

**Subject:** Burlington and West Burlington Shared Service Project

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**To:** Chad Bird, City Manager, City of Burlington & Gregg Mandsager, City of West Burlington, City Administrator

**From:** School of Planning and Public Affairs, University of Iowa

### **Executive Summary**

City leaders in Burlington and West Burlington have recognized the benefits of working more closely together to provide efficient and quality services to their residents. Additionally, recent changes at the Iowa state legislature have put limits on the revenue generation abilities of municipalities in the State of Iowa via capping property tax increases and consolidation levies. The limits for municipalities have prompted them to think strategically about how to provide services. Master of Public Affairs students at the University of Iowa (“the Project Team”) explored opportunities for the City of Burlington and City of West Burlington to collaborate or share municipal services. Utilizing three different analyses, the group recommends further exploration into incremental collaboration between the two communities to protect community identity and ensure cost efficient provision of services.

### **Methodology**

The Project Team created a decision-making tool that guided the research of opportunities for collaboration. With inspiration from the Wisconsin Policy Forum’s 2020 report, “Greater than the Sum: A Scan of Municipal Service Sharing in Opportunities in Jefferson County”, the team developed a five-point tool that guided the analysis. The tool asked the group to think about current and future *capital* purchases, *staffing* needs, concerns regarding *quality of service*, whether shared service provision is *cost efficient*, and how shared services impact *community identity and political feasibility*. The long-term goal for the decision-making tool is that both Burlington and West Burlington can use it to repeat the process again in the future if they decide to further explore shared service options. To gather the proper information for the decision-making tool, the group conducted a literature and case study review, financial analysis, and interviews with department leaders in both communities.

### **Findings/Analysis**

A comprehensive explanation of the findings and analysis can be found in the full final report. This report highlights three departments that have the strongest opportunities for collaboration. Findings from the financial analysis on expenditures per capita can be found in Figure 1 and staffing in Figure 2.

- Fire – Both fire departments see a need for capital purchases in the coming future. Burlington has a traditional staffing model, whereas West Burlington has a volunteer fire

department and accompanying difficulties that come with that. Literature and case studies demonstrate this service could be a strong candidate for some service sharing. Currently the two communities have auto-aid agreements through 28E agreements, but there is concern about community identity, especially considering West Burlington's pride in their volunteer force.

- Police – Both department leaders cited their biggest capital expense as vehicles and that they have staffing challenges to meet the demand of services. Research and literature point to police services as a good candidate for service sharing. The police department is another example of strong concerns for respecting the individual community identity of each department.
- Public Works – Although the two communities are at a comfortable staffing level, both communities have a need for capital purchases in the future for large vehicles and camera systems for sewer repairs. Neither community has quality of service metrics. The two departments have a strong relationship for collaboration on smaller tasks and sharing equipment.

### **Opportunities for Collaboration**

Below is a list of opportunities the City of Burlington and West Burlington can further explore in each department based on the findings from the literature and case study review, financial analysis and interviews performed by the Project Team.

- Community Development – Both departments should ensure they remain on the same code cycle for the International Building Code and International Fire Code to maintain uniformity.
- Finance – Both departments should continue to keep in communication with each other for information sharing and problem solving from those with institutional knowledge.
- Fire – Both departments should continue to collaborate on training to reduce redundancies related to resources and equipment. They also should consider sharing equipment as the City of Burlington opens a new fire station.
- Parks & Recreation – Both departments should continue sharing equipment and explore opportunities to purchase larger equipment together. The departments should also consider combined staffing models that attract and retain seasonal pool staff.
- Police – Both departments should continue to collaborate on training to reduce redundancies related to resources and equipment. The departments should also further explore sharing an investigator.
- Public Works – Both departments should continue to share equipment when appropriate and explore opportunities to purchase larger equipment together. With bigger equipment purchases, the departments should further explore contracting the use of the equipment.

Along with the above departmental opportunities, the Project Team recommends the following general actions in the future when considering shared services

1. Task Force – It is recommended that Burlington and West Burlington form an oversight board that manages decision-making related to shared services. A governing board like this would be natural progression from the joint Council meetings the two communities have held over the past year to facilitate the discussion of collaboration
2. Quarterly Check-Ins – The Project Team recommends the two cities conduct quarterly check-ins between department leaders from each city. The two department leaders should discuss upcoming purchases, quality of service, and staffing in to assess if collaboration, sharing, or joint purchases should occur.
3. Serve Quality Metrics – From discussions with department leaders, both communities lack proper metrics on performance in each department. To properly administer shared services, West Burlington and Burlington will need metrics to adjudicate whether service provision has changed since sharing.
4. Consultation with the Decision-Making Tool – For shared services to achieve the goals for both communities, routine consultation with the components of the decision-making tool will be necessary.
5. Incremental Steps – To maintain a sense of community identity and individual ownership of services, it is recommended that steps taken towards service sharing are meaningful, but small at the beginning. It will also be important to encourage community involvement and buy-in in the process.
6. Shared Communication Support – As shared services continue to grow, the communities should consider adding a shared communications staff member. The position would help ensure that residents in both Burlington and West Burlington receive clear and consistent information and build trust in the service sharing process.

## Appendix

**Figure 1: 3-Year Average (FY2022 – FY2024) of Per Capita Spending Per Department**

	Burlington	West Burlington	Burlington & West Burlington	Average Peer Communities
<b>Community Development</b>	\$37.66	\$42.50	\$38.23	\$25.43
<b>Fire</b>	\$258.00	\$139.35	\$244.05	\$214.22
<b>Parks &amp; Recreation</b>	\$46.13	\$64.37	\$48.27	\$77.42
<b>Police</b>	\$257.02	\$383.49	\$271.84	\$235.79
<b>Public Works</b>	\$487.71	\$1,351.30	\$589.29	\$321.73


\*Finance not included in the financial analysis

**Figure 2: 3-Year Average (FY2022 – FY2024) of Staffing Per Department and FTEs per 1,000**

Department	Burlington	West Burlington	B/WB Combined	Peer Communities
<b>Community Development</b>	7.90	1.33	9.23	6.30
	0.3 per 1,000	0.4 per 1,000	0.3 per 1,000	0.2 per 1,000
<b>Fire</b>	49.73	26.66	76.40	50.40
	2.1 per 1,000	8.4 per 1,000	2.8 per 1,000	2.1 per 1,000
<b>Parks and Recreation</b>	3.46	9.67*	13.13	16.44
	3.5 per 1,000	3.0 per 1,000*	0.4 per 1,000	0.7 per 1,000
<b>Police</b>	53.30	13.33	66.79	47.35
	2.2 per 1,000	4.1 per 1,000	2.5 per 1,000	2.0 per 1,000
<b>Public Works</b>	26.53	9.67*	36.20	36.90
	1.1 per 1,000	3.0 per 1,000*	1.3 per 1,000	1.5 per 1,000

\*Indicates combined staff lines for Parks and Recreation and Public Works in West Burlington

**Figure 3: Blank Decision-Making Tool**

CRITERIA	BURLINGTON	WEST BURLINGTON	SOURCE
Challenges meeting current staffing needs?			Dept. Head Interviews
Expect retirements to impact staffing in the next 10 years?			
Expect to significantly invest in upgrades or new capital purchases in the near future?			
Opportunities to collaborate outside of merging staffing or services?			
Opportunities to merge staff lines?			
Opportunities to merge services (e.g. 28E agreement)?			
Opportunities to share <i>existing</i> physical or technical resources (e.g. equipment)?			
Opportunities to share costs of <i>future</i> capital equipment purchasing?			
Would detract from the community identity?			
Concerns about the current quality of services to residents?			Literature Review 
Opportunities to improve the quality of service for residents?			
Significant opportunities for cost savings?			Expenditure & Staffing Analysis
Combined staffing higher than the average among peer communities?			
Combined spending per capita higher than the average among peers?			
<u>OPPORTUNITIES</u>			