

Aim for more mergers at local level



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State leaders aren't the only ones who need to cooperate more.

Local governments should save money and improve services by sharing more responsibilities across municipal lines.

Five communities in southern Milwaukee County, for example, could save more than \$1 million a year by forming a single fire department, [a new report by the nonprofit Public Policy Forum](#)

[estimates](#). All 10 fire stations in Franklin, Greendale, Greenfield, Hales Corners and Oak Creek would stay open. The savings would come from reduced overtime and seven fewer positions out of 178. The unified department also could operate with 15 fewer emergency vehicles, according to the analysis.

A similar consolidation of fire agencies on the North Shore of Milwaukee County in the mid-1990s has improved response times to emergencies and reduced administrative costs, the study noted.

Elsewhere across Wisconsin, Brown County officials plan to study consolidation of some or all of the police departments in the county, which includes Green Bay. The hope is to save money during tight times while maintaining if not improving services.

Closer to Madison, talk of combining the Columbus and Fall River school districts in Columbia County has surfaced [as the Columbus School Board considers placing a building referendum on fall ballots](#).

"It makes no sense to have two high schools three miles apart," Columbus city council member Dave Bomkamp said recently, according to the Columbus Journal.

Fall River, the smaller community, appears skeptical.

Merging local services and agencies is inherently difficult because of turf wars, differing tax levies and resistance to change. Sometimes consolidation doesn't make sense or work well.

But with more than 3,000 local units of government across Wisconsin, surely more efficiencies

can be found. That's especially true now that local officials have more freedom to redesign the delivery of public services in the absence of strict union contracts.

Local officials have more power — and responsibility — to deliver for taxpayers and the public good.

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