

CONSOLIDATING POLICE AND FIRE OPERATIONS:
COMPARATIVE CASE
STUDY OF KALAMAZOO, MI AND GRAND RAPIDS, MI
by
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Abstract

Administrators who have supported public safety consolidation have consistently made claims regarding cost savings that are primarily theoretical and are not supported by empirical data. Additionally, these administrators have often failed to acknowledge increased expenditures associated with the initial consolidation, environmental factors and political challenges associated with transitioning to the public safety model. The interest in realizing short term or immediate cost savings due to the current financial crisis leads to a polarization of the arguments by both proponents and opponents of public safety departments who tend to use self-serving anecdotes at best or skewed and exaggerated data at worst, to support their positions.

It appears many municipalities that begin considering a transition to a public safety department fail to adequately consider all of the cost factors (training, equipment purchases including additional patrol vehicles, and especially higher employee compensation packages [increased wages, cross training bonuses, post employment benefits, legacy expenditures such as pensions and retiree healthcare]) are often “traded” for timely union acceptance of fully consolidating their police and fire departments (City of Kalamazoo, 1981; Par Group, 2010).