

Ypsilanti Fiscal and Operational Report
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Combine Police and Fire Into a Full Public Safety Model

Abstract

Taking the 25 sworn officers from the police department and combining them with the 14 firefighters, resulting in 39 public safety employees, the majority of whom would be cross trained to perform both police and fire functions would certainly result in the ability to place more officers on the road. The question is, at what cost?

There are both financial and operational costs in moving to the public safety model. We will first consider the financial costs.

Training:

To train an existing police officer to be able to perform fire department functions, the officer would need to complete the fire academy, and to provide the level of service currently provided, become a basic emergency medical technician (BEMT) with certification in Pre-hospital Trauma Life Support (PHTLS).

Locally the fire training could be accomplished through Schoolcraft College or the Oakland Fire Training Institute. The BEMT/PHTLS could be achieved through the Michigan Academy of Emergency Services or Huron Valley Ambulance. The average costs per officer are below:

(Note: Overtime pay was calculated using the known class time at top pay overtime rate. With the current staffing, even if student is not paid overtime to attend class, shift coverage overtime would be needed.)

Existing Police officer training: Tuition, \$2350, required materials, \$640, overtime, 380 hours @ \$45/hr. = \$17,100.

Medical training: Tuition, \$880, required materials, \$189, overtime, 267 hours @ \$45/hr. = \$12,015. Or perform the training in-house if certification can be obtained for a training facility.

***Total fire and medical training expenses per police officer:
\$33,174.***

To train an existing firefighter to become a police officer, the firefighter would need to complete the police academy at either Washtenaw Community College, or Schoolcraft College. The average costs are below:

Tuition: \$4760, required materials: \$1500, overtime, 866 hours @ 28.93/hr. = \$25,053.

Total police training per existing firefighter: \$31,313.

The training costs would be a one-time expense for current employees. The city could attempt to hire fully trained PSOs when hiring new personnel, however this would significantly reduce the potential pool of applicants. Most recruits will have centered

their training and education on one of the two professions. To find fully trained PSOs may be difficult.

Compensation

In addition to the one-time training costs, it is important to consider that typically public safety officers are compensated at a higher rate of pay than that of police officers or firefighters. It is difficult to quantify the increase, as it would be subject to collective bargaining agreements. Negotiating two tier wage and benefit packages would over time reduce these costs, but not until new employees begin to be hired.

Other costs

Other costs that may not have financial implications are in the areas of service delivery. Having cross-trained public safety officers provide police, fire and EMS services necessitate cutting back on some services. *During major fire incidents, there are few, if any officers available to respond to police calls.* During normal operations, the demands weigh heavily on the police side and fire training often goes by the wayside. *It is difficult enough for full-time fire departments to keep up with training requirements, let alone a department that is charged with police responsibilities as well.* (See appendix 1, required fire training.)

That being said, public safety departments throughout the state consistently deliver excellent service to their communities. How is this accomplished? For the most part, the sacrifice is made on the fire end of the equation. This may not be the case in all public safety departments, but it is the case in the majority. The organizations understandably become police oriented. Large fire runs are infrequent, and eventually are always controlled to one extent or another. The day-to-day fire runs such as medical emergencies, automatic fire alarms, smoke/odor investigations, etc. are either handled with existing resources, or contracted out. The demands of the police side understandably overwhelm the demands of the fire side. In addition, public safety directors typically come from a police background. Again, this is understandable, given the service demands. Another factor is there tends to be an imbalance in the educational background of police vs. fire personnel. It is typical for a police officer to have a bachelor's degree, and many have master's degrees, while firefighters may have certifications and perhaps an associate's degree, but bachelor degrees are much less frequently found and master's degrees are rare. *With the service demands being higher on the police side, public safety directors coming typically from police ranks, it is not surprising that public safety resources in time and money are directed more towards law enforcement.*

In looking at public safety departments throughout the state, with very few exceptions, they are found in communities that are smaller in size and have lower crime rates and fire service demands. That is not the case in Ypsilanti. Ypsilanti's downtown area, University, large older housing stock, apartments and dormitories demand an aggressive fire response. Is there a community similar to Ypsilanti that has the same types of hazards that operates on the public safety model? The one that comes to mind is Kalamazoo.

Kalamazoo has a downtown area, large older housing stock, a major university, and in those respects is similar to Ypsilanti. They are larger, with a population of 74,262 as compared to Ypsilanti's 19,435, so one would expect the public safety department to be larger than Ypsilanti's as well, and it certainly is. ***The Kalamazoo Department of Public Safety has over 300 sworn officers, or approximately 40.4 officers per 10,000 population. If Ypsilanti were to combine all police and fire personnel on January 1st 2013, they would have 39, or approximately 20 per 10,000. Is the crime rate higher in Kalamazoo? No.*** According to crime rate statistics, Kalamazoo has 9.75 violent, and 47.63 property crimes per 1000, while Ypsilanti has 11.53 violent and 62.10 property crimes per 1,000.

When considering a move to the public safety model, police departments often see it as a way to shore up core services. It is typically firefighters that raise concerns regarding the impact on services to the fire part of the equation, and while in part there may be a large degree of self-preservation, it is also because firefighters are the ones that understand the need for and delivery of quality fire service and all of its sub-specialties.

Understanding that there are skill sets and knowledge within the fire department that are usually reduced in the public safety model is a major factor in fully comprehending the cost of moving to this model.