means that local leaders in Walworth County may have no choice but to consider mergers or contracting options that provide necessary service improvements while also controlling costs. Also, a number of chiefs from POC or volunteer departments shared that they will be retiring in the near future, which would provide another incentive for smaller departments to consider new service arrangements with neighboring jurisdictions.



NEAR-TERM OPTIONS TO MEET EMERGING CHALLENGES

With several of Walworth County's fire and EMS agencies already having resolved immediate operational challenges with new staffing models or contracts with larger agencies, there are arguably fewer incentives for county and municipal leaders to consider countywide or regional collaborative approaches to shore up services for those that are struggling. Yet, our analysis and interviews indicate that such opportunities still exist.

In this section, we identify a range of collaborative options to meet emerging challenges. These include small-scale collaborations, county-supported measures, and consolidation opportunities that potentially could be implemented in a relatively short timeframe. In the following section, we lay out a more comprehensive consolidation option.

Small-Scale Collaboration

A number of small-scale collaboration opportunities that we typically point to in our service sharing studies already are being pursued in Walworth County. For instance, the county is already supporting a study that could lead toward consolidated dispatch services and standardized dispatch protocols, and many departments take part in joint training sessions. Even so, there are a few areas where some enhancements could be made.

Additional **operational service sharing agreements** could be developed between departments, such as agreements to have the closest available responder field a call regardless of jurisdiction, or agreements that stipulate more precisely when and how mutual aid is requested and delivered. The barrier to these options may be financial, as some departments may not wish to lose the revenues to calls given to another department, even if it means a faster response.

Departments could explore **sharing ambulances and fire apparatus**. While we acknowledge that some sharing of backup vehicles is already happening between some departments, it was not evident that all departments have access to a backup ambulance that would be necessary to ensure service provision when the main ambulance is in need of repairs. Additionally, ladder trucks are expensive and rarely used and might be ideal for sharing. Another option that might be considered is one that is currently in place in Milwaukee County, where municipal fire departments have entered into a formal agreement that allows one department to operate a fire engine, ladder truck, ambulance, or certain equipment owned by another department when both are present at the scene of an emergency response or on a short-term basis (up to 30 days) when both parties agree.

Collaborative approaches to vehicle maintenance could be pursued. For example, departments that currently contract out for vehicle repairs and maintenance could seek to combine their contract with one or more neighboring jurisdictions to add volume and potentially reduce contract costs. A more ambitious approach would be to designate a larger department in each quadrant of the county to conduct vehicle maintenance and repairs for all departments in the quadrant on a contract basis.

Most departments engage in at least some **community risk reduction** activities, such as enforcement of fire code regulations through regular inspections of commercial properties as well as fire investigations. Many also provide public education on fire safety and more general health and safety



issues. Teaming up to conduct such activities regionally could be a way for departments to free up some time spent by existing staff and even improve service quality through pooled resources.

Departments could consider **joint purchasing for fire and EMS supplies**. For smaller departments in particular, teaming up with neighboring jurisdictions to procure supplies and equipment could reduce costs, and teaming up on supply ordering and inventory management might save some staff time. Alternatively, they could independently purchase and store medications in collaboration with a local hospital or medical center, as there can be significant cost savings as well as the ability to pick up vials as needed rather than full cases, thereby reducing the risk of expiration for certain supplies that are infrequently used.

Cross-credentialing POC and volunteer staff so they can respond to fire and EMS incidents in multiple jurisdictions is an opportunity to promote more effective mutual aid and create greater opportunities for shared responses and backup response agreements. It also can help pave the way for eventual consolidation of departments. This is already happening in some parts of the county, but additional departments may wish to consider this approach. This approach also would increase the likelihood that a responder is available near an emergency and potentially able to meet an ambulance or fire engine at the scene of a fire or EMS incident, which may be increasingly important as POC rosters continue to decline.

Greater Involvement by County Government

Our analyses in other counties have revealed various roles for county governments to play in supporting EMS and perhaps even fire services. In most cases, county support entails administrative or oversight duties or supplementary operational assistance, as opposed to direct service provision.

There are several areas in which Walworth County government might similarly assume certain roles or responsibilities. We acknowledge that county leaders historically have been reluctant to consider such activity, and their decision to commission this report did not reflect a desire to become further involved in service oversight or provision. Nevertheless, we lay out some options here for roles the county might play in enhancing and improving the coordination of fire services and EMS countywide.

Dispatch improvements, including incorporation of fire and EMS dispatch services currently provided by the Whitewater and Lake Geneva police communication centers into the Walworth County Dispatch Center, could lead to unified dispatch protocols and potentially support faster response times. Indeed, leaders across the county have also recognized this potential benefit and the county is initiating a feasibility study on the topic.

In the near term, having the county work with departments to make adjustments to current dispatch protocols may be beneficial. For example, one chief, in seeking to understand why a report showed 12 seconds⁸ between a dispatch and scene arrival time, learned that the answer included multiple dispatchers being involved in a call and time entries being made after the fact. Chiefs also mentioned during interviews that they prefer to rely on their own call volume tracking because the dispatch center does not always make adjustments to correctly reflect who took a call in instances of automatic aid or mutual aid. Departments also commonly record calls requiring both a fire and an EMS response as two separate instances, for the purposes of differentiating between fire calls from

⁸ A chief reported this experience during an interview and the use of the word “seconds” is not in error.



EMS calls in a calendar year. The county dispatch center, however, records only one call per request for help and does not account for whether both fire and EMS response vehicles were necessary.

A **county-employed EMS Coordinator** could coordinate EMS operations across the county, establish countywide standards and protocols, and engage in planning activities that local departments lack the resources to pursue themselves. Examples include working with medical directors (or a single county-appointed medical director) to create uniform quality of care standards; coordinating and standardizing training countywide (a separate county-employed training coordinator also could be considered); and engaging in countywide data collection and analysis to support data-driven decision making. The coordinator also could play a role in convening regular meetings among the county's fire and EMS providers and supporting countywide service improvements, including those that would result from service sharing efforts or service consolidation. These are important activities that can improve the quality of care that local departments typically do not have capacity to undertake alone. Milwaukee County is an example where a county government plays this type of coordinating and quality control role for municipal EMS providers, although in light of the much larger population and call volumes this coordination requires several county-employed staff.

Financial support for countywide initiatives such as data collection and planning activities or countywide service enhancements is another area where the county could play a meaningful role. One example of an enhancement that could be partly or fully financed by the county would be the implementation of a countywide mobile integrated healthcare program, which would involve using paramedics to proactively reach out to frequent users of EMS to steer them toward primary care or other mechanisms to reduce costly emergency occurrences and promote better health outcomes.⁹

Another example we have witnessed in other counties, such as Waushara County, WI and Butler County, IA, is the use of one or more county-financed paramedic “fly vehicles” strategically located in a small handful of locations in the county. These would be Tahoe-type vehicles driven by a single paramedic who could provide extra assistance at the scene of a serious incident requiring a paramedic level of care, join an ambulance to complete its crew, or serve as a first responder on a scene until an ambulance can arrive.

Finally, chiefs cite the absence of a sufficient pipeline of new, highly trained EMS workers in the county to replace those who are retiring or moving to other regions. They note that EMS classes at area technical colleges are often cancelled and express concern that the training being provided is not adequately preparing students for the positions for which they are applying. This may be another area where the county could play a supportive role by working with educational institutions on countywide EMS training and education standards and student recruitment and retention.

A primary advantage of having the county lead and pay for such countywide initiatives is its greater ability to finance them. The county can levy property taxes under certain conditions for countywide EMS functions that do not count toward its own levy limits, which would not be the case for municipal departments that seek to implement such activities in their own service areas.¹⁰

⁹ Mobile Integrated Healthcare (MIH) – sometimes known as community paramedicine – uses paramedics to proactively identify and seek individuals in need of health care services and has them provide such services or guidance in the individual's home. Often, MIH targets individuals with chronic conditions who are frequent callers to 911. One of its primary goals is to proactively engage with such individuals to address their medical concerns before they need emergency care.

¹⁰ See [Section 66.0602\(3\)\(e\)6](#) of the Wisconsin Statutes, which states that “the amount that a county levies in (each) year for a countywide emergency medical system” is exempt from state-imposed property tax levy limits. The same exemption



Limited Consolidation Options

As mentioned earlier, departmental mergers or service contracts offer an opportunity under the right circumstances to maintain or improve the quality of fire services and EMS at a cost that is considerably more affordable than if individual departments attempted to pursue the same improvements on their own. Cost efficiencies can be gained through reducing the number of stations and command personnel required to serve a geographic area, lowering vehicle needs and replacement costs, and creating a broader base of funding that may reduce or preclude the need to go to referendum to finance higher-quality services. It is also important to note that consolidated fire departments are not subject to state-imposed levy limits,¹¹ which means they may have greater capacity to meet service demands.

Consolidation also can produce benefits on the human resources front. For example, larger departments can offer career ladders that help improve recruitment and retention by offering staff members greater opportunity for advancement. They also can provide opportunities for specialization by allowing capacity for one or more deputy or assistant chiefs who can focus on specific areas such as training, EMS, inspections, etc.

As we have noted throughout this report, several Walworth County departments already have implemented or are in the process of considering consolidation and contracting options. Indeed, a strength of Walworth County fire and EMS agencies has been their ability to adjust staffing models or partner with neighboring departments to maintain service levels as the availability of POC and volunteer personnel has waned over time. The following changes have occurred in recent years or are currently underway:

- The Town of Linn Fire Department has dissolved and the Lake Geneva Fire Department now covers its former service area under a 20-year contract.
- The Troy Center Fire Department only offers fire services, with East Troy Fire and Rescue contracted to cover EMS. A study is now underway to fully merge the two departments.
- The Williams Bay Fire Department offers only fire services and contracts with the Fontana Fire Department for EMS.
- Darien Fire and EMS and Sharon Fire and Rescue share six full-time personnel for fire services and EMS, with each maintaining a POC roster for additional support.
- The Lauderdale-LaGrange Fire Department has separate automatic aid agreements with the Whitewater Fire Department and the Elkhorn Area Fire Department. For each, Lauderdale-LaGrange or its partnering department will be dispatched simultaneously when certain conditions are present, such as visible smoke or flames.¹²

does not exist for municipal governments. There is some ambiguity, however, regarding how a “countywide emergency medical system” is defined. In the case of Milwaukee County, because county government plays an overall administrative and coordination role, its expenditures in fulfilling that function have been deemed to be related to a countywide EMS system and are exempted from levy limits.

¹¹ See Section [66.0602\(3\)\(h\)\(1\)](#) of the Wisconsin State Statutes.

¹² As this report neared publication, some chiefs indicated that most or all departments in the county have automatic aid agreements of this nature in place, which are regularly used to ensure adequate staffing at a fire scene.



We observe that several similar opportunities exist for departments that continue to foresee difficulties in sustaining their service models.

- The **Lauderdale LaGrange** department could consider dissolving and turning to the Whitewater or Elkhorn fire departments to fully assume its service area. Such a move might involve having the larger department staff the existing Lauderdale LaGrange station, or it could involve construction of a station by one of the two larger departments that would support better response times at the far reaches of their current service areas in addition to allowing them to effectively assume the Lauderdale LaGrange service area.
- The **city and town of Delavan** have geographic areas that are extremely conducive to a consolidation of fire services and EMS given that the town of Delavan surrounds the city on three sides and parts of its jurisdiction have been periodically annexed by the city. We acknowledge that the relationship between the two fire departments has not always been smooth, and that the two jurisdictions have previously shown little interest in partnering on a consolidated fire and EMS service. However, there appears to be promise from a service-level and financial perspective, and a recent change in leadership at the city department may create another rationale for considering this option. We would point to a similar scenario in Ozaukee County, where the Mequon and Thiensville fire departments recently merged after years of unwillingness to consider that option despite the fact that Mequon surrounds much of Thiensville (see our 2021 report, [First Response](#)).

Beyond geographical considerations, the majority of the City of Delavan Fire Department's 47 POC employees are nearing retirement and younger responders are not in the pipeline in sufficient numbers to take their place. Further, our interviewees have suggested that the city's ability to rely on its current private EMS contractor in the long term may not be sustainable given the contractor's human resources challenges. We would also note that because there are relatively frequent instances of simultaneous calls, the EMS contractor's single crew was not able to respond to 16% of the service area's total call volume in 2024, leaving the city department and neighboring departments to cover nearly 200 calls in the last year. Meanwhile, the town of Delavan has amply financed its department and its services appear sustainable for the foreseeable future.

The two departments and their respective governments would need to engage in careful conversation about the appropriate staffing model that would be necessary for a single department to serve the combined area. That would likely involve a mix of full-time, part-time, and POC staff, which could add costs on the operating side but likely would produce capital savings given that the combined fleet of fire apparatus across the two jurisdictions may be more extensive than necessary. Additionally, there may be an opportunity to either remove one of the three current stations in the area and operate out of only two, or to keep the town of Delavan's eastern station and build a second station in a location that would be determined based on call volumes and response times for the larger, combined service area.

- Although the **Darien** and **Sharon** fire departments have a mutually beneficial intergovernmental agreement in place, there may be opportunity to create additional efficiencies by taking the agreement a step further and merging the two departments. For example, a combined department would require only one chief and the combined fleets of the two departments could possibly be reduced. A new governance structure would be



required to oversee the department, which could involve either creation of an independent department or a merger of the Sharon department into the Darien department.

- A merger between the **Fontana, Williams Bay, and Walworth** departments may produce efficiencies and service-level improvements. The departments operate within close proximity and have relatively low call volumes, suggesting there is redundancy in administrative oversight and response vehicles for an area that could logically be served by a single department. Whether the appropriate option would be to create an independent department with a joint governance structure or simply to fold the smaller Walworth and Williams Bay departments into the larger Fontana department would depend on the interests of the parties involved.

The Williams Bay Fire Department already contracts with the Fontana Fire Department for EMS. Given that it likely will struggle to maintain its fire services in the future under its existing POC model, a full consolidation with Fontana may be the next logical step. Alternately, the village could choose to contract with the town of Delavan department for fire services, which is another option in close proximity. Either scenario would allow for a reduction to the department's fire apparatus.

Walworth Fire and Rescue has recently resolved its immediate staffing concerns by bringing on four full-time staff. Yet, the village may find it more cost effective to pay for the cost of full-time personnel as part of its contribution to a larger department. Furthermore, contracting or merging could allow it to avoid a costly station renovation or replacement and lower the costs of owning, maintaining, and replacing fire apparatus.

Finally, it should be mentioned that even larger, stable departments may benefit from advanced sharing opportunities that stop short of full consolidation. For instance, the Elkhorn and East Troy fire departments have service areas that span large areas and are adjacent to each other. A new, shared station on the border of the two service areas could reduce response times in parts of each service area. Additionally, by splitting the cost of construction and operations, the two departments could gain those benefits at a much lower cost than if they tried to add a station on their own. Elkhorn and Lake Geneva might benefit from a similar shared station initiative. Even so, there would be numerous cost sharing and administrative questions to navigate in building and operating a shared station that would require dedicated and collaborative effort from all parties.

We recognize that some of these department mergers may already be under consideration and that some have been discussed and previously rejected by elected officials or citizens. We cite them, however, to point out their logic and our sense that each should merit further consideration or reconsideration if the operational and financial challenges we have observed for the departments in question persist.



REGIONAL CONSOLIDATION MODEL

While smaller consolidation scenarios like those discussed in the previous section likely would be more practical in the short term, Walworth County's fire and EMS operations also possess several characteristics that suggest an opportunity to consider larger, regional consolidation options. Those include, most prominently, the existence of a handful of well-staffed departments in geographically disparate areas of the county that are surrounded by smaller departments that are struggling to maintain POC staffing models.

After discussing consolidation possibilities with chiefs and analyzing data, we considered modeling a five-department option for the county. Under such an approach, single departments would serve the county's northeast, northwest, southeast, and southwest quadrants, with a fifth department covering Elkhorn and the central portion of the county.

However, given the political challenges involved with negotiating and implementing such an ambitious model among more than a dozen existing departments and many more jurisdictions, we instead elected to show how a hypothetical single consolidated department might function in one specific region of the county. We selected the **southwest region** in light of the large number of departments operating in the region, which includes the current service areas covered by the Darien, city of Delavan, town of Delavan, Sharon, Fontana, Walworth, and Williams Bay departments.

Our purpose is not to prescribe in detail all facets of a large regional consolidation option, but rather to give a high-level overview of operational and financial implications. With a hypothetical model in hand, current or future decision makers would have important insights into the benefits produced by departmental consolidation as well as some of the challenges, including the need for multiple jurisdictions to negotiate a fire and EMS staffing and operational framework, cost allocation methodology, and governance structure.

Specific benefits that might result from a consolidated regional department include:

- A larger workforce that might aid in recruitment and retention by providing greater opportunities for career advancement and possibly increased compensation.
- Cost efficiencies and service enhancements through consolidation of non-response tasks such as planning, finance, and inspections.
- Unification of training and other specialized functions to produce greater cohesion at emergency scenes.
- Eliminating the need to add full-time staff to departments that lack the call volume to justify the costs of such an approach.
- Opportunity for leaders to strategically deploy staff and resources on a regional level, which can eliminate service redundancies and better address coverage gaps.
- Cost savings through a reduction of redundant apparatus and a possible reduction of station locations.

There might also be potential drawbacks to a regional approach. Those include a partial loss of local control by each community over fire and EMS operational and financial decisions; the possibility that some communities would need to pay more for fire and EMS than they currently do (although service enhancements might justify that cost); the possibility that some communities may benefit more than



others in operational efficiencies or cost savings; and the contentiousness that might arise in the consolidation of staff and command structures.

In the end, the benefits and drawbacks of any consolidation effort in Walworth County also would be impacted greatly by the tenor of negotiations and decisions on cost sharing and governance. It is possible that the results could address the concerns of each locality to create a “win-win” situation, but also possible that such issues could not be resolved, and the effort would never get off the ground. Still, we hope it will be instructive to policymakers and citizens to see what a hypothetical regional department might look like.

Hypothetical regional model design

Our model identifies what we consider to be the appropriate number of stations to serve the southwest region based on call volumes and geography, while also ensuring response times that fall within national standards. Leadership is consolidated under one chief while a small handful of additional command and administrative positions are envisioned to manage the department, which we assume would be a freestanding, independent department similar to consolidated departments in the North Shore of Milwaukee County and western Waukesha County. Our assumed staffing model would be a combined career/POC model. We also adjust the fleet of ambulances and fire apparatus to reflect consolidation.

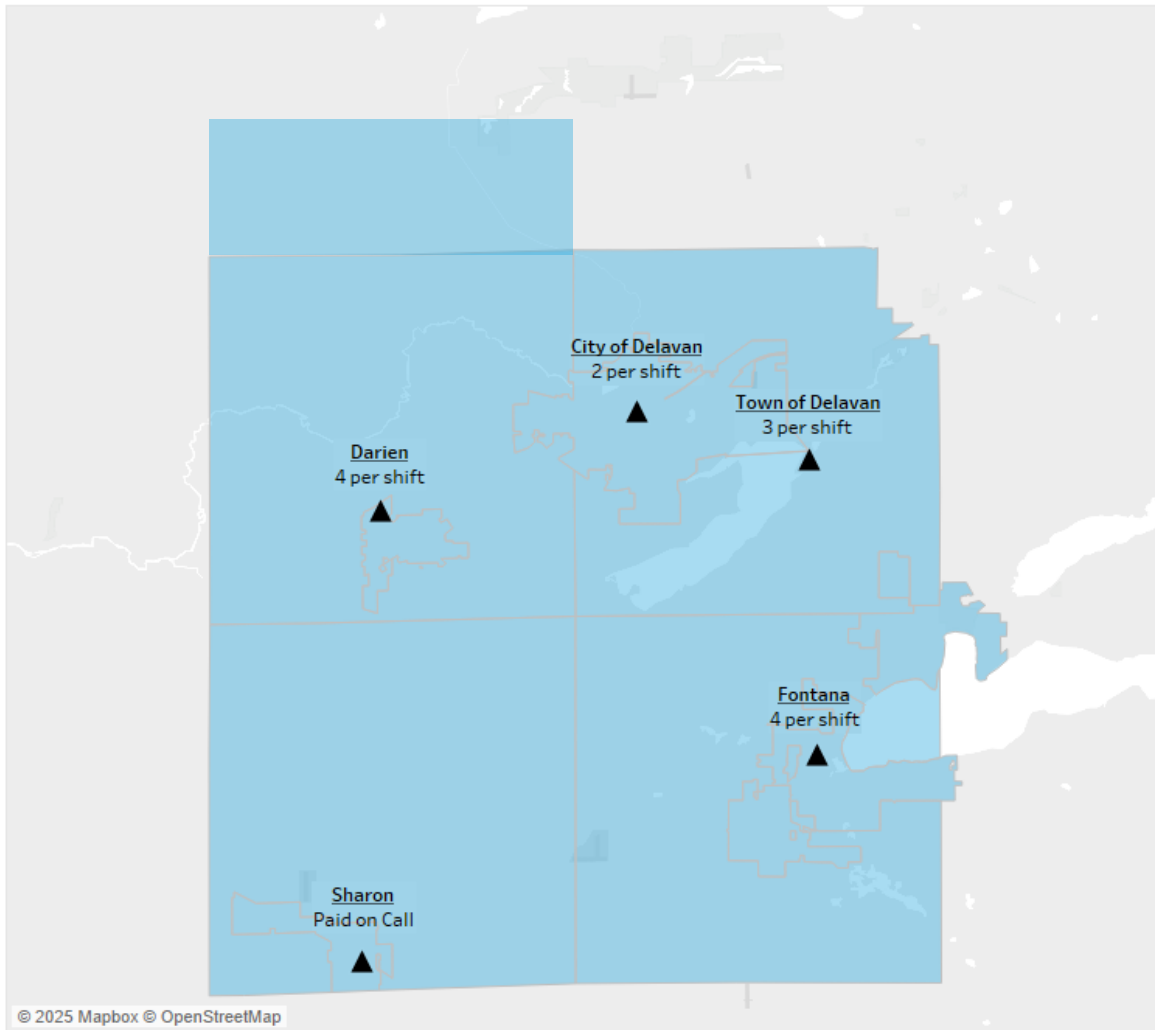
The region is currently served by eight stations located at the village of Darien, the city of Delavan, two in the town of Delavan, and the villages of Williams Bay, Fontana, Walworth, and Sharon. In the consolidated model, the stations at Walworth, Williams Bay, and the southwestern station at the town of Delavan would be closed. The service areas those stations currently cover would be assumed by other nearby stations, which would have full-time staffing; consequently, because responders would not have to be called in, response times likely would improve despite the longer driving distance to some calls.

Also, it should be noted that the Fontana station – which under our model would serve substantial portions of Williams Bay and Walworth – likely would need to be renovated or replaced to accommodate the four full-time responders who would be stationed there on a 24/7 basis. It is our understanding that renovation and replacement discussions among village officials already have been initiated, so we feel comfortable making that assumption.

Map 3 on the following page shows this station scenario as well as suggested shift staffing, which largely mirrors the shift staffing currently in place at existing stations through a mix of career and POP or POC staff. The biggest difference, which will be detailed further, is that these would be primarily full-time staff as opposed to a mix of full-time and POP or POC.



Map 3: Hypothetical Station and Shift Staffing Plan



Shift staffing

Currently, there are 29 full-time staff across the southwest region of Walworth County. The majority are firefighter/EMS staff, though four are paramedics without firefighting credentials. There are also 183 POC personnel across the region who offer a range of skills. Some respond solely to EMS calls, some are solely firefighters, or both.

In the hypothetical model, the full-time staff would remain in place or be relocated to a different station. Additionally, 20 full-time positions would be added to ensure 24/7 shift staffing by full-time personnel (as opposed to POP or POC), and to account for gaps caused by sick leave and vacation. POC staff would continue to be leaned on for support as needed, particularly when a station receives simultaneous calls for service as well as larger fire or medical emergencies. The Sharon station would use solely POC staff given that its current model with an ambulance arriving from Darien is working well and because its geographic location in the far southwest region necessitates having some fire response capacity despite the relatively low call volumes. However, activity levels at that station would not rise to the level of needing full-time staff.

Table 7 details the hypothetical shift staffing by location as well as the number of full-time staff needed to support the staffing structure. While it is possible that fewer full-time staff would be needed for night-time shifts, our model conservatively assumes all shifts would be staffed the same.

As shown, we assume 49 full-time positions would be needed to support 13 responders on duty on a 24/7 basis district-wide – 39 to ensure 13 responders for each of three shifts plus 10 to cover for sick leave, vacations, etc. Any additional coverage would be provided by POP staff. In total, this would require the creation of 20 full-time positions to compliment the 29 already existing in the region, although

it should be noted that seven of those result from replacing the contracted EMS provider at the city of Delavan station with full-time staff. Elimination of the Medix contract would produce an estimated savings of \$211,512 to help offset the additional personnel cost, as detailed below.

Table 7: Hypothetical station staffing

	Staff per Shift	Full-time positions
Darien	4	15
City of Delavan	2	7
Town of Delavan	3	11
Fontana	4	16
Sharon	0 (POC staff only)	0
Total	13	49

Assuming that the consolidated department would be licensed at the paramedic level, at least half of the full-time positions would need to be paramedic/firefighters to guarantee a paramedic available for any EMS call. We also note that the roster of 183 POC personnel currently supporting fire and EMS responses likely would be substantially reduced in the hypothetical district. Some are nearing retirement age and would undoubtedly retire while some might transition into new full-time roles.

Command and administrative staff

The seven departments currently operating in the region each have a fire chief. Most also have one or two assistant chiefs, and the town of Darien has two battalion chiefs as part of its administrative leadership team. These are not salaried positions, though they typically receive a stipend or additional hourly compensation in recognition of their contributions.¹³

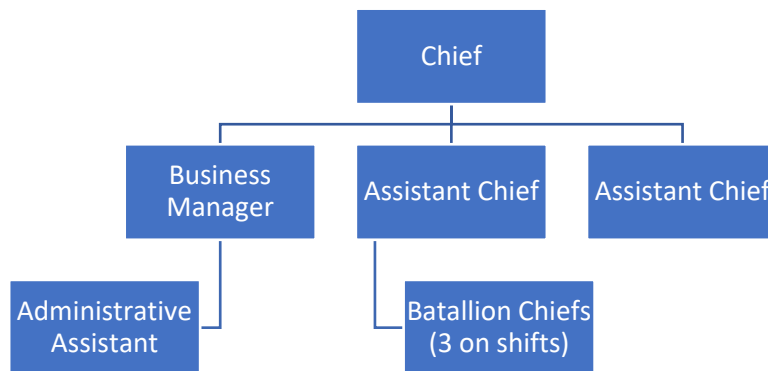
In our hypothetical model, a new team of full-time command and administrative staff would be created. They would include a chief, two assistant chiefs, a business manager (to handle finance and human resources among other duties), three battalion chiefs, and an administrative assistant. When on duty, the assistant chief would be able to serve as command staff at larger fire calls and oversee the battalion chief. In terms of administrative duties, one assistant chief might be assigned to preside over training, fire inspections, and fire prevention, while the other might focus on EMS.

Figure 1 details the hypothetical command and administrative structure. The three battalion chiefs would allow for one to be on duty for each shift on a 24/7 basis; a captain or lieutenant or assistant chief could fill in during vacation and other time off. We do not include captains and lieutenants in the figure, as they would be part of shift staffing.

¹³ We recognize the challenge of asking a chief to give up authority as a result of a consolidation effort. Fortunately, there are retirements on the horizon for some of the chiefs in the area, which can be a helpful factor in eliminating chief positions. The question of whether the remaining chiefs could still be given a role that recognizes their expertise and contributions is one that leaders of the effort will need to consider.



Figure 1: Hypothetical administrative leadership structure



Apparatus

Ambulances and heavy fire apparatus are an area with potential for significant cost savings over time in most consolidation analyses. An ambulance, for example, can cost in excess of \$350,000, and associated equipment like power cots can add more than \$75,000 to the price. A pumper tanker can cost between \$800,000 and \$1 million while a ladder truck can cost upwards of \$2 million. Additional equipment such as hoses, nozzles, tools, and extrication equipment can increase costs further.

In the southwest region of Walworth County in particular, current station proximity is such that a modest reduction in certain apparatus could result in cost savings across the region without risking safety and coverage. **Table 8** on the following page shows the number of ambulances and heavy fire apparatus currently existing across the region and the numbers suggested for our hypothetical department based on call volumes, station location, and staffing. Our model also includes reserve vehicles, which few departments in this study currently have. Minimally, our model shows the possibility of reducing the total fleet in the region by 10 vehicles (from 41 to 31).

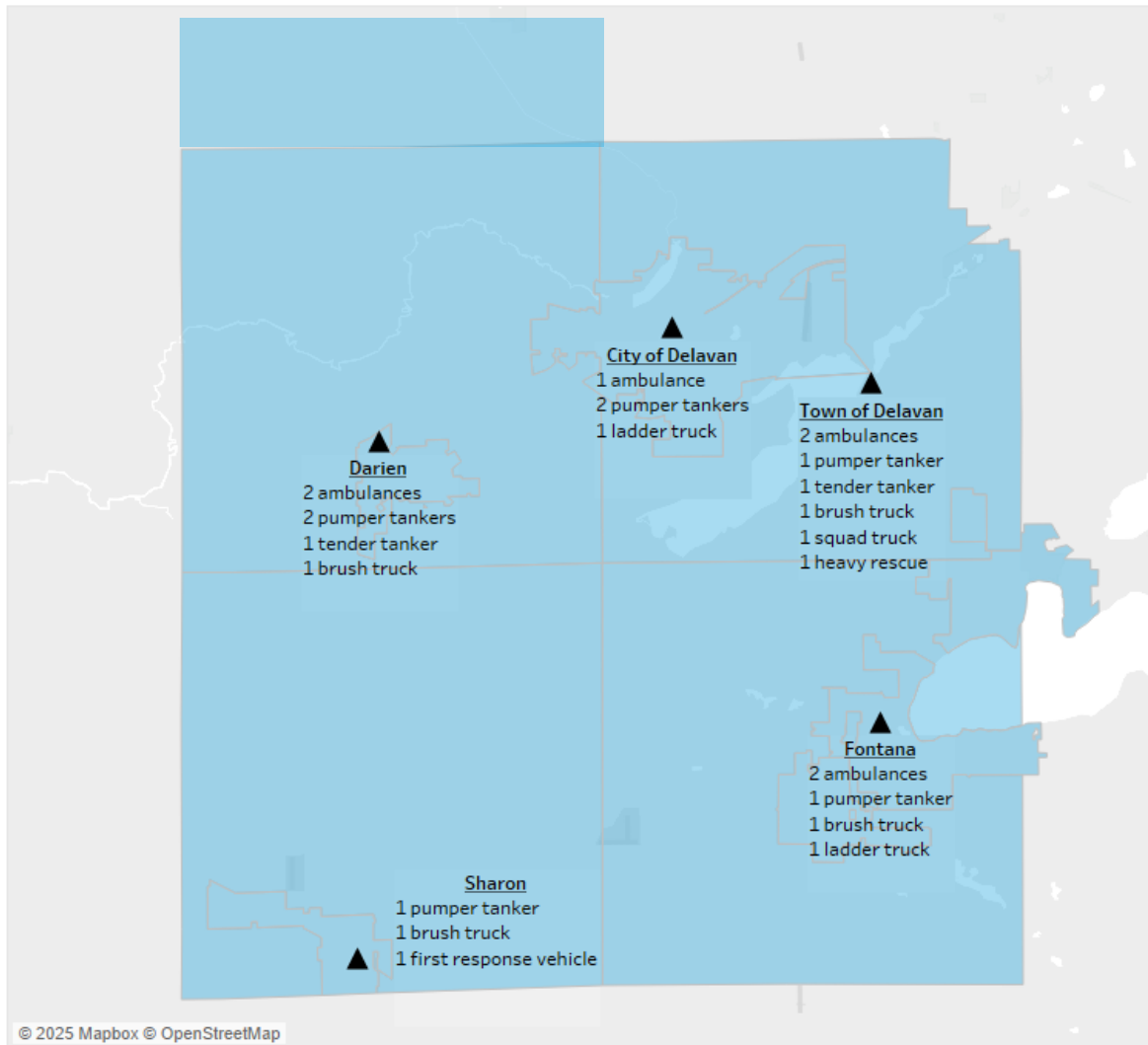
Table 8: Current and consolidated ambulance and heavy fire apparatus

	Current Vehicles	Consolidated Department Active Vehicles	Consolidated Department Reserve Vehicles
Ambulances	10	7	3
Fire pumper tanker	16	7	3
Fire tenders	4	2	1
Aerial ladder trucks	4	2	0
Brush trucks	6	4	1
Heavy rescue squad trucks	1	1	0
Total	41	23	8



Map 4 on the following page shows possible placements for active ambulances and heavy apparatus in the hypothetical department. We do not include reserve vehicles listed in the table. Additionally, although it is not a capital cost at the level of an ambulance or heavy apparatus, the map includes a first response vehicle at the Sharon station to clarify that there would be some first responder equipment and vehicle capacity available in that part of the service area while an ambulance is en route to an emergency scene.

Map 4: Hypothetical Station and Apparatus Plan



The prices for ambulances and fire apparatus are difficult to model with precision due to a number of variables, including whether they are purchased new or used and the specialized features that can be added. Also, prices have escalated in recent months and may continue to do so. For the purposes of this modeling exercise, we estimate costs of \$350,000 for ambulances, \$200,000 for a grass truck (also called a brush truck), \$1 million for a fire pumper tanker, \$550,000 for a fire tender (also called a fire tanker), \$2.25 million for a ladder truck, and \$400,000 for a heavy rescue truck.

If the hypothetical district were to reduce the size of its fleet by the amount shown in the table above, then we estimate there would be a cost savings over time of \$10.2 million, which would be achieved by eliminating the need to replace all of the vehicles currently in existence. Actual savings may be somewhat higher given that our replacement cost estimates may be low compared with future prices. On an annual basis, if we assume the \$10.2 million in savings would be accrued over 10 years (and that the vehicle replacements would be financed with cash as opposed to borrowing), then regional apparatus replacement savings would total roughly \$1.02 million per year for 10 years. Additional savings may be generated by eliminating some command vehicles in the region, the majority of which would no longer be needed under the new administrative structure.¹⁴ There would likely also be some revenues generated if the vehicles being eliminated from the fleet were sold.

Estimated Financial Impacts

Table 9 shows estimated salary and benefits costs associated with the staff roster envisioned in our hypothetical model. Our salary costs are based on average salary costs used in some of our recent consolidation studies in other parts of the state, and we added a fringe benefit percentage of 60% to each full-time, salaried position.

Table 9: Hypothetical cost of full-time district staffing

	Salary	Benefits	FTEs	Hypothetical Cost
Chief	\$130,000	\$78,000	1	\$208,000
Assistant Chief	\$100,000	\$60,000	2	\$320,000
Battalion Chiefs (one per shift)	\$95,000	\$57,000	3	\$456,000
Business Manager	\$85,000	\$51,000	1	\$136,000
Admin Assistant	\$45,000	\$27,000	1	\$72,000
Paramedic/firefighters	\$82,000	\$49,200	25	\$3,280,000
AEMT/firefighters	\$52,000	\$31,200	24	\$1,996,800
Total full time staffing costs	\$589,000	\$353,400	57	\$6,468,800

-Salaries are estimated based on other service sharing studies we have conducted, using competitive wages.

-Benefits are estimated at 60% of salary costs.

The table includes the eight administrative positions previously discussed, as well as 49 full-time responder positions assigned to shifts. Given that 29 full-time staff already exist in the region, this reflects an addition of 20 full-time firefighter/paramedics and firefighter/AEMTs to the region. It should be noted, however, that seven of those 20 positions are needed to provide EMS response out of the city of Delavan station, as the contract with Medix ambulance would be eliminated.

¹⁴ We did not include command vehicle costs in **Table 8** because they tend to be SUVs and are not heavy fire apparatus. Command vehicles typically cost between \$25,000 and \$85,000.



We were unable to access line-item budget details for all departments currently operating in the region. However, using a general formula that assumes 85% of each department's budget is for staffing, we estimate that current staffing costs across the region total about \$5.1 million annually. This includes the estimated \$211,500 cost of the Medix Ambulance contract at the city of Delavan. The \$6.5 million cost of the 57 positions in the table above would produce a regionwide cost increase of approximately \$1.4 million, which would be distributed across the participating jurisdictions. However, the estimated \$1.02 million in annualized cost savings produced by a smaller fleet of fire apparatus would offset the increased personnel costs for at least the first 10 years and result in a total estimated regional cost increase of \$380,000 per year.

Given that some localities already are supporting the cost of full-time staff, while others are not, sharing the cost of 57 full-time positions would require some and likely all jurisdictions to pay more for fire and EMS operations. However, those jurisdictions would benefit from being served by a career department with robust shift staffing at area stations, and some would likely experience increased personnel costs if consolidation does not occur given their need to add full-time staff to their current operating frameworks or consider contractual arrangements with neighboring departments.

Also, whatever cost increases might be experienced on the operating side would likely be at least partially offset by the sharing of capital savings, which may also reflect savings from station closures that are not reflected in our analysis. Ultimately, how much more some or all jurisdictions would have to pay would depend on whatever cost allocation formula the participating municipalities agree upon and the more extensive analysis that would need to take place to determine the precise staffing and other characteristics of a consolidated department.

Governance

In addition to considering the likely public safety benefits that would result from a single regional fire department and potential fiscal impacts, local leaders would need to determine and agree upon a methodology for allocating the costs of the new agency to participating jurisdictions and how it would be governed.

Given the number of jurisdictions involved, a logical governance model would involve the creation of an independent, freestanding department governed by a board of directors or commission that consists of appointees from participating municipalities. Each participating municipality could appoint one member, or the number of members could be proportional based on population or other factors. Alternatively, one local government could be selected to house the department and serve as its fiscal agent, though governance still could involve a separately appointed board or commission.

Cost allocation also would need to be negotiated by participants. Several consolidated departments in Wisconsin – including the North Shore Fire Department and Lake Country Fire and Rescue – use formulas that are based on each jurisdiction's call volume, population, and property values.

Finally, the ownership of existing stations and apparatus would need to be considered. For example, those assets could be turned over to the new district or could remain the property of the current owner. In most cases we have observed, ownership of apparatus and equipment is turned over to the consolidated department while station ownership remains with the existing municipal owner.



CONCLUSION

Our analysis of the current state of fire protection services and EMS in Walworth County reveals both considerable differences in the challenges facing the 15 departments and some important commonalities that may lend themselves to collaborative solutions.

We observe that a handful of departments have already taken successful steps to address their personnel concerns by adding full-time positions and, in some cases, contracting with smaller jurisdictions to generate additional revenues to pay for the cost. Others, however, remain reliant on shrinking POC rosters and still have not determined whether to maintain their independence by adding full-time positions or – in acknowledgement of their low call volumes – seeking to purchase services from a neighboring department. Some also fall in between – while they have made some adjustments to their staffing models, they may need to expand those efforts in the future and may struggle to afford to do so.

In terms of commonalities, we find that almost all departments face considerable apparatus or station repair and replacement needs in the not-too-distant future, and that several currently lack the financial capacity to address those needs. We find, further, that staff recruitment and retention concerns are paramount for all departments, regardless of whether they can offer full-time opportunities.

These findings suggest that building on recent contracting and consolidation activities in the county is essential. Indeed, if starting from scratch to plan fire and EMS service delivery in Walworth County, it would be impossible to justify 15 departments and 18 stations in the context of the county's population and call volumes. The skyrocketing cost of vehicles and building materials on its own would suggest that citizens would benefit from a new paradigm.

Also, the benefits of having fewer departments and stations would not just be financial. Under a scenario in which the county had five or fewer regional departments, the ability to staff those departments on a mostly full-time basis would undoubtedly improve service for most jurisdictions, while also easing responder recruitment and retention challenges and making it easier to implement service upgrades like mobile integrated health care.

We recognize, however, that starting from scratch is not an option, and that there are several justifiable reasons why local leaders may not wish to relinquish their control of fire and EMS to regional departments or shut down departments that have served their communities admirably over many decades. Consequently, gradual movement toward service sharing and consolidation as outlined in this report may represent both the most realistic and effective option.

Overall, while this analysis focuses on broad conceptual options and solutions, we hope that it will point local leaders to several collaborative paths forward that could provide enhanced services to citizens at a cost that would be lower than if each jurisdiction acted on its own.



APPENDIX

Types of EMS Personnel

Emergency Medical Responder (EMR): An individual trained and licensed to provide non-invasive first aid while awaiting an ambulance and higher-level personnel. Interventions are performed with minimal equipment, such as clearing airways manually, CPR, controlling bleeding, taking vital signs, and using portable defibrillator devices.

Emergency Medical Technician-Basic (EMT-B): In addition to all of the skills of an EMR, EMT-Bs are trained and licensed to perform more invasive medical skills such as tracheotomies, tourniquets, and cervical collars, administer oxygen, and provide some medications, including Narcan for opioid overdoses. Interventions are performed with basic equipment typically found on an ambulance.

Advanced Emergency Medical Technician (AEMT): In addition to all of the skills of an EMT-B, an AEMT can start an IV and administer a wider range of medications to support critical and emergent patients. Interventions are performed under medical oversight, using basic and advanced equipment typically found on an ambulance.

Paramedic: In addition to all of the skills of an AEMT, a paramedic is trained and licensed to perform invasive procedures such as using a needle for chest decompression and intubation, and can administer the widest range of medications. Operating under medical oversight, interventions are performed with basic and advanced equipment typically found on an ambulance.

Critical Care Paramedic: An individual trained and licensed to perform all the duties of a paramedic plus the ability to administer more medications than a paramedic during an interfacility transport.

