

FAQs – Windsor Heights Fire / EMS Service Delivery (Merger with Clive / Stand Alone)

1) Has the staff / administration made a formal recommendation regarding a merger with Clive creating one entity, or maintaining a stand-alone, in-house department?

Answer: There are many variables to consider in terms of cost, efficiencies, and human resources, etc. As presented during the public informational meeting and outlined in the PowerPoint presentation online, there are virtually equal numbers of opportunities and challenges with both models. Staff is happy with the recent changes and the direction the Fire / EMS Department is heading and would like to continue that positive energy along with the continuously improving morale. Administration is confident that both models can be successful. What is not clear at this point is what model will ultimately cost more in the long run and what, if any, performance improvement measurement will come with that greater cost. Over the short term (1-3 years), the merger model will likely realize a savings between \$30,000 - \$120,000 per year over the status quo with necessary improvements needed to maintain an in-house department.

2) Why are most of the questions and answers centered around a potential merger?

Answer: The majority of questions relating to the merger is due to the fact that it is a greater unknown than making improvements to a status quo, in-house department. As such, the majority of the questions in this FAQ, which are related to those that have been asked both at the public informational meeting and day-to-day inquiries, do revolve around questions related to the merger model.

3) If WHFD merges with Clive and all fire department staff move to the Harbach fire station, how will this impact response times to emergencies in Windsor Heights?

Answer: Currently Clive's average response time to emergencies within their own jurisdiction is approximately 5 ½ minutes. Windsor Heights's current average response time is approximately 5 minutes. Under the new merged model average response times to most areas of Windsor Heights can be expected to be 7 minutes or less. An overall benchmark of 8 minutes or less [90% of the time] has been set as an expectation for emergent responses to reach any portion of the Windsor Heights community.

4) If the Windsor Heights fire station is no longer in use and the staff at the Harbach station are already tied up on a call for service, where will assistance be coming from?

Answer: Most likely the Urbandale fire station at 71st & Douglas or the West Des Moines fire station at 35th & Ashworth, which is part of our current mutual aid response.

5) Right now between Clive and Windsor Heights fire stations there are typically between eight or nine fulltime staff persons working in the two stations. After the merger how many fulltime staff persons will be in the Harbach station to cover both cities?

Answer: Six

6) Right now between Clive and Windsor Heights fire stations the fleet inventory of fire apparatus totals four engines, one ladder truck, and three ambulances. I've heard with the merger that there will be a fleet reduction. What will this look like?

Answer: Under the merged model there will two engines, one ladder truck, and three ambulances will be in service at the Harbach station.

7) In the cost sharing models it looks like merging will save the City of Clive approximately \$565,000 in the first year, then by the 20th year their savings will be more than \$975,000 per year. How much will Windsor Heights save in the merger?

Answer: In the first year of the merger Windsor Heights will pay approximately \$11,000 more than their current model and this does not include potential expenses associated with a one-time penalty for breaking a communications contract with Polk County. By year twenty of the modeling, Windsor Heights would be paying roughly \$7,000 more per year from the existing status quo model.

8) What happens if Clive wants to spend money or make an organizational change that Windsor Heights doesn't agree with?

Answer: The merger will be governed by a 28E agreement that creates a six member board with equal representation from each city (Mayor, city administrator/manager, city council person from each jurisdiction). If consensus can't be reached and there is no clear majority opinion, then current practice/budget will carry forward until alternative solutions can be agreed upon by the Board.

9) What if the merger doesn't work or one city becomes dissatisfied?

Answer: There will be provisions within the 28E that allow for dissolution of the agreement and the dividing up of assets according to funding percentages.

10) When a Windsor Heights resident calls 911 for medical assistance, how does that call get dispatched through the Harbach station?

Answer: 911 calls in Windsor Heights will continue to be received by the Polk County Sheriff's Office dispatch center. The dispatcher will receive the call and transfer it to the WestCom communications center that dispatches for the Harbach station. During the time of transfer the caller will never be placed on hold. The dispatchers will do a live "hand off" of the call. In the meantime Polk County Dispatch will send Windsor Heights Police to the location to render aid.

11) Will the Easter Egg Hunt, Santa Day, and the Pancake Breakfast continue in Windsor Heights if the two departments merge?

Answer: Yes

12) If Windsor Heights merges with Clive will any employees lose their jobs?

Answer: No. Every employee who has a position will retain a similar role in the new entity with credit for years of service.

13) If Windsor Heights chooses not to merge with Clive, what happens next?

Answer: City staff will continue to examine the feasibility of hiring one additional full-time firefighter/EMT-B in the upcoming budget year. If this is not possible then incremental steps will be taken over the course of a few budget years to achieve this. Additional review will also be considered in the future hiring of a deputy chief to be accountable as the system matter expert of day-to-day operations in the fire department.

14) If Windsor Heights doesn't merge and we need to add one additional staff member in the fire department in the next budget year, how much will my property taxes increase?

Answer: A home owner with a valuation of \$200,000 can expect his/her taxes to increase approximately \$32 per year based on necessary staffing and facilities enhancements required.

15) The City of Clive appears to be saving a significant amount of money in each year of the 20-year merger cost modeling. As that city continues to experience growth, it will most likely become necessary to add staff or additional large ticket capital equipment items. Even with the proposal's expense sharing allocations, will Clive's continued growth impact Windsor Heights's overall cost obligations? Also, if Clive continues to experience growth, will the management committee continue to have an equal number of representatives between both cities?

A: The funding formula for operations and capital equipment of the merged fire department is based upon three factors from each city that are weighted equally – population, assessed property valuations, and annual calls for service. As Clive continues to grow their population numbers, annual calls for service will also go up, and property values should increase with new construction. This may mean that Windsor Heights's overall contribution percentage could decrease. However, whether or not paying a lesser share of a greater operational expense (for additional staff members and/or equipment) will cost the City of Windsor Heights more or less than what is currently projected is difficult to predict. Another unknown to the expected growth in Clive is whether or not staff/equipment increases would occur at the Harbach station or another fire station west of I-80/35.

As to the representation of voting members on the Board, the draft 28E states that each community will have equal representation. Windsor Heights officials are not likely to back away from wanting equal representation in this collaboration agreement.