Value Task Force  
Fire Department Final Report  

General Summary  
Chief Jim Vest and his team gave a lengthy presentation to the Value Task Force (VTF) at West Bend Fire Department (WBFD) Fire Station #1. In addition to addressing the RFI sections, the presentation and supporting documents highlighted the many moving parts and functions related to fire safety, response, prevention, and emergency medical services (EMS). VTF subcommittee follow-up work dug deeper into the budget numbers, statistics, personnel, peer comparisons, and general department operations.

To effectively manage and present the large amount of information gathered from the department interview, RFI document, and subcommittee research, the findings and recommendations highlighted in this report encompass four main categories: Overtime, EMS services, Full-time/Part-Time staffing, and general operational themes.

Department Background  
WBFD is a very experienced, professional, well-trained, Combination Department that relies on 40 full-time firefighters and paramedics (or EMT-I99s) to provide immediate response to calls for fire and emergency medical response. There are also 13 paid, on-call firefighters who can be called to assist on-duty personnel for confirmed structure fires or emergencies beyond the capabilities of the on-duty personnel. The department is part of Division 111 of the MABAS mutual aid system that covers 90% of Wisconsin’s population. From three stations within the city, WBFD provides coverage to the city of West Bend, and parts of the towns of West Bend and Barton – which are covered through fire protection contracts.

In addition to fire and EMS response, the WBFD provides special teams coverage in conjunction with other fire departments in the county and the Washington County Sheriff’s Department. This includes membership in the County Hazardous Materials Team, and Water Search and Rescue Team. WBFD also provides fire prevention building inspections and public safety education programs to prevent loss from fire and other causes. The members of the WBFD are also very involved in the community – as evidenced by service on several state and local organization boards, the IAFF Union Local 2025 Charitable Fund, and community project assistance.

WBFD’s operating budget for 2011 was approximately $3.9 million. This is approximately 15% impact on the city’s 2011 budget. Approximately 96%, of the department’s budget is dedicated to salary and benefits. The department generated approximately $1.6 million in revenue in 2011, and has averaged roughly $1.3 million in revenue annually (2009-2011). Revenue is primarily generated through ambulance fees and local fire protection services for the towns of Barton and West Bend.
Findings
1. Staffing
   A. 40 total budgeted personnel. The average years-of-experience is 14.5, and the average department salary is $61,702.
   B. Fire Department staffing breakdown:
      Fire Chief 1
      Battalion Chiefs (3)
      Battalion Chief (Admin & Maintenance) 1
      Battalion Chief (EMS & Training) 1
      Battalion Chief (Fire Prevention) 1
      Captains (3)
      Maintenance Captain 1
      Training Captain 1
      Prevention Captain 1
      Lieutenants 9
      Motor Pump Operators 9
      Firefighters 15
      PT Secretary 0.5
   C. 96% of the department's budget is dedicated to salary and benefits.
   D. NFPA 1710 recommends 4 personnel for each engine or truck company. For the WBFD, this would include 1 lieutenant and 3 firefighters at each station, for a daily minimum of 12 represented firefighters and 1 Battalion Chief (13 total daily).
   E. The WBFD (based on 2008 staffing figures given) averaged 10.40 daily staff, for each of the three shifts, at each of the three stations.
   F. Staffing levels for a fire department are disparate across municipalities, as are volunteer departments vs. paid departments.
   G. Chief Vest feels the WBFD is understaffed, based on productivity/efficiency studies, ISO studies, NFPA 1710, and recent firefighter/EMS crew performance studies done by NIST and ICMA.
   H. The department had a succession plan and conducted an appointment process for the outgoing (retired) Fire Prevention Captain to ensure the responsibilities were transitioned to the new designee. The WBFD has a process that includes training, testing, and the ability to act in that position for any promotions or appointees.

2. Stations
   A. There are 3 stations in the city from which the fire department responds.
   B. The fire department is staffed for response with 9 firefighters (3 at each station), and one Battalion Chief at all times.
   C. Any type of service call requires 3 firefighters, who respond in a truck or ambulance.
   D. Per Chief Vest, for EMS calls, a 3-person team is the most efficient. Because of increased numbers of firefighters with Paramedic certification, at least 2 paramedics and 1 Advanced Life Support-certified firefighter is on each ambulance.
   E. The WBFD’s goal is to have two stations fully-staffed and available for service calls at all times.
3. **Cost-Per-Capita**
   A. Compared to like-sized cities in Wisconsin, the WBFD represents a lower cost per capita for fire & EMS services.
   B. Per a comparator chart presented by Chief Vest, West Bend’s cost-per-capita at $104 is the lowest of the cities selected of comparable departments, except for Manitowoc which has a larger Interfacility program. This demonstrates a high level of service at a very reasonable cost.

4. **85/15 Call Ratio**
   A. 85% of the WBFD’s call volume is for EMS/ambulance response.
   B. 15% is for fire response.

5. **Examples of Overtime**
   Specific types of service calls and situations trigger specific types of personnel responses:
   A. **Call Hold-Overs**: Calls that occur close to a shift change. These calls require personnel to stay past the end of their shift.
   B. **Call-Backs**: Hiring back off-duty personnel to maintain staffing for two stations. These are generated when 2 stations are on calls and personnel are called back to keep a 2-station response capability. These are not automatic – the Battalion Chief makes the decision based on the factors of the calls and when a company will be back in service.
   C. **Group Calls**: Calling in all off-duty personnel and paid-on-call (POC) personnel for structural fires or other large-scale emergency events and/or EMS calls.
   D. **Hire-Backs**: In situations where a vacancy exists due to sickness or other unexpected leave.
   E. **Group Calls/All-Calls**: Call-Backs and Group Calls can be combined to form Group Calls/All-Calls.

6. **Group Call Situations**
   A. In 2011, the WBFD averaged 8.56 calls for service per day, and 1.6 group calls per day.
   B. 18% of service calls trigger a Group Call.
   C. Examples of service calls that trigger a Group Call include:
      i. **Two-Station Call**
         Anytime there are two stations responding to a service call, a group call may be triggered.
      ii. **Confirmed Fire**
         All off-duty firefighters and POC firefighters are called in when a fire is confirmed.
      iii. **Town Call** (Towns of Barton & West Bend)
         Because a fire call from the towns requires resources from two stations, and two stations must be staffed at all times, a group call may be triggered.
      iv. **Person Not Breathing Call**
         PNB calls require an ambulance, an intercept car, and a Battalion Chief. These types of calls generate a Group Call.
v. **Traffic Accident**
A traffic accident may require several units, possibly generating a Group Call.

vi. **Multiple Group Calls**
After a first Group Call, if there are not enough personnel to staff the second station, a second Group Call is made.

7. **Overtime**
A. The city spends about $400,000 of overtime on the WBFD per year.
B. Overtime pay can be broadly categorized as:
   i. **Structural** (non-emergency; contractually or legally required). Structural OT accounts for 42-48% of all overtime.
   ii. **Emergency** (generated due to an emergency call response and maintaining a minimum of two-station response). Emergency OT accounts for 58-62% of all overtime.
C. As reported in finding #6, to maintain 2 fully-staffed stations at all times, a group call is triggered. A group call is triggered approximately 1 out of every 5 service calls (18%).
D. In any emergency call-back situation, at least 2 hours of overtime pay are spent: the first hour at double-time, and any additional hours at time-and-one-half (per contract) for every firefighter called back. According to Chief Vest, this is probably similar to other city departments.
E. 6,180 total hours of overtime were logged in 2011.
F. **Emergency** overtime hours in 2011
   i. $220,000 paid for 2,031.15 total Emergency OT hours.
      - Call-Backs (2x rate): 1,470 hours; $174,613.
      - Call Hold-Overs (1.5x rate): 419.15 hours; $45,387.
      - Interfacility Transports (2x rate): 142 hours.
   Structural (non-emergency) overtime hours in 2011:
   ii. $180,000 paid for 4,148.9 total Structural OT hours.
      - Hire-Backs (1.5x rate): 3,664 hours; $160,898.
      - Training, Meetings, Public Education (1.5x rate): 484.9 hours; $19,102.

8. **Inter-facility Transport Program**
A. In 2007, the WBFD began providing interfacility transports, which are patient transports from St. Joseph’s and Aurora (Hartford) Hospitals to Milwaukee hospitals that have advanced care capabilities.
B. Interfacility transports are performed by on-duty personnel. These are not by patient request, but by hospital ER staff who decide that a patient needs advanced services not offered at their facility.
C. 319 Interfacility transports were provided in 2011.
D. In 2011, the WBFD generated $1,138,108 from EMS revenue.
E. Interfacility transports contributed $215,520 to the 2011 EMS revenue. Following is a breakdown of costs and revenue for the Interfacility transport program:
   i. Total Billed: $365,357
   ii. Total Collected: $215,520 (58.7% collection rate)
   iii. Cost to Provide Service: $169,575
   iv. Collections-Costs Balance: $45,945

F. The cost to provide Interfacility Transport service includes the cost for on-duty firefighters (which would be paid if they were on an Interfacility call or not), an estimated OT cost for those calls that generate a Group Call, department and city administration overhead, vehicle use costs, health insurance costs, and retiree health insurance costs.

G. Interfacility transport services influence WBFD’s staffing and response capabilities. This service sends one-third of the city’s response capability outside of the city, and consumes approximately 800 hours of service per year. In 2011 inter-facility transport services generated 68 out of 440 total overlapping calls.

9. EMS/Ambulance Services
   A. 85% of the WBFD’s call volume is dedicated to ambulance services.
   B. 15% of the WBFD’s call volume is dedicated to fire services.
   D. The WBFD averages 7 ambulance calls per day. Every ambulance call that goes out leaves the department with two emergency teams in waiting for a second response.
   E. There are no protocols, and Police Department Dispatch staff is not trained at PSAP (dispatch) to send a private ambulance instead of a city ambulance for EMS calls.
   F. The WBFD frequently stresses the importance of response time. In reference to the response time map, the West side of the city by far has the lightest emergency protection. This was covered in 2003 after the ISO evaluation of the city.
   G. Chief Vest stated that the department is 5 times more likely to have an ambulance call than a fire call, and that ambulance services will only increase in the future.
   H. Intercept calls are requests from a neighboring community for ambulance service with Advanced Life Support capabilities. In these situations, two WBFD firefighters use one support vehicle to drive to the scene and ride with the patient in the ambulance on the scene. The city is reimbursed for these calls.

10. Full-Time/Part-Time
    A. 75% of all fire departments are staffed by volunteers.
    B. NFPA requirements limit the ability to make changes in staffing levels.
    C. Full-Time/Part-Time Model: New Berlin Fire Department
        i. New Berlin (pop. 39,584) operates its fire/EMS department out of 5 stations (3 are staffed), with fewer full-time than part-time employees (27 FT vs 30 PT). All
full and part-time positions are represented by the local Fire Union and are all cross-trained.

ii. The cost of a part-time position is about half of a full-time position, after taxes and benefits.

iii. New Berlin’s fire chief stated that a full-time/part-time structure is more common outside of SE Wisconsin, and that many East Coast cities have full-time departments supplemented by volunteer staff.

iv. Approximately 9 full-time positions are scheduled on-duty daily. Additional positions or vacation/sick days are supplemented by part-time staff.

v. To help prioritize the use of part-time personnel, the department operates on a shift rotation of 48-hours on, and 96 hours off for full-time personnel. Part-time personnel work a 24-hour shift, and they are scheduled every 6th day. The consistency of the part-time staff, along with a permanent schedule allows New Berlin’s chief to maintain a good work environment. The full-time personnel are familiar with the part-time, and have confidence in their abilities.

vi. In call-back situations, they utilize a part-time employee. This dramatically reduces their overtime pay cost; however, call-backs in NB are not as common as in WB, because neighboring departments cover calls when a station is not available.

D. The cities of Franklin, Oak Creek, Greendale, Greenfield, and Hales Corners are participating in a large-scale, multi-city study by the Public Policy Forum that is examining efficiencies, duplication of services, coverage areas, and staffing levels of neighboring metropolitan fire departments. This study is scheduled to conclude in June. All departments are full-time, with the exception of Hales Corners – which is a Combination Department that is staffed to provide almost 24-hour EMS response. Paid-On-Call staff provide fire/other emergency response.

E. The cities of Brookfield and New Berlin are involved in discussions regarding an operational or functional consolidation for an area where better coverage can be provided by the other department. This is modeled on the functional consolidation system between Appleton and Neenah/Menasha.

11. General Findings
   A. Outstanding Service
      i. In addition to being a well-run and well-organized department, the WBFD provides outstanding service to the city, and arguably the best service anywhere compared to similar-sized cities.
      ii. Compared to private services, the WBFD provides two paramedics “in the box.” The department rightfully has a lot of pride in the service they provide, and how they provide it.
      iii. Members of the WBFD are actively involved in the community, including service on several state, and local community organization boards. IAFF’s Local 2025 Charitable Fund has supported several state and local organizations. WBFD members also routinely volunteer to assist community projects (ie: assemble playground equipment, assist with German Fest stage).
iv. The WBFD has received commendation from the regional Flight For Life base for their commitment to the process and standards in patient care and outcomes.

v. Several training and education achievements are evident in the city budget.

B. Revenue

i. The WBFD generated $1,661,709 in revenue in 2011. The average revenue generated in 2009-2011 was $1,337,570.

ii. Department revenue is generated through the following (Amounts reflect 2011 revenues):

- WI VTAE Training: $3,181
- Fire Insurance Tax: $101,691
- False Alarm Assessments: $0
- Fire Department Fees: $18,260
- Ambulance Fees: $1,138,108
- Local Fire Protection Service: $400,469

C. ISO Rating

i. The ISO rating estimates a department’s ability to limit fire damage. It is a rating that applies only to fire damage.

ii. Historically, areas were given lower insurance rates where fire departments demonstrated an ability to limit fire damage.

iii. For the range of services offered by the WBFD, time is a factor and the ISO response guidelines are a good indication of their ability to quickly address emergencies and limit damage.

iv. The ISO rating for WBFD is 4/5 (read as “4 to 5”) on a scale of 1-10. The lower ISO rating number, the better the score.

v. Actions that can lower ISO ratings include more fire stations, fire hydrants, and personnel.

vi. There are two different ISO rating standards – one for the fire department standards, and another for building code standards.

vii. Based on subcommittee research, there is very little difference for residential insurance company rates for ISO numbers rated between 1 and 8. Commercial rates may rely more on the ISO rating.

D. Purchasing

i. The WBFD keeps little inventory other than medication, extra turn-out gear, and brass fittings and hose accessories.

ii. Medication purchases were recently switched to Aurora, resulting in significant overall savings. The switch will help eliminate discarding outdated medications, because they’ll be able to exchange near-expiration-date medications with the hospital pharmacy.

iii. Major purchases such as engines are done by a committee that “specs” a vehicle and then sends it out for bid. Once a vendor is chosen, the committee works closely with them to build the vehicle as ordered.
Recommendations
Based on the information gathered and analyzed by the VTF, there appears to be the potential of substantial savings to the city of West Bend, while maintaining the current high standard of service provided by the WBFD to citizens. Due to the size and scope of the WBFD, and the limitations of the VTF, we recommend the city invest in a consultant to further examine the findings presented in this report, as well as the recommendations that follow.

1. EMS / Inter-Facility Transports
   A. Determine if it is feasible to optimize inter-facility patient transports, including the impact on costs and revenues. We’d recommend Council focus on the potential impact on costs and revenues do ultimately define how the city can most effectively limit costs, maximize revenues, and maintain the current service it provides to its citizens. We’d also suggest consulting with private ambulance companies regarding their capabilities and costs to perform transports.
   B. Determine if the PSAP (dispatch) can call a private ambulance for a second 911 ambulance request, and/or a second inter-facility transfer. This would require some additional training. Also determine the effect on the level of service provided to the second 911 call or Interfacility Transport, and the impact on revenue to the city.
   C. Analyze the cost and effectiveness of triggering call-backs during interfacility transport calls.

2. Operating Costs & Services
   A. Determine the cost and feasibility of always maintaining staffing levels at 9 FTEs, and the associated need for call-backs triggered to maintain that staffing level.
   B. Explore ways to reduce the number of hours to decrease overtime costs.
   C. Define the correlation between different service levels and their respective costs.
   D. Create a list of charges for services, and compare to other communities. Clearly define what the city can charge for services, and what it cannot. (Note: Per Chief Vest, Council was not in favor of past WBFD proposals to charge for some services).
   E. Council should Identify trigger points to begin discussions related to stations and staffing. Examples of these types of discussions could include:
      i. Are we are overstuffed by 1 station? Chief Vest agreed that 2 stations or 6 firefighters are adequate for West Bend at an average of 7 hours per day (sometimes as much as 19 hours/day); however, the city is currently staffed for response with 9 firefighters and 1 Battalion Chief at all times.
      ii. Potential savings, continuation of services, and effect on response time by having two, 6-person-staffed firehouses with backup for every call.
      iii. Determination of if/when the fire department needs to expand, and how the city will execute the expansion – including an analysis of current and potential future stations, locations, continuation of services, effect on response times, and personnel.
      iv. Analysis of the relationship between call volume, call-backs, and overtime. Per Chief Vest, as call volume increases, call-backs and overtime will also increase.

F. Determine the relevance of the ISO rating, and its effect on the WBFD’s range of services offered to limit fire damage, including:
  i. Must the ISO rating be a number lower than 8.
  ii. Any significant differences for insurance rates for ISO numbers from 1 through 8, and if a significant difference justifies adding more capabilities and resources.

G. Continue to work with dealers to purchase pre-owned vehicles. Dealers can conduct broad searches on vehicles based on the specifications requested. (Note: Per Chief Vest, for the recent purchase of a pick-up truck, because of pricing through the state contract, new vehicles were less expensive than used vehicles).

H. Council should challenge departments anytime a change in provision of services is requested. This was most recently demonstrated in the WBFD’s proposal to provide a Technical Rescue Team for the Water and Sewer Utilities and Public Works workers. Ask fundamental questions like:
  i. Why should the WBFD provide the service?
  ii. Can another city agency/group provide the service?
  iii. Should the requested service even be provided by the city?

3. Full-Time/Part-Time Structure.

A. 75% of all fire departments are volunteer staffed. A completely volunteer fire department in West Bend would not be practical or effective. Also, according to Chief Vest, many volunteer departments in Washington County are hiring some full-time staff to cover calls during daytime work hours, and it is getting increasingly difficult to attract and maintain volunteer fire fighters.

B. NFPA recommendations may limit the ability to make significant changes to personnel structure; therefore, we suggest the city review these requirements while considering part-time personnel to supplement full-time personnel.

C. Using the New Berlin FD findings, along with input from the WBFD, Council should formulate a specific strategy that addresses future operations of the WBFD.
  i. The New Berlin FD is only offered as a model, but after review of their EMS services, Council should have adequate information to implement potential changes that could decrease the WBFD’s costs while meeting the EMS and fire protection needs of West Bend’s citizens.
  ii. Because New Berlin is in the Milwaukee suburban area, council should consider its geographic and demographic attributes.