



03/13/11 Sharing Makes Sense During Tough Times - Allouez Fire Dept. Consolidation

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Editorial from the Green Bay Press Gazette, March 13, 2011:

The village of Allouez appears to be taking a rational, measured approach to the possibility of consolidating or sharing fire services — the kind of move our state could see more of as belt-tightening in Madison trickles down to the local level.

Fire officials on Wednesday held the first of two public meetings to gauge residents' thoughts on the matter, which eventually could involve another community providing some service to Allouez. Interim Fire Chief Neil Cameron, acting with approval from the Village Board, has met with fire officials from Bellevue, De Pere and [Green Bay](#) to discuss the concept's potential.

Working with the area's Ritter Forum, a group that examines local government issues, Allouez has been among the municipalities studying how consolidation or otherwise working together — options include consolidating administrative duties or entering into a contract-for-services approach — might affect everything from cost to services and response time. And while Cameron on Wednesday said the department still is "testing the waters" on the idea, he thinks — and we agree —exploring ways to increase [efficiency](#) makes a good deal of sense.

"How do you contain costs and provide services more efficiently?" is a crucial question in [tough](#) economic times, Cameron told a member of the Green Bay Press-Gazette editorial board. "Is it time for people to revisit whether or not everybody has their own (services), or if we can share some things?"

Allouez is asking this question at a critical time, both generally and because Gov. Scott Walker's biennial budget plan calls for significant cuts in aid to local governments — some \$60 million less to cities and \$36 million less to counties statewide. Yet the village isn't taking anything for granted in terms of constituent support, and local officials have made it clear they do not intend to proceed if [safety](#) or services would be compromised.

A 2009 survey of more than 1,800 Allouez residents showed support for the idea of pursuing shared services such as police, fire and rescue and public works with neighboring municipalities. Nearly 74 percent of respondents agreed they'd support the idea, 16 percent disagreed and about 10 percent were neutral on the concept.

Even so, Allouez is making a prudent move in encouraging residents to speak out on the issue. Opinions can change, and how taxpayers felt about a hypothetical concept when the survey was issued might not mirror what they think about the idea being closer to reality today.

Just how much consolidating or sharing services might save in terms of dollars and cents remains unknown at this stage, Cameron said Wednesday. Officials would like to develop a plan for implementation of any service sharing that might occur in time for next year's budget — much of that work will be done this fall — although the interim chief acknowledged that timeline might be optimistic.

We're pleased Allouez appears to be doing its homework on the potential for various service-sharing avenues, exploring the possibilities while avoiding a rush to act. We'll likely see more exploration of such agreements as Wisconsin's budget challenges persist, and the Allouez model could be a good way to approach those studies.

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