



CEDARBURG FIRE DEPARTMENT

ASSESSMENT OF FIRE / EMS NEEDS & FUNDING OPTIONS
FALL 2023

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CEDARBURG FIRE DEPARTMENT OPTIONS ASSESSMENT



Cedarburg Fire Department Overview

The Cedarburg Fire Department (CFD) was founded in 1866 by a group of early Cedarburg residents who served as the first volunteers on the crew.

The Department's approximately 30-square-mile service area includes more than 7,200 residences, three nursing homes, eight senior living facilities and commercial properties valued at more than \$227 million total across both municipalities.

It operates out of two fire stations and serves a population of more than 18,000 residents in both the City of

Cedarburg and the Town of Cedarburg, providing fire suppression, fire inspection, rescue, and emergency medical services, in addition to providing public safety education to the community. As part of its commitment to providing rescue services, the Cedarburg Fire Department supports its own dive team, one of just three in Ozaukee County.

The Department carries only an Advanced Emergency Medical Technician (AEMT) license as a reflection of the average level of emergency medical services CFD responders can provide. Depending on the level of certification a given employee or volunteer has achieved, they may be able to provide the following services:

- **EMT-Bs** (Emergency Medical Technicians-Basic) are qualified to provide basic, non-invasive first aid, including clearing airways, CPR, controlling bleeding and using automated defibrillators, in addition to some invasive medical skills such as airway insertion and management, and the use of tourniquets. They are also able to administer oxygen and can provide medications like Narcan.
- **AEMTs** (Advanced Emergency Medical Technicians) are qualified in all of the skills of EMT-Bs, in addition to starting IVs, manual defibrillation and administering a wider range of medications.
- **Paramedics** are qualified in all of the skills of AEMTs, in addition to intubation and other more invasive procedures. Paramedics are able to administer the widest range of medications.

The Cedarburg Fire Department is funded jointly by the City and Town of Cedarburg, with the City providing 64.53 percent of funds in the budget and the Town providing 35.47 percent of the funds. CFD has never required the use of taxpayer funds to purchase fire apparatus or equipment – all have been donated to CFD by Fireman's Park Inc.

CEDARBURG FIRE DEPARTMENT OPTIONS ASSESSMENT

Staffing Model & Levels

Since its founding, the Cedarburg Fire Department has relied almost exclusively on volunteer staff – rather than part- or full-time employees – to provide fire suppression and emergency medical services.

Sometimes referred to as “paid-on-call” personnel, **volunteer staff do not work at CFD fire stations. They are notified when a call comes in and respond if/when they are able to do so based on other obligations.**

The Cedarburg Fire Department **pays volunteers only for occasions in which they transport a patient via ambulance to a hospital.** Volunteer drivers earn \$18.72 per transport, volunteer EMT-Bs earn \$25.73 per transport, and volunteer AEMTs earn \$31.92 per transport. Transports can take anywhere from 90 to 150 minutes, depending on both the hospital a patient is being transferred to and the time it takes to complete the paperwork necessary for a given situation. **The Department does not currently pay volunteers for the time they spend at training or when they respond to fire suppression calls.**

Active volunteers are assigned to one of three duty groups, which rotate on a 48 hours on / 96 hours off schedule. When on duty, volunteers are expected to respond to night and weekend emergencies or to find another volunteer to cover that need.

The Cedarburg Fire Department includes 64¹ active volunteers, three (3) part-time employees, and six (6) full-time employees.

Part-time employees include:

- (1) Fire chief
- (1) Administrative assistant
- (1) Fire inspector

Full-time employees include:

- (1) Deputy chief / AEMT
- (1) Fire inspector
- (2) Firefighter-AEMTs
- (2) Firefighter-Paramedics

¹ As of last available, complete data - from 2022.

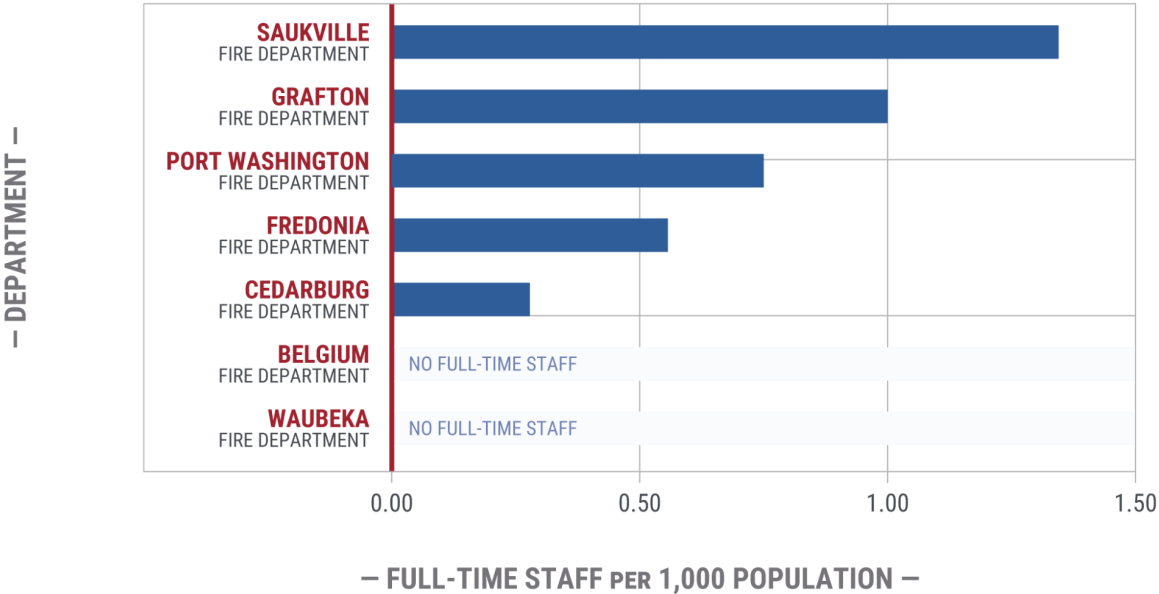
Volunteers are considered "active" if they adhere to the following: Active Firefighter volunteers are required to participate in a minimum of ten (10) monthly fire suppression trainings. Active EMTs are required to participate in a minimum of eight (8) rescue trainings and to submit a monthly transport schedule with a minimum of 24 hours available on each schedule.

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The Department’s Firefighter-Paramedics were hired in 2023 with the help of Ozaukee County American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars, with the understanding that CFD would receive funds from the County in 2023 and 2024. **Without additional funding, the Department will not be able to maintain the employment of these Firefighter-Paramedics.**

Compared to other Ozaukee County fire departments, **this level of full-time staffing is low.** See the following chart, which reflects the most recent² available staffing data for neighboring communities.

**OZAUKEE COUNTY FIRE DEPARTMENT:
FULL-TIME STAFF / 1,000 POPULATION**



With just 0.27 full-time staff per 1,000 residents, **Cedarburg Fire Department staffing levels fall below those of its neighbors.**

² Chart reflects staffing levels from 2019.

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Staffing In-Station Each Day

Each day, Station 1 – located at W61N631 N. Mequon Ave – is **staffed by just 1-2 full-time employees at all times of day and night**. The part-time Fire Chief³ also works in Station 1 and can help respond to calls as available. **In-station staff are supported by volunteers who help respond to calls as they are able, traveling to Station 1 from home, work or other obligations before joining their full-time colleagues in responding to a call.**

Station 2 – located at 1350 Covered Bridge Road – is **not staffed by any full-time employees**. Volunteers who live in the Town of Cedarburg, and thus are closer to Station 2, must travel to the Station before responding to a call.

In addition to other volunteers, four City of Cedarburg and one Town of Cedarburg Department of Public Works employees are able to supplement daytime staffing, However, their availability varies depending on their assigned work duties.

To minimally staff an ambulance, at least two (2) personnel – one certified at an EMT level who is capable of driving and one certified at at least an AEMT level – must be present. In cases when a patient is in need of more serious care, three (3) personnel are required; one who is capable of driving and two who are able to care for the patient. To minimally staff a fire engine, the National Fire Protection Association recommends a minimum of four (4) staff.

Because of the Department's current model of minimal in-station staffing, **full-time staff often cannot respond to calls or staff vehicles alone; they must wait for volunteers to arrive in a station before heading out to the incident site to properly address a call for service.**

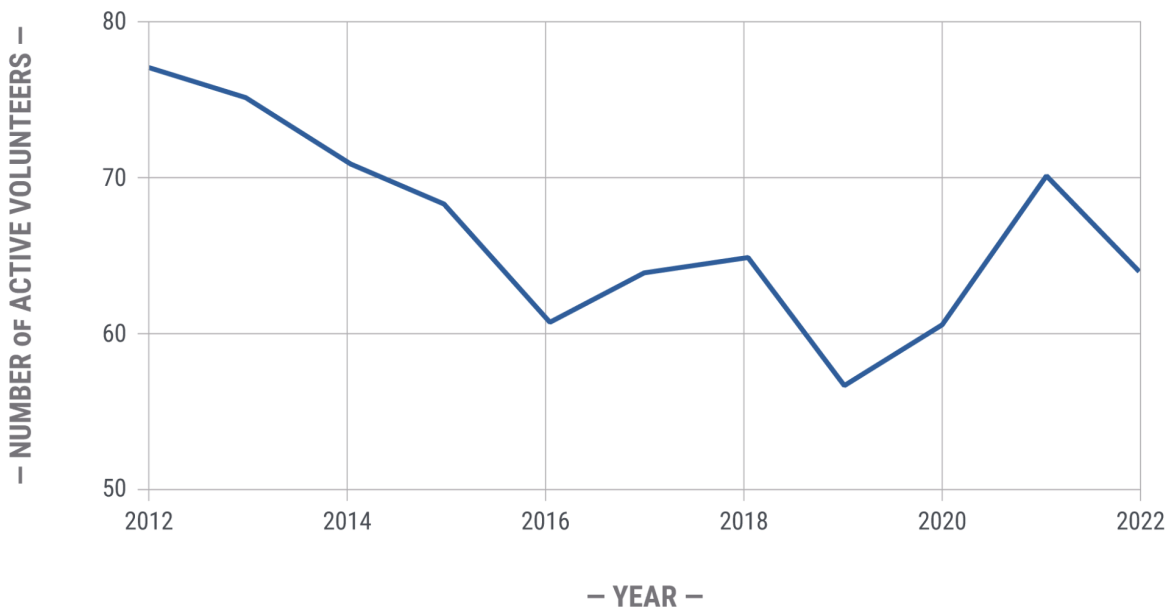
³ While his part-time status means that the Chief can only be compensated for 23 hours of work per week, he often volunteers an additional 20+ hours per week.

CEDARBURG FIRE DEPARTMENT OPTIONS ASSESSMENT

Decline in Volunteer Staff Available

Fire departments across Wisconsin are struggling⁴ to maintain their historically volunteer-staffing models. That statewide trend rings true for the Cedarburg Fire Department, which saw a nearly **17 percent decline in active volunteers** between 2012 - 2022.

CEDARBURG FIRE DEPARTMENT: VOLUNTEER STAFFING OVER TIME



This **decline in volunteerism is a result of several factors**, including:

- ➔ Lengthy, intense and expensive certification processes,
- ➔ Increasing demands on volunteers' personal time,
- ➔ Decreasing ability on the part of full-time employers to allow employees to leave work in order to respond to a call for service,
- ➔ Decreasing desire, culturally, to volunteer in public safety,
- ➔ Increasing costs of living which makes it difficult for volunteers to justify taking time out to respond to a call for service without being compensated adequately, or at all, for doing so.

The challenge in relying so heavily on a shrinking volunteer workforce is not simply that the Department is seeing a decline in the number of active volunteers on the roster – it is also that **the volunteers who are still considered “active” are less available to respond to calls.**

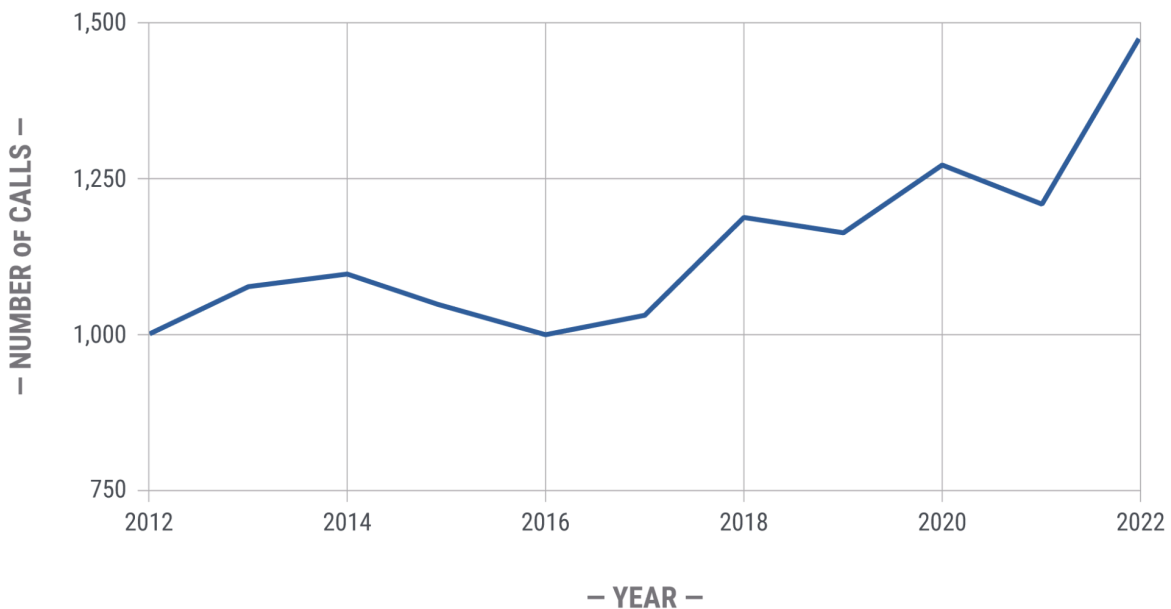
⁴ Source: Wisconsin Policy Forum
<https://wispolicyforum.org/research/first-response-addressing-fire-and-emergency-medical-service-challenges-in-ozaukee-county/>

CEDARBURG FIRE DEPARTMENT OPTIONS ASSESSMENT

Growth in Calls for Service

In 2022, the Department responded to 1,480 calls for service – averaging about four calls per day. These calls included a mix of fire suppression and emergency medical incidents. Up from just 1,007 calls for service in 2012, this represents a nearly **47 percent increase in the number of calls for service** responded to in just a decade.

CEDARBURG FIRE DEPARTMENT: CALLS FOR SERVICE OVER TIME



It is also important to note that these calls for service regularly overlap with each other, meaning that **CFD is called to respond to several incidents at once**, increasing the strain on volunteers and reducing the Department's ability to respond as subsequent calls are received. In 2022, 38 percent of calls came in simultaneously.

In some cases, the Department is wholly unable to respond to a call for service. When that happens, CFD relies on mutual aid from fellow Mutual Aid Box Alarm System (MABAS) member departments around the area – typically the Southern Ozaukee Fire Department or Grafton Fire Department – to provide service. The Cedarburg Fire Department relied on mutual aid 31 times in 2022.

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Lengthy Response Times

In addition to increasing numbers of calls for service, the average response time for members of the Cedarburg Fire Department to provide service at an incident site in the Town of Cedarburg **does not meet the industry standard of 8 minutes or less.**

Lengthy response times impact the quality of outcomes for those who require fire suppression, emergency medical or rescue services from the Cedarburg Fire Department. The quicker responders can arrive, typically the better the outcome.

A study conducted by the Joint Ad-Hoc City and Town of Cedarburg Fire and EMS Committee and affirmed by the subsequent permanent committee found that **the greatest factor impacting response times is the “rollout time:” the time between when a call comes in and when staff leave the fire station on their way to the call.** Rollout times are longer when a volunteer must leave from home, work or other obligations and travel to the fire station to staff an ambulance or fire apparatus to enable a response.

There is cause for cautious optimism: in the last few years, CFD has hired full-time staff who can leave immediately from the station upon receiving a call. The Department has also enabled the use of a “first response vehicle” to head to the scene of an incident before an ambulance or apparatus can be fully staffed. In this way, some initial response is possible and response times have improved.

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The Challenge

Cedarburg Fire Department's ability to provide critical public safety services is strained by an increasing number of calls for service paired with a decreasing number and reducing availability of active volunteers willing and able to respond to those calls in a timely way. The Department's response times, although improved from previous years, are still longer than the industry standard in some areas, impacting the quality of outcomes for residents of the community in need of emergency services.

As a result, the fundamental challenge facing the communities is that **staffing levels are misaligned with the growing demands for high-quality fire and emergency medical services** in the City and Town of Cedarburg. The current volunteer staffing model is becoming unreliable and is in need of support.

Cedarburg Fire Department leaders and the Joint City and Town of Cedarburg Fire and EMS Committee recommend the following changes to the Department:

- ➔ Adjusting from a volunteer to a paid-on-call model,
- ➔ Transitioning the Fire Chief role to a full-time position,
- ➔ Adding three (3) full-time Lieutenant positions,
- ➔ Funding nine (9) full-time Firefighter-Paramedic positions.

Transitioning to a paid-on-call model will mean that, instead of merely donating their time in service of public safety, those who have historically been "volunteers" will receive compensation for responding to calls for service – helping to **retain critical Department members and recruit additional support personnel, without the taxpayer burden of shifting to an entirely full-time staffing model.**

Increasing the number of full-time staff in the Department will **support continuing volunteer/paid-on-call efforts** and will **ensure that adequate staff is available at all times to handle multiple emergencies.**

What's more, the inclusion of additional Firefighter-Paramedics will **increase the level of service the Cedarburg Fire Department will be able to provide** as it will allow the Department to transition from an AEMT level agency to a Paramedic level agency. This translates to an increase in the number of medications and emergency medicine skills available to patients.

While these improvements would be phased in over time, funding the necessary changes the Department will require approximately an additional \$2,015,658 for its annual operating budget. Based on the Department's funding formula, the City's portion of this additional budget would amount to approximately \$1,292,302 and the Town's portion would be approximately \$723,356.

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Potential Solutions

OPTION 1: MAINTAIN THE STATUS QUO

The communities may determine they prefer to take no action to resolve public safety challenges. Over time, if the City and Town of Cedarburg do not identify funding to hire the recommended additional staff and offer compensation to volunteers, the **existing challenges will create more strain as the demand on the Department continues to grow.**

Maintaining the status quo would likely result in continued decreases in volunteerism as aging volunteers retire from service and are not replaced by new volunteers. This situation will **exacerbate lengthy response times and may cause the Department to be unable to respond to calls for service** in more cases.

If the City and Town do not identify new funding sources, the results may be:

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Loss of two full-time Firefighter-Paramedics currently budgeted for with ARPA funds.→ Increased response times, as demand for service continues to increase and CFD is forced to rely more heavily on neighboring departments for assistance.→ Continued impacts on quality and timeliness of service from CFD due to continued low staffing levels.
IMPACT ON MUNICIPAL BUDGETS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Operating costs will remain the same.
IMPACT ON TAXPAYERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Property taxes would remain the same but the quality of EMS and fire suppression services would be lower as the need for services continues to rise.

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OPTION 2: BUDGET CUTS AND SERVICE REDUCTIONS

An alternative would be for the City and Town to **identify other areas of their budgets that could be removed or reduced to free up funding** for additional Cedarburg Fire Department staff and compensation.

In order to fund the City's portion of the required adjustments to the Cedarburg Fire Department, the City would need to make decisions about **a combination of the following cuts from its budget**:

- Pausing forestry operations, including tree pruning, dead tree removal, stump grinding and landscaping;
- Removing overtime pay for DPW staff, impacting snow emergency responses and requiring policy changes related to snow removal;
- Decreasing the amount of street repairs conducted annually; and
- Decreasing police services.

In order to fund the Town's portion of the required adjustments to the Cedarburg Fire Department, the Town would need to **cut its budget in all of the following ways**:

- Eliminating refuse and recycling collection programs – saving \$425,000;
- Eliminating the use of road salt during snow operations – saving \$60,000;
- Cutting highway, roadside and drainage maintenance efforts – saving \$147,000; and
- Cutting equipment maintenance – saving \$96,000.

These cuts would very likely strain the communities and have the following impacts:

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY	→ Reductions in the services and staffing listed above would allow the City and Town to reallocate budget resources to CFD.
IMPACT ON MUNICIPAL BUDGETS	→ Operating costs will remain the same.
IMPACT ON TAXPAYERS	→ Property taxes would remain the same. → The budget cuts in other service areas would negatively impact the quality of other services and resident quality of life.

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OPTION 3: IDENTIFY ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF REVENUE

If the City and Town seek to uphold the standard of services its residents are accustomed to *and* resolve public safety challenges, they will need to **raise additional revenue** in order to increase the Cedarburg Fire Department's budget.

As state law limits the ways municipalities can raise revenue, there are **few options** available: (1) approval by voters through a **referendum to exceed the state-imposed property tax levy limits**; (2) implementation of **municipal wheel taxes** on eligible vehicles; or (3) addition of **utility service charges**. However, in order for the City and Town of Cedarburg to raise additional revenue through a utility service charge, mechanisms must be developed to determine the rate of each residents' use of certain municipal services – because of these challenges, the City and Town do not recommend pursuing this potential option.

Property Tax Levy Increase:

The State of Wisconsin limits the amount of property taxes a municipality can collect each year. In order to exceed that levy limit, the municipality needs voter approval through a community-wide referendum.

That voter approval could be completed through referendums in both the City and Town during the Spring 2024 General Election, which, if approved, would provide additional funding starting with the municipalities' 2025 budgets.

If a referendum is passed in each community, property owners would see an increase in their annual property taxes starting with the bills issued in December 2024. In the City of Cedarburg, this would result in a property tax increase of approximately \$67.82 per \$100,000 in assessed property value (\$264.51 for a median home assessed at \$390,000) and in the Town of Cedarburg an increase of approximately \$57.08 per \$100,000 in assessed property value (\$276.86 for a median home assessed at \$485,000).

Municipal Wheel Tax:

Wisconsin law allows municipalities to collect an annual municipal vehicle registration fee ("wheel tax"). The fee applies to vehicles kept in the municipality or county with automobile registration. Note that these fees would be in addition to the State of Wisconsin's \$85 annual fee to renew automobile plates. Cities and counties throughout Wisconsin use wheel taxes to make up for lost state revenue. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation collects wheel tax fees for the municipality, retains an administrative fee of \$0.17 per vehicle application and sends the rest to the municipality. The wheel tax is collected at the time of first registration and at each registration renewal.

Revenue generated from a wheel tax must be used to fund street repairs and other transportation expenses – however, such revenue can free up funds raised from property taxes to help fund other services.

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There are 10,853 eligible vehicles⁵ (automobiles, autocycles and trucks) registered in the City of Cedarburg. To increase the City's budget enough to fund the City's portion of the required Cedarburg Fire Department budget increase, **the City would need to charge a \$119.24 per year per vehicle wheel tax.**

There are 5,190 eligible vehicles (automobiles, autocycles and trucks) registered in the Town of Cedarburg. To increase the Town's budget enough to fund the Town's portion of the required Cedarburg Fire Department budget increase, **the Town would need to charge a \$139.55 per year per vehicle wheel tax.**

Adjustments to municipal budgets based on additional sources of revenue may have the following impacts:

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SAFETY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ The level of fire and emergency medical services from the Cedarburg Fire Department would increase and become stabilized as additional staff are hired to meet the growing needs of the communities and volunteers are compensated for their support.
IMPACT ON MUNICIPAL BUDGETS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ The City and Town would have the revenue needed to support an appropriate level of fire and emergency medical services.→ Neither the City nor the Town would have to make additional budget cuts to fund the Cedarburg Fire Department.
IMPACT ON TAXPAYERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Property taxes would increase to meet the current and growing need for reliable fire and emergency medical services.<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Owners of a median home in the City of Cedarburg would be asked to pay approximately \$264.51 more in property taxes per year; Owners of a median home in the Town of Cedarburg would be asked to pay approximately \$276.86 more per year.→ Alternatively, vehicle owners in the City would be charged an additional \$119.24 per year per vehicle and vehicle owners in the Town would be charged an additional \$139.55 per year per vehicle.<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Unlike property taxes, the wheel tax is not tax deductible for residents.

⁵ Source: Wisconsin Department of Transportation,
<https://wisconsindot.gov/Documents/dmv/shared/rpt-28-cal-22.pdf>

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OPTION 4: PARTNER WITH NEIGHBORING COMMUNITIES

The Cedarburg Fire Department collaborates with neighboring agencies and departments throughout the State in what is known as a “shared services” or “mutual aid” model. As part of the Mutual Aid Box Alarm System (MABAS), **CFD often supports neighboring agencies during major incidents and relies on the support of neighboring agencies when it is not able to respond** to an emergency alone.

The Department continues to identify ways to improve services in its community and, in addition to the ongoing partnerships through MABAS, **CFD and other departments in Ozaukee County will collaborate on a unified dispatch operation, beginning in 2024.**

In part to explore whether additional consolidation or collaboration were worth pursuing, **Ozaukee County-based fire departments contracted the Wisconsin Policy Forum to conduct a preliminary study of fire and EMS agencies throughout the County and help identify challenges and opportunities** – including considering whether creating a County-wide Fire District or sharing additional services would be beneficial.

That report, First Response, was published in March 2021 and prompted **CFD to discuss potential consolidation with the Mequon and Thiensville Fire Departments - who have since combined to form the Southern Ozaukee Fire Department. CFD also explored potential consolidation with the Grafton, Saukville and Port Washington Fire Departments.** The report indicated that the only potential cost savings to consolidation would be “through more efficient procurement and possible reduction of apparatus and backup apparatus” – which is not relevant to Cedarburg Fire Department, whose apparatus are purchased with donations rather than budgeted for through tax revenue.

After reviewing available studies and exploring all options, **the Joint City and Town of Cedarburg Fire and EMS Committee does not recommend pursuing additional consolidation measures at this time.**

In addition to the lack of cost saving potential from consolidation, this decision takes several other factors into consideration, including:

- Reduction of local control and community oversight;
- Loss of a point of strong community pride going back more than 150 years;
- Potential challenges related to labor contracts and personnel issues; and
- Additional costs associated with consolidation and the requirement to fund capital expenditures, which, for the Cedarburg Fire Department have not been borne previously by taxpayers but by generous community donations.

Conclusion

The Cedarburg Fire Department, in conjunction with joint committees from the City and Town of Cedarburg, has identified a need to improve emergency response reliability by funding additional full-time personnel, supporting volunteers, and raising emergency medical services to a paramedic level.

In the coming weeks and months, the City and Town of Cedarburg – in partnership with local residents – will determine the best path forward for the Department and all those it serves.