Shared Municipal Service Opportunities in Burlington and West Burlington

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In partnership with:

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Project Team & Acknowledgements

Project Team

The project team consists of University of Iowa Master of Public Affairs students Vanessa Bittok, Natalie Murphy, and Shuyi Wu. Under the guidance of faculty advisors Phuong Nguyen and Travis Kraus, the team developed a decision-making tool to properly assess current service provision and opportunities for sharing between the communities of Burlington, Iowa, and West Burlington, Iowa.

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Executive Summary

The Shared Services project was a project of the University of Iowa's Initiative for Sustainable Communities (IISC) and the cities of Burlington and West Burlington, Iowa. The project team was comprised of partners from the two communities and Master of Public Affairs students from the UI School of Planning and Public Affairs. The team's mission was to evaluate opportunities for a shared municipal service provision between the two cities. In recent years, new state laws have constrained both cities' ability to raise property taxes – their main source of revenue. A model which shares municipal services may offer solutions to revenue generation and cost savings. This project aims to assess the opportunities for shared services across six municipal departments: community development, finance, fire, parks and recreation, police, and public works.

The team began by conducting a literature review on shared services, identifying best practices in Iowa communities, and lessons learned from municipalities across the nation and abroad. Drawing from this research and incorporating input from the partnering city managers and councils, the team developed an evaluation framework to assess opportunities for service sharing across five key areas: capital, staffing, efficiency, quality of service, and community identity. Using this framework, the team conducted in-depth interviews with department leaders from both Burlington and West Burlington across the six departments to gain a thorough understanding of current operations, departmental priorities, and perceived barriers to collaboration. The Project Team also performed a financial analysis examining the expenditures for each city individually, a hypothetical combined Burlington and West Burlington, and in comparison, three similarly sized Iowa communities.

The final recommendations conclude that while not all services may be feasible to share in their entirety, certain tasks, purchases, or staffing models present opportunities for collaboration. The report also outlines general recommendations such as a governing board, ways to evaluate collaboration, and a new shared communications position for both communities as next steps.

Background and Community Profile

Background and Community Profile

Introduction

In an era of rising costs and constrained municipal budgets, local governments are increasingly exploring shared services as a way to be efficient and maintain financial sustainability. An International County Management Association 2022 survey found that 58% of local governments reported using shared services to address budget limitations, improve service delivery, and reduce duplication[i]. The cities of Burlington and West Burlington are exploring shared service opportunities to improve efficiency, reduce costs, and ensure long-term financial sustainability while ensuring that each city maintains its unique identity. To support this effort, the project team developed a shared service analysis tool.

Community Profile

Burlington and West Burlington, two neighboring cities in Des Moines County, Iowa, share close geographic proximity. Burlington, the larger of the two cities, was established in the early 19th century and served as an important river port and commercial hub along the Mississippi River. It developed as a regional economic center, attracting businesses, government offices, and infrastructure investments. West Burlington, in contrast, emerged later and developed a distinct suburban and industrial identity.
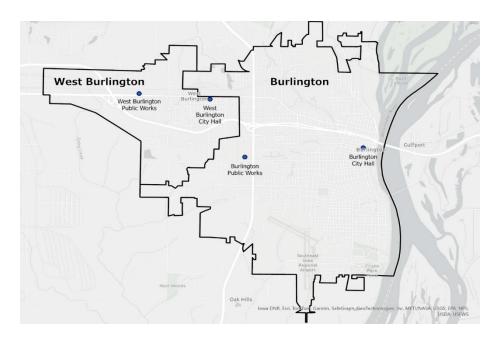
Figure 1: Map of Burlington and West Burlington

While local government officials, economic development organizations, and regional planning agencies, among other stakeholders, often group Burlington and West Burlington together in economic and policy discussions, the two cities have historically functioned as separate entities. Each one has its own distinct governance structure, economic priorities, and social identities.[ii]

West Burlington has experienced small population growth in recent years, in contrast to both Burlington and Des Moines County, which have seen declines. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Burlington's population declined by 6.6% between 2010 and 2020 (from 25,663 to 23,982). In contrast, West Burlington experienced 8.0% growth during the same period, rising from 2,968 to 3,205 residents. Meanwhile, Des Moines County declined by 3.5%, while the state of Iowa grew by 4.7%.

Figure 2: Populations of Burlington and West Burlington

Location	2010 Population	2020 Population	Change (%)
Burlington	25,663	23,982	-6.6%
West Burlington	2,968	3,205	8.0%
Iowa	3,046,355	3,190,427	4.7%

Both Burlington and West Burlington have become more racially diverse over the past years, reflecting broader demographic trends across Iowa. In 2020, Burlington reported approximately 15% of residents identifying as non-white, including Black, Hispanic, and multiracial populations.[iii] West Burlington, while smaller, also saw an increase in diversity, with non-white populations growing to more than 10%.[iv]

Economic disparities also exist between the two communities. Burlington's median household income is $51,628, while West Burlington's is $42,721.[v] Both fall significantly below the state average of $71,433 and the county average of $58,084.[vi] Poverty rates in both cities are above state and county levels, with 17.8% of Burlington residents and 18.7% of West Burlington residents living below the poverty line, compared to 14.6% in Des Moines County and 11.3% statewide.[vii] These figures highlight the need for efficient, equitable public services that can reduce costs while addressing growing community needs.

Figure 3: Household Income and Poverty Rate in Burlington and West Burlington

Location	Median Household Income ($)	Poverty Rate (%)
Burlington	$51, 628	18.0%
West Burlington	$42, 721	19.0%
Iowa	$71, 433	11.0%

Property Tax Reform and Fiscal Considerations

A major challenge in implementing shared services is the disparity in property tax bases between municipalities. Burlington has a median household income of $51,628, whereas West Burlington's median household income is $42,721.[viii] Since municipal services are largely funded through property taxes, these differences can create inequities in cost-sharing arrangements if not structured correctly. Further complicating the issue are state-imposed tax levy limitations that cap the amount of revenue municipalities can generate through property taxes. Along the same lines, in 2023, the Iowa Legislature passed House File 718 (HF718) that limits the growth of property tax revenue by consolidating levy rates and imposing tighter caps, including a 3% limit on annual increases in residential and agricultural property value, regardless of increases in assessed value.[ix] While designed to ease the tax burden on Iowans, HF718 also reduces the flexibility cities have to respond to inflation, infrastructure needs, or population changes. These changes make it difficult for Burlington and West Burlington to generate sufficient revenue to support independent services.

The 28E Agreement: A Legal Framework for Collaboration

Chapter 28E of the Iowa Code allows governmental units to jointly perform any function they are legally authorized to perform individually, including services such as public safety, utilities, and administration.[x] To facilitate shared services, Burlington and West Burlington will likely need to utilize Chapter 28E Agreements, which enables municipalities to share services while maintaining separate governance. This framework has been successfully used by other Iowa cities to coordinate services such as fire departments, water utilities, and regional projects that are discussed later in the case study review.

Balancing Effectiveness and Efficiency: An Equity Framework for Shared Services Between Burlington and West Burlington

As Burlington and West Burlington consider implementing shared services, a crucial theoretical framework to evaluate the initiative is the balance between effectiveness and efficiency. Shared services refer to the collaboration between two or more municipalities to jointly deliver public services – such as fire protection, public works, or administrative functions – without merging government structures.[xi] The goal is to increase service quality and reduce duplication, achieving better results through cooperation.

One such framework is the Four E's: economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity.[xii] Effectiveness focuses on whether the services meet community needs in terms of quality, accessibility, and responsiveness.[xiii] Efficiency emphasizes resource optimization—delivering more or better services using the same or fewer inputs.[xiv] Equity ensures that costs and benefits are distributed fairly across communities, accounting for differing needs and capacities. Economy refers to managing scarce resources to get the desired level of service for the least cost.[xv]

An equity-based approach ensures that shared services are structured to distribute costs, benefits, and responsibilities fairly. Equity differs from equality—instead of treating both cities the same, it acknowledges different needs and contributions to create a fair arrangement. A fair financing model must adjust for population size, tax revenue, and service demand. Burlington's larger population (23,982 compared to 3,197) means it will likely require more resources, but West Burlington should not be financially disadvantaged. For example, if shared services lower costs by $1 million annually, an equity model might allocate: Burlington a 88% of savings ($880,000) and West Burlington 12% of savings ($120,000). This example may oversimplify a true scenario, but conveys the general concept.

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[i] ICMA (2022). Local Government Strategies to Address Budget and Service Challenges: Results from the 2022 Shared Services Survey. *International City/County Management Association (ICMA).*
 Available at: https://icma.org

[ii] Burlington Economic Development. (2022). *Burlington Economic Development Performance and Strategy Update*. https://burlingtonpublishing.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=64644

[iii] U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2016–2020*. https://data.census.gov

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[vi] U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates: Income and Poverty Data*. https://data.census.gov

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[ix] Iowa Legislature. (2023). *House File 718: Property tax reform legislation*. https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislation/BillBook?ga=90&ba=HF718

[x] Iowa Legislature. (2024). *Iowa Code Chapter 28E – Joint Exercise of Governmental Powers*. https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/28E.pdf

[xi] Niehaves, B., & Krause, A. (2010). Shared service strategies in local government–a multiple case study exploration. *Transforming Government: People, Process and Policy, 4*(3), 266-279.

[xii] Norman-Major, K. (2011). Balancing the four E's; or can we achieve equity for social equity in public administration? *Journal of Public Affairs Education, 17*(2), 233–252.

[xiii] Zidane, Y. J. T., & Olsson, N. O. E. (2017). Defining project efficiency, effectiveness and efficacy. *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business, 10*(3), 621–641.

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[xv] Norman-Major, K. (2011). Balancing the four E's; or can we achieve equity for social equity in public administration? *Journal of Public Affairs Education, 17*(2), 233–252.

Methodology

Methodology

Decision-Making Tool

The methodology that influenced the project is in the form of a decision-making tool developed to measure opportunities for shared services between Burlington and West Burlington. The project team took inspiration from the Wisconsin Policy Forum's 2020 report *Greater than the Sum: A Scan of Municipal Service Sharing Opportunities in Jefferson County*. The report considers key municipal services in different towns and unincorporated areas in Jefferson County, Wisconsin.[xvi] The project team developed five key components to guide analysis: capital, staffing, efficiency, quality of services, and community identity/political feasibility. Additionally, there are actionable items for each category to gather the proper information to highlight opportunities. The group narrowed its analysis to six departments that overlap in both cities: community development, finance, fire, parks and recreation, police, and public works. The decision-making tool was applied to all departments studied and is evaluated in the Findings, Analysis, and Application chapters.

The overall goal is for both communities to continue to utilize the decision-making tool when determining whether shared services are the best fit for maintaining quality of service while also lowering operational costs. The five guiding principles of the tool are:

I. **CAPITAL –** Are there opportunities to share existing physical or technical resources? Will there be significant upgrades or new capital purchases soon? Are there opportunities to share costs of future capital equipment purchases?

II. **STAFFING –** Are there challenges meeting current staffing needs? Will retirements impact staffing in the next 10 years? Are there opportunities to merge staff lines?

III. **EFFICIENCY –** Are there opportunities for cost-savings with collaboration or shared services?

IV. **QUALITY OF SERVICE –** Are there community concerns about the current quality of service? Are there opportunities to improve the quality of service for residents?

V. **COMMUNITIY IDENTITY/ POLITICAL FEASIBILITIY** - Is service sharing politically feasible? Would shared services detract from community identity? Does shared services have an equitable impact on community identity?

Financial Analysis

Burlington and West Burlington's combined population is 27,179 people (23,982 and 3,197 respectively) as of the 2023 American Community Survey 5-year estimates. To properly analyze the financial efficiencies of shared services, a financial analysis was performed by gathering the expenditures and staffing for each department in both cities, averaged from fiscal years 2022-2024. Three micropolitan areas in the State of Iowa of similar size to Burlington and West Burlington's combined population were analyzed under the same financial analysis to draw a comparison to a hypothetical situation where Burlington and West Burlington effectively combine the entirety of their services. From that comparison our question is whether the hypothetical combined Burlington and West Burlington spends more per capita per service or has more staff than the comparison cities. A full list of the expenditure line-items used for the expenditure analysis can be found in Item 1 of the Appendix. The three Iowa micropolitan areas are Clinton (24,239)[xvii], Fort Dodge (24,591)[xviii], and Muscatine (23,799)[xix]. Data throughout the analysis was adjusted for inflation to 2024 U.S. dollars for the expenditure analysis. Along with the number of staff per department, the project team also normalized the staffing data via population to discuss how many full-time equivalents there are per 1,000 residents.

Interviews

The project team conducted interviews with the cities' departmental directors in February and March of 2025. A list of all department leaders, the cities they serve, and the departments they work for can be found in Item 2 of the Appendix. Interview questions were developed from the decision-making tool with particular focus on capital purchases, staffing capacity, day-to-day operations, feasibility, and community identity. This took the form of asking questions related to communication, where department leaders see opportunities for service sharing, and concerns for service sharing. Interviews were complemented with department leaders sharing information on the number of employees in each department, expected retirement in the coming years, and upcoming purchases. For all interviews, the same questions were asked with additional questions for public works and community development. The script of interview questions along with other departmental data requests can be found in Item 3 of the Appendix.

Literature Review & Case Study

The project team completed a literature and case study review to evaluate quality of service provision. The geographic scope of the literature review ranges from Iowa communities, municipalities in central New York and Michigan, and to international examples in Germany. The project team reviewed academic papers about municipal shared services and researched Iowa communities that have implemented shared services. After selecting Grimes and Johnston, Iowa as an example, the team interviewed a representative from Grimes.

[xvi] Wisconsin Policy Forum. (2020). *Greater than the sum: A scan of municipal service sharing opportunities in Jefferson County*. Wisconsin Policy Forum. wispolicyforum.org

[xvii] https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/clintoncityiowa/DIS010223

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xix https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/muscatinecityiowa/PST045224

Literature Review & Case Studies

Literature Review & Case Studies

Literature Review

Implementing Shared Services

Before implementing shared services, municipalities must evaluate which services are best suited for collaboration. Research suggests that labor-intensive services, such as law enforcement, are often prioritized over capital-intensive services like road maintenance due to considerations for economies of scale. However, smaller municipalities tend to manage labor-intensive services more effectively, and larger municipalities excel in handling capital-intensive services.[xx]

Holzer and Fry highlight that ideal services for sharing include parks and recreation programs, fire and police services, public works, solid waste management, and finance. Administrative functions within parks and recreation – such as planning, program development, and web-based information services – are often effectively shared. However, manual labor tasks, like maintaining parks facilities, are typically more cost-effective when handled by individual municipalities due to lower reliance on expensive equipment.

Evaluating Feasibility and Measurement

Before entering a shared service agreement, municipalities should conduct performance assessments and feasibility studies to determine efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and service limitations. Assessing municipal service performance is important for identifying inefficiencies and establishing benchmarks for improvement. However, comparing service delivery across municipalities is complex due to variations in service frequency and standards. For example, a town offering twice-weekly trash collection will have a higher per capita cost than one that collects every two weeks. Without additional context, cost differences can be misleading, making transparency essential in performance evaluations.

To develop an effective performance measurement system, municipalities should:
- Define clear performance indicators for each service.
- Collect relevant data and compare results with similar communities.
- Analyze data to identify areas for improvement.

Evaluation Models

The following sections outline different methods to evaluate whether shared service agreements reached their intended goals.

- Setting clear goals and measurable results - Governments should establish specific, measurable goals before launching shared service initiatives. This ensures collaborations meet efficiency, cost-saving, and service-quality expectations.[xxi] This can be accomplished by using Key Performance Indicators (KPI), including response time and financial savings.
- Performance benchmarking - Benchmarking enables local governments to compare shared service outcomes with industry best practices, past performance, or similar municipalities. This can be accomplished by identifying a baseline, comparing with peer communities, and tracking financial savings.
- Pilot projects for evaluation - Pilot projects allow governments to test shared service feasibility and refine agreements before full-scale implementation. This can be accomplished by selecting low-risk projects at the beginning that do not require long-term commitment.
- Types of service model - Shared services in municipalities generally fall into several categories, depending on the level of cooperation and governance over the service. These categories include cooperation, contracting, service transfers, and centralized service administration.

Municipalities must carefully consider the method of service delivery based on their unique circumstances. There is no universal "best way" to provide services, and the method chosen should align with the specific needs and capabilities of the involved municipalities.[xxii]

Evaluating the success of shared service arrangements is critical to ensuring they meet community needs. Metrics such as workload, budget input, service output, and external factors (e.g., weather conditions) can be used to assess the effectiveness of shared services. These data provide insight into how well municipalities deliver services and whether shared services are achieving the intended cost savings and efficiencies.

Efficiency

Researchers McQuestin and Drew question whether sharing municipal service results in efficiency. Although the results of their study did not rule definitively one way or another, the authors found that in certain cases, shared services at the municipal level may not be as efficient as expected. The research took in a large amount of data including, "relative technical efficiency (TE) for the 68 general purpose municipalities that constitute the jurisdiction of South Australia over 5 financial years (p. 270)".[xxiii] The researchers came up with several models and performed regressions on each to review technical efficiency with population among others.

It is important to note the differences that come with research performed on municipal governments in the U.S. and other nations. It is worth considering this research's main takeaways when judging technical efficiency with service sharing. It should be noted that most of the findings were statistically significant, but only marginally. The three main takeaways from the article are stated below.

- In this study, technical efficiency is dependent on population size and other services provided in the municipality.
- Municipal efficiency may be slightly lower when the municipality participates in at least one shared service.
- The type of service that is shared between municipalities matters when measuring technical efficiency.[xxiv]

Preconditions

Another article described shared services as a central tool for cooperation and public sector reform, addressing technical and organizational issues. By analyzing multiple case studies of two shared services projects in Germany, this study identifies the preconditions for the emergence and formation of shared services cooperation. It provides several insights into the application of shared services in the public sector:

- Cost pressure is the main motivation for initiating a shared services program. The public sector seeks to reduce costs while at the same time focusing on other

possible advantages, such as improving service quality. Therefore, there needs to be sufficient financial incentives to implement shared services.[xxv]

- The presence of key players is crucial for the emergence of shared services. These key players usually hold positions in politics and management, and their presence can facilitate the development of shared services.
- Prior partnerships play an important role in the emergence of shared services. Prior collaborative relationships can create the conditions for establishing shared services and, to some extent, determine the structure of shared services.
- Prior collaborative structures are related to the subsequent structure of shared services. Shared services will also be centralized if the previous cooperative structure is centralized.

In considering whether to apply shared services in the public sector, players should consider cost pressures, the presence of key people, and prior collaborative relationships and structures.

Lessons from Erie County

The case of consolidation in Erie County, New York provides several notable takeaways for the Burlington and West Burlington shared services capstone. The following literature review will examine key takeaways from Hardwick's (2006) article, "Priming the pump to promote intermunicipal consolidation."

Hardwick's example varies considerably from Burlington and West Burlington's by the size of the municipalities and which municipalities are considering consolidation.[xxvi] Erie County, New York, is home to one of the state's largest cities -- Buffalo. It should also be noted that with a much larger population comes a larger tax base (e.g., a larger budget for local governments). The problem facing the county was whether to consolidate some services due to much overlap in service provision. After many years of trying to consolidate services, the county was finally able to assemble a committee responsible for reviewing proposals for consolidation by entities throughout the county.[xxvii]

When the county's committee reviewed requests or proposals for consolidation, they worked under a framework that had some subjective sections, but also a section that

asked them to score the following: "cost effectiveness, improvement in services, regional impact, feasibility, and innovation (p. 14)".[xxviii] This framework is of note for a couple different reasons. First, it highlights some of the indicators we have discussed as a group from previous case studies. Secondly, it notes innovation as a factor to consider. Innovation should be a serious consideration for Burlington and West Burlington because if services are to be shared or consolidated, it should be in a way that prepares them for effective service use for many years to come. This type of innovation could occur from working closely with new peers and learning new ways to improve service provision.

Case Studies

Grimes and Johnston 28E Agreement: Fire Department

Grimes and Johnston entered a 28E agreement to enhance coordination and financing for their fire departments with the aim of providing more efficient and effective fire safety services. The agreement, unanimously approved at the Grimes City Council, created a three-year partnership under the name Johnston-Grimes Metropolitan Fire Department, which will operate three fire stations: Station 37 in Grimes, Station 39, and Station 40 on the Grimes-Johnston border.[xxix]

The arrangement allows Station 37 to operate daily from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., while Station 40, staffed jointly by both cities, will provide 24/7 coverage. This setup ensures that Grimes receives immediate fire response during overnight hours without requiring a fully staffed 24-hour fire station. Grimes will also maintain on-call firefighters for additional support.

Despite operating under one name and a unified fire chief, the two departments will retain separate staff for their respective communities. This hybrid model allows for shared resources while preserving local identity and autonomy. The updated agreement provides equal input from both cities on decisions regarding the fire chief, shifting from the previous arrangement where Johnston employed the chief and Grimes contributed 35% of the salary. The governing board now includes two city council members, the mayor, and the city administrator from each city.

Cost-sharing for the services is calculated based on a combination of property valuations, land area served, population, and the number of service calls in the previous fiscal year. Although Grimes currently pays 35% of the costs, the agreement anticipates future adjustments as the city's rapid growth outpaces Johnston, which is more geographically constrained.

City officials praised the agreement for its efficiency and taxpayer savings. It is estimated that Grimes would need to spend an additional $571,806 annually to maintain the same service level independently. Council members expressed optimism about the partnership, calling it a model for future government collaborations that save money and improve services.

Michigan

Several municipalities in Michigan have implemented shared services to streamline operations and reduce costs. For instance, Northville and Plymouth share the services of a building official, allowing both cities to employ an additional official while splitting employment costs nearly equally. This arrangement reduces the financial burden on each city while maintaining service capacity. Similarly, the municipality of Luna Pier contracts with Erie Township for building inspection services. Luna Pier pays 25% of the inspector's salary while Erie Township covers the remainder. This allows Luna Pier to access necessary services without the need for a full-time employee, exemplifying how smaller municipalities can benefit from sharing specialized personnel.[xxx]

Another successful example is the shared animal control service between Hazel Park and Ferndale, MI. Prior to 2006, each city had its own animal control officer, but after one officer retired, both cities determined that their combined population only required one officer. The shared service now splits costs 50/50, cutting their previous expenditures in half. Additionally, the Village of Wolverine Lake and the City of Walled Lake merged their police departments in 2008 through the Walled Lake & Wolverine Lake Police Shared Services Agreement.[xxxi] This merger decreased duplication of services, increased efficiency, enhanced investigative capacity, and provided additional community programs like drug education and awareness. The merger also strengthened the police's presence within the combined communities, demonstrating how shared services can not only reduce costs but also enhance service delivery.

United Kingdom Police Department

The Project Team reviewed two case studies of collaborations in the UK, one between two police services and another a regional cooperation between a police service and two fire and rescue services. These two case studies demonstrate how collaboration across organizational systems can be developed and sustained in policing. These case studies provide public managers with practical experience and insights to help them better assess the results of collaborative efforts.

The two case studies focused on information-sharing and technology application in police cooperation. In implementing their solutions and collaborations, they used the following methods and strategies:

- Establishing a shared IT unit: The two police agencies, in case study 1, collaborated and jointly established an IT unit to reduce costs and provide more powerful and reliable services. They merged two separate IT teams to form a single collaborative unit.
- Realizing financial savings: Collaboration enabled the police agencies to realize financial savings. The collaboration in Case Study 1 saved £1.4 million in the first two years and £400,000 annually.[xxxii] The partnership in Case Study 2 also achieved financial savings.
- Building trust and partnership: The importance of building trust and partnership was highlighted in the case studies. Experience of previous collaborations and building relationships allows for better anticipation of future collaborative efforts and speeds up decision-making.
- Building formal and informal contacts: The importance of building formal and informal contacts was mentioned in the case studies. Through formal meetings and informal gatherings, relationships and connections can be built to facilitate better collaboration and decision-making.

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Findings, Analysis, and Application

Findings, Analysis, and Application

As outlined in the methodology chapter there were three major components to the project team's analysis: department leader interviews, financial analysis, and literature review and case study. The following chapters outline the findings from the interviews and financial analysis by department. Then, the decision-making tool is applied to each department based on the three analyses.

Interview Findings

Cit department heads of Burlington and West Burlington provided input about opportunities for shared services. The interview findings reflect the perceptions and thoughts of the interviewees and are not official positions of either community.

Financial Analysis

The financial analysis presents the average total expenditure per capita for Burlington and West Burlington individually, as well as their combined total expenditures per capita. It also includes the total per capita expenditures of three peer cities, Clinton, Muscatine, and Fort Dodge, averaged over three fiscal years (FY 2022-2024). These peer cities were selected because they are in Iowa and their populations closely reflect the combined population of Burlington and West Burlington. Burlington and West Burlington have a combined population of 27,179, and the mean population of the three peer cities is 24,057.

Additionally, the data outlines the number of FTEs in Burlington and West Burlington, both individually and combined, along with the average FTEs for Clinton, Muscatine, and Fort Dodge over the same three-year period. The staffing data is also normalized for FTE per 1,000 people.

The Finance Department is not included in the financial analysis because, based on information gathered during interviews, it was determined that this service will only be considered for small scale sharing between Burlington and West Burlington.

It is important to note that the purpose of combining the budgets of Burlington and West Burlington is solely to determine the amount being spent per capita in comparison to similar sized communities. This analysis does not suggest or recommend that the two cities should formally combine their budgets.

The following tables show an overview of the financial analysis which will be detailed in the subsequent sections by department. A full breakdown of each individual community's per capita expenditure per department and staffing analysis can be found in Items 4 and 5 in the Appendix.

Figure 4: Per Capita Spending Comparison Between Burlington and West Burlington Combined and Peer Communities Adjusted for Inflation

Department	B/WB Combined	Peer Communities	Difference Between B/WB and Peer Communities
Community Development	$38.74	$25.72	$13.02 higher in B/WB
Finance	Undetermined	Undetermined	Undetermined
Fire	$247.51	$217.12	$30.39 higher in B/WB
Parks and Recreation	$48.92	$78.48	$29.56 less in B/WB
Police	$275.69	$239.00	$36.70 higher in B/WB
Public Works	$603.97	$326.17	$277.80 higher in B/WB

Figure 5: Staffing Comparison Between Burlington and West Burlington Combined and Peer Communities

Department	B/WB Combined	Peer Communities	Difference Between B/WB and Peer Communities
Community Development	9.2	6.3	B/WB has 0.1/1,000 more FTE than peer communities **(equivalent to 2.1 more staff)**
	0.3 per 1,000	0.2 per 1,000	
Finance	Undetermined	Undetermined	Undetermined
Fire	76.4	50.4	B/WB has 0.7/1,000 more FTE than peer communities **(equivalent to 19.0 more staff)**
	2.8 per 1,000	2.1 per 1,000	
Parks and Recreation	13.1	16.4	B/WB has 0.3/1,000 more FTE than peer communities **(equivalent to 5.3 more staff)**
	0.4 per 1,000	0.7 per 1,000	
Police	66.8	47.4	B/WB has 0.5/1,000 more FTE than peer communities **(equivalent to 13.6 more staff)**
	2.5 per 1,000	2.0 per 1,000	
Public Works	36.2	36.9	B/WB has 0.2/1,000 fewer FTE than peer communities **(equivalent to 5.4 less staff)**
	1.3 per 1,000	1.5 per 1,000	

Applied Decision-Making Tool

The applied decision-making tool prompts were based on the research performed and the financial analysis. Each section of the tool is separated by what portion of the analysis influenced the answers for each. The goal of the tool is that it can be reused to consider other departments or see how answers may have changed when consulting it after implementation. A blank version of the decision-making tool can be found at Item 6 in the Appendix.

Community Development

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Interview Findings

Capital

Burlington's Community Development department's biggest needs involve upgrading equipment and facilities, including aging infrastructure and lacking comprehensive security systems and cameras. West Burlington's Community Development department has recently updated its technology, allowing their inspector to take tech with him for inspections, but continues to rely on hand-me-down resources like retired police vehicles. In addition, West Burlington has bought codebooks in preparation for building and fire code updates and hopes to implement the changes soon.

Staffing

Burlington is close to fully staffed, currently having three inspectors. However, West Burlington has one part time employee to oversee building inspections, rental inspections, code enforcement, and fire inspections. Due to the lack of assistance, there are delays and backlogs in rental inspections, but the goal is to mirror Burlington's current building and fire codes.

Efficiency

Burlington and West Burlington see a possibility of collaboration in the future, and both agree that they communicate well and have a comfortable working relationship with each other. In recent years, Burlington has assisted West Burlington with inspections when they experienced vacancies. However, discrepancies between building codes present notable challenges. The International Building Code (IBC) and International Fire Code (IFC) are updated every three years. While Burlington is on the 2021 versions, West Burlington is still operating under the 2015 codes. West Burlington seeks to align its codes with Burlington's, especially since it is already utilizing Iowa Code Chapter 657A, the same code Burlington follows for addressing abandoned homes.

Quality of Service

Departments in both cities have many of the same services with the bulk of their work including building and rental inspections. West Burlington measures its services through code enforcement reports and weekly updates to the city administrator, who then informs the city council. Burlington measures their services by having communication with the community. Their main concerns regarding sharing revolve around how information will be communicated between the two city managers and how conversations will be handled if one community receives complaints related to the other.

Community Identity

Both departments expressed concerns about maintaining community identity in a shared-service model. For Burlington, there is hesitation about who sets priorities. West Burlington has a strong sense of local identity and there is uncertainty about how expanded collaboration would be received.

Financial Analysis

Over the past three years (FY 22-24), Burlington spent an average of $38.17 per capita on community development, while West Burlington spent $42.98 per capita. If their budgets were combined, the two cities would have spent $38.74 per capita. In comparison, the average per capita spending on Community Development across the three peer communities, Clinton, Muscatine, and Fort Dodge, was $25.72 over the same period.

Looking at FTEs, Burlington had an average of 0.3/1,000 (7.9) FTEs, while West Burlington had an average of 0.4/1,000 (1.3) FTEs. Combined, the two cities averaged 0.3/1,000 (9.2) FTEs. In comparison, the average FTE across the three peer communities, Clinton, Muscatine, and Fort Dodge, was 0.2/1,000 (6.3) FTEs over the same period.

Figure 6: 3-Year Average (FY2022-FY2024) of Per Capita in Community Development Adjusted for Inflation

	Burlington	West Burlington	B/WB Combined	Peer Communities	Difference
Community Development	$38.17	$42.98	$38.74	$25.72	$13.02 lower

Figure 7: 3-Year Average (FY2022-FY2024) of Staffing and FTEs per 1,000 in Community Development

	Burlington	West Burlington	B/WB Combined	Peer Communities
Community Development	7.9	1.3	9.2	6.3
	0.3 per 1,000	0.4 per 1,000	0.3 per 1,000	0.2 per 1,000

Applied Decision-Making Tool

Burlington lacks equipment upgrades such as cameras and security systems, while West Burlington's technology is mostly up to date, which provides an opportunity for shared purchases. Both cities struggle with staffing, which could be shared either through contracted time or temporary fill-ins to relieve pressure and increase responsiveness in West Burlington. In West Burlington, shared services would lead to cost savings in the recent 2 years. The variation across fiscal years is minimal, and in all years, the combined cost remains comparable to or better than peer cities like Muscatine and Clinton, which suggests a potential cost savings for shared services. There are community identity concerns, especially those who set priorities and how conflicts could be solved.

Burlington: **$903,285.67 Expenditures** / **7.9 FTE** - West Burlington: **$135,869.46 Expenditures** / **1.33 FTE**
*Based on 3-year averages (FY2022-2024) of expenditures and staffing

CRITERIA	BURLINGTON	WEST BURLINGTON	SOURCE
Challenges meeting current staffing needs?	Yes	Yes	Dept. Head Interviews
Expect retirements to impact staffing in the next 10 years?	Maybe	Yes	
Expect to significantly invest in upgrades or new capital purchases in the near future?	Yes	No	
Opportunities to collaborate outside of merging staffing or services?	Yes	Yes	
Opportunities to merge staff lines?	No	No	
Opportunities to merge services (e.g. 28E agreement)?	Yes	Yes	
Opportunities to share *existing* physical or technical resources (e.g. equipment)?	Yes	Yes	
Opportunities to share costs of *future* capital equipment purchasing?	Undetermined	Undetermined	
Would detract from the community identity?	No	No	
Concerns about the current quality of services to residents?	No	No	
Opportunities to improve the quality of service for residents?	Maybe – literature was not department specific		Literature Review
Significant opportunities for cost savings?	Yes, found in Luna Pier and Erie Township		
Combined staffing higher than the average among peer communities?	Yes, 2.93 FTEs higher		Expenditure & Staffing Analysis
Combined spending per capita higher than the average among peers?	Yes, $12.80 higher		
OPPORTUNITIES Standardize building and rental codes between the two cities to streamline inspections and reduce redundancy.			

Finance

FINANCE

Interview Findings

Capital

Burlington's Finance Department has expenses including servers, computers, subscriptions, computer updates, but the current budget is light. There is interest in obtaining new Human Resources software to assist in hiring, but the current budget is unable to support it. In contrast, West Burlington's department does not anticipate major purchases.

Staffing

Departments in both cities are understaffed and have one full-time equivalent (FTE) and one part-time employee. In Burlington, separate roles, finance director, HR director, and HR assistant, are handled by two people. The city struggles to gain qualified candidates for new positions across departments. West Burlington is similar with the current staff unable to meet all operational needs.

Efficiency

There has been informal collaboration between the two cities' departments. Burlington's finance staff have provided guidance to West Burlington when needed. However, they have different finance systems, making collaboration, beyond simple questions and assistance difficult.

Quality of Service

Burlington's staff focuses on addressing issues as they arise. When errors occur, they try to see where the issue was, and when they hear nothing that is a good thing. West Burlington's staff responds to citizen questions but lacks performance metrics. The primary indicator of quality is feedback from the city administrator.

Community Identity

There is concern in West Burlington's Finance Department that collaborating too closely with Burlington's Finance Department will result in a loss of identity, and Burlington understands West Burlington's apprehension. While staff from both cities expressed a willingness to assist with questions, full collaboration does not seem like a possibility.

Applied Decision-Making Tool

Neither Finance department in Burlington nor West Burlington have a substantial need for new equipment, but if purchases are needed, they will not cost the communities much. Although both communities struggle with staffing their department, sharing staff and equipment may not be feasible because the two communities use different financing systems when it comes to billing and payroll. The two departments should continue to share information and use each other as resources when applicable, especially as staff with institutional knowledge begin to retire.

Burlington: Undetermined - West Burlington: Undetermined

*Based on 3-year averages (FY2022-2024) of expenditures and staffing

CRITERIA	BURLINGTON	WEST BURLINGTON	SOURCE
Expect retirements to impact staffing in the next 10 years?	Maybe	Yes	Dept. Head Interviews
Expect to significantly invest in upgrades or new capital purchases in the near future?	Yes	No	
Opportunities to collaborate outside of merging staffing or services?	Yes	Yes	
Opportunities to merge staff lines?	No	No	
Opportunities to merge services (e.g. 28E agreement)?	Yes	Yes	
Opportunities to share *existing* physical or technical resources (e.g. equipment)?	Undetermined	Undetermined	
Opportunities to share costs of *future* capital equipment purchasing?	Undetermined	Undetermined	
Would detract from the community identity?	No	No	
Concerns about the current quality of services to residents?	No	No	
Opportunities to improve the quality of service for residents?	Undetermined – literature was not department specific		Literature Review
Significant opportunities for cost savings?	Undetermined – not found in the literature review		
Combined staffing higher than the average among peer communities?	Undetermined		Expenditure & Staffing Analysis
Combined spending per capita higher than the average among peers?	Undetermined		
OPPORTUNITIES Information sharing and problem solving on general tasks between tenured staff and newer staff			

Fire

FIRE

Interview Findings

Capital

Burlington's Fire Department is facing a large projected capital investment over the next 5 years which will total around $12.5 million from FY 26–30. The department's capital needs include a $7 million fire station, two fire apparatuses projected at $2.2 million and $1.2 million, six Advanced Life Support ambulances, outfitted at approximately $1 million total, and additional ongoing costs for replacement hoses, gear, and vehicles. West Burlington's Fire Department has its own capital budget, needing a new fire engine, that would cost approximately $750,000, and a ladder truck, that could be up to $1.7 million. With Burlington planning to build a third station near the West Burlington border, there is emerging interest in exploring shared use of some equipment potentially on a 50/50 basis, according to West Burlington.

Staffing

Burlington currently has 44 FTE employees. When fully staffed, Burlington would have 48 full-time FTE firefighters and 1 administrative billing coordinator. While there are five vacancies, staffing is adequate for now, and three additional positions will open over the next five years. In contrast, West Burlington is a volunteer department, which creates significant challenges because many volunteers are finding it difficult to leave their jobs for calls. They have a fire chief and two part time training positions, but the bulk of their service relies on volunteer availability.

Future collaboration with West Burlington raises questions about the difference between a full-time union department and West Burlington's largely volunteer-based department. This presents cultural and structural challenges to any joint staffing model.

Efficiency

There is a 28E automatic aid agreement between Burlington and West Burlington, which ensures both departments respond to confirmed structure fires and large-scale emergencies across city lines. Historically there has been limited joint training, but the two departments did collaborate on training for the first time last year. Burlington also donated a truck to West Burlington after finding a replacement. However, internal dynamics present some challenges, as communication is inconsistent, and collaboration is occasionally impacted by individual pride.

Quality of Service

Burlington's Fire Department offers a wide range of services such as ambulance standby for large events, water and confined-space rescue, airport crash response, and county-level HAZMAT team operations. Other than response times, there is no formal performance metric used, the department considers community perception as a strong indicator of success. There is a belief that, should share services with West Burlington be pursued, they would need to operate under Burlington's leadership to maintain quality and consistency. West Burlington measures quality mostly through community feedback, and auto aid has improved their quality of service.

Community Identity

Burlington's staff recognize that any move towards consolidation would feel like a takeover and will give West Burlington concerns over identity loss. Burlington knows that organizational charts would need to be restructured. Burlington also has questions around expectations and standards in West Burlington. While some believe shared services could improve safety and efficiency, others know there will be community resistance, particularly in West Burlington. The West Burlington Fire Department Chief realizes that costs are rising but knows that some citizens take pride in their West Burlington identity and may take offense to a merger with Burlington.

Financial Analysis

Over the past three years (FY 22-24), Burlington spent an average of $261.63 per capita on fire, while West Burlington spent $141.59 per capita. If their budgets were combined, the two cities would have spent $247.51 per capita. In comparison, the average per capita spending on Community Development across the three peer communities, Clinton, Muscatine, and Fort Dodge, was $217.12 over the same period.

With respect to FTEs, Burlington had an average of 2.1/1,000 (49.7) FTEs, while West Burlington had an average of 8.4/1,000 (26.7). Combined, the two cities averaged 2.8/1,000 (76.4) FTEs. In comparison, the average FTE across the three peer communities, Clinton, Muscatine, and Fort Dodge, was 2.1/1,000 (50.4) FTEs over the same period.

Figure 8: 3-Year Average (FY2022-FY2024) of Per Capita Spending in Fire Adjusted for Inflation

	Burlington	West Burlington	B/WB Combined	Peer Communities	Difference
Fire	$261.63	$141.59	$247.51	$217.12	$30.39 higher

Figure 9: 3-Year Average (FY2022-FY2024) of Staffing and FTEs per 1,000 in Fire

	Burlington	West Burlington	B/WB Combined	Peer Communities
Fire	49.7	26.7	76.4	50.4
	2.1 per 1,000	8.4 per 1,000	2.8 per 1,000	2.1 per 1,000

Applied Decision-Making Tool

Burlington and West Burlington differ significantly in their staffing models, with Burlington relying on full-time employees and West Burlington depending largely on volunteers. Additionally, there is notable political resistance, particularly from West Burlington, which fears a loss of identity and autonomy under a merged department. Burlington has acknowledged these identity concerns and would expect to take the lead in a merger, while West Burlington recognizes there would be considerable opposition to such a change. While there is potential for cost savings, the concerns around representation and community identity outweigh the financial benefits. However, both communities' departments should continue sharing training resources, and there is a strong possibility for future collaboration with the planned construction of a Burlington station near the Burlington/West Burlington border.

Burlington: **$6,187,412.33 Expenditures / 9.73 FTE -** West Burlington: **$445,498.02 Expenditures / 26.66 FTE**
*Based on 3-year averages (FY2022-2024) of expenditures and staffing

CRITERIA	BURLINGTON	WEST BURLINGTON	SOURCE
Challenges meeting current staffing needs?	No	Yes	Dept. Head Interviews
Expect retirements to impact staffing in the next 10 years?	Yes	N.A	
Expect to significantly invest in upgrades or new capital purchases in the near future?	Yes	Yes	
Opportunities to collaborate outside of merging staffing or services?	Yes	Yes	
Opportunities to merge staff lines?	No	No	
Opportunities to merge services (e.g. 28E agreement)?	Yes	Yes	
Opportunities to share *existing* physical or technical resources (e.g. equipment)?	Yes	Yes	
Opportunities to share costs of *future* capital equipment purchasing?	Yes	Yes	
Would detract from the community identity?	Yes	Yes	
Concerns about the current quality of services to residents?	No	No	
Opportunities to improve the quality of service for residents?	Yes- found in Grimes and Johnston 28E Agreement		Literature Review
Significant opportunities for cost savings?	Yes- found in Grimes and Johnston 28E Agreement		
Combined staffing higher than the average among peer communities?	Yes, 26.00 FTEs higher		Expenditure & Staffing Analysis
Combined spending per capita higher than the average among peers?	Yes, $29.83 higher		

OPPORTUNITIES

Share training resources and equipment: Both departments already collaborate on training, and expanding these efforts could improve collaboration.

Future opportunity to share equipment when Burlington builds Station near West Burlington border: With Burlington planning to build a third station near the West Burlington border, there is strong potential for shared equipment.

Parks and Recreation

PARKS AND RECREATION

Interview Findings

Capital

Burlington's Parks and Recreation Department's capital priorities focus on maintaining aging infrastructure, upgrading trails, and enhancing amenities throughout the city. West Burlington Parks and Recreation Department has concerns with aging park infrastructure with the city's main park being over 25 years old.

Staffing

Burlington's parks side of the department currently operates with two full-time and one part-time parks staff, along with one maintenance manager. The forestry team consists of two full-time and two part-time employees. While the department typically hires 60–70 seasonal workers, they are facing growing challenges with recruitment and retention. West Burlington has 10 full-time employees who serve both the Parks and Recreation and Public Works departments. Despite this dual responsibility, the city reports feeling fully staffed. Most employees stay a considerable amount of time, some as long as 25 years. However, four employees are expected to retire within the next five years.

Efficiency

Burlington's staff is looking to work with companies to see if their city pool can be repaired, but the city council has moved forward with the budget that does not include the pool which has caused its closure for summer 2025. Additionally, Burlington has emphasized that the parks departments in the two cities are not similar. West Burlington's staff agrees on their difference and expanding that to say sharing may be difficult in the parks department.

Quality of Service

For Burlington's department, quality of service is measured through communication. While some responsibilities, such as tree maintenance, are relatively easy to manage, making sure that the needs of both communities are fully addressed present a more complex challenge. Functions such as the forestry department use a reactionary model such as mowing as needed. They also use a seven-year cycle to assess and maintain a healthy tree canopy, but broader service metrics are lacking. West Burlington also measures quality of service through communication by fixing complaints they hear either from their city manager or the community.

Community Identity

With West Burlington facing staffing issues, Burlington has questioned how staffing and programming decisions would be made across two municipalities. If the two cities were to collaborate, there are questions about who would make decisions regarding which features from each department would remain open. West Burlington expressed concern that shared services with a larger city like Burlington. They acknowledge that there is some resistance, but there are things that could be shared for cost-saving purposes like the community pool.

Financial Analysis

Over the past three years (FY 22-24), Burlington spent an average of $46.75 per capita on parks and recreation, while West Burlington spent $65.18 per capita. If their budgets were combined, the two cities would have spent $48.92 per capita. In comparison, the average per capita spending on Community Development across the three peer communities, Clinton, Muscatine, and Fort Dodge, was $78.48 over the same period.

Looking at FTEs, Burlington had an average of 0.1/1,000 (3.5) FTEs, while West Burlington had an average of 3.0/1,000 (9.7). Combined, the two cities averaged 0.5/1,000 (13.1 FTEs. In comparison, the average FTE across the three peer communities, Clinton, Muscatine, and Fort Dodge, was 0.7/1,000 (16.4) FTEs over the same period.

Figure 10: 3-Year Average (FY2022-FY2024) of Per Capita Spending in Parks & Recreation Adjusted for Inflation

	Burlington	West Burlington	B/WB Combined	Peer Communities	Difference
Parks and Recreation	$46.75	$65.18	$48.92	$78.48	$29.56 lower

Figure 11: 3-Year Average (FY2022-FY2024) of Staffing and FTEs per 1,000 in Parks and Recreation

	Burlington	West Burlington	B/WB Combined	Peer Communities
Parks and Recreation	3.5	9.7*	13.1	16.4
	0.1 per 1,000	3.0 per 1,000*	0.5 per 1,000	0.7 per 1,000

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

Applied Decision-Making Tool

One major area for possible collaboration between the two departments relates to joint purchases. Major capital expenses could lend well to sharing as both communities see a need to make updates to their park infrastructure. With respect to full-time staff, West Burlington feels fully staffed, whereas Burlington has expressed concern about attracting and retaining seasonal employees. From an expenditure standpoint, it is more cost efficient on a per capita basis to share services completely. When it comes to the two swimming pools, the two communities should further explore shared staffing models to reduce cost inefficiencies, improve quality of service, and improve on attracting and retaining candidates for the season.

Burlington: **$1,106,174.00 Expenditures / 3.46 FTE -** West Burlington: **$205,801.63 Expenditures / 9.67 FTE**
*Based on 3-year averages (FY2022-2024) of expenditures and staffing

CRITERIA	BURLINGTON	WEST BURLINGTON	SOURCE
Challenges meeting current staffing needs?	Yes	No	Dept. Head Interviews
Expect retirements to impact staffing in the next 10 years?	Yes	Yes	
Expect to significantly invest in upgrades or new capital purchases in the near future?	Yes	Yes	
Opportunities to collaborate outside of merging staffing or services?	Yes	Yes	
Opportunities to merge staff lines?	Yes	No	
Opportunities to merge services (e.g. 28E agreement)?	Yes	Yes	
Opportunities to share *existing* physical or technical resources (e.g. equipment)?	Undetermined	Undetermined	
Opportunities to share costs of *future* capital equipment purchasing?	Undetermined	Undetermined	
Would detract from the community identity?	Maybe	Yes	
Concerns about the current quality of services to residents?	Yes	Yes	
Opportunities to improve the quality of service for residents?	Undetermined – literature was not department specific		Literature Review
Significant opportunities for cost savings?	Undetermined – literature was not department specific		
Combined staffing higher than the average among peer communities?	No, 3.31 FTE less		Expenditure & Staffing Analysis
Combined spending per capita higher than the average among peers?	No, $29.15 less		

OPPORTUNITIES
Share equipment between the two departments as needed with proper communication, with the possibility of purchasing larger equipment in the future
Further explore staffing models that encourage attracting and retaining seasonal pool staff between the two communities

*"No" in staffing for West Burlington is concerned with full-times staff, not seasonal

Police

POLICE

Interview Findings

Capital

Both Burlington's and West Burlington's Police Department face increasing capital costs with vehicles being both cities' biggest expense. West Burlington would prefer to replace squad cars annually due to high mileage and engine wear, but they currently do replacements every other year. Beyond vehicles, Burlington is keeping up with technology such as body cameras and breathalyzers.

Staffing

Neither department is fully staffed. Burlington is currently nine officers down and struggles to hire and retain high-quality officers due to retirements and competition for higher salaries. This has led to mandating officers to work more. West Burlington is currently down two officers and reports that a full-time investigator and SRO remain unmet priorities. Burlington currently has nine officers eligible to retire, while West Burlington has three officers eligible. As retirements occur, there is potential for some positions to be absorbed rather than refilled as a cost-saving strategy.

Efficiency

Burlington's staff has assisted West Burlington's staff, specifically in high-profile investigations. Burlington's Police Department believes there are many duplications and redundancies, and collaboration would help that issue, stating something as simple as joint training sessions could make a difference. West Burlington's Police Department also sees potential for collaboration, especially during larger-scale events.

Quality of Service

Burlington's Police Department has previously conducted citizen surveys before but recognizes as law enforcement they can't make everyone happy, that it's not possible to satisfy everyone. In West Burlington, quality of service is measured through community feedback and communication with the city administrators. Some concerns have been voiced about whether a merged or shared system would maintain the current image both cities hold.

Community Identity

Burlington faces higher violent crime, lower income levels, and more service calls, while West Burlington deals with fewer crimes but a higher volume of retail-related calls. A merged department might struggle with balancing priorities. Burlington's Police Department has expressed an interest in a unified department, but West Burlington's Police Department has indicated that this is not the direction they are interested in pursuing.

Financial Analysis

Over the past three years (FY 22-24), Burlington spent an average of $260.70 per capita on police, while West Burlington spent $388.60 per capita. If their budgets were combined, the two cities would have spent $275.70 per capita. In comparison, the average per capita spending on Community Development across the three peer communities, Clinton, Muscatine, and Fort Dodge, was $239.00 over the same period.

Looking at FTEs, Burlington had an average of 2.2/1,000 (53.3) FTEs, while West Burlington had an average of 4.1/1,000 (13.3). Combined, the two cities averaged 2.5/1,000 (66.8) FTEs. In comparison, the average FTE across the three peer communities, Clinton, Muscatine, and Fort Dodge, was 2.0/1,000 (47.4) over the same period.

Figure 12: 3-Year Average (FY2022-FY2024) of Per Capita Spending in Police Adjusted for Inflation

	Burlington	West Burlington	B/WB Combined	Peer Communities	Difference
Police	$260.70	$388.64	$275.69	$239.00	$36.70 higher

Figure 13: 3-Year Average (FY2022-FY2024) of Staffing and FTEs per 1,000 in Police

	Burlington	West Burlington	B/WB Combined	Peer Communities
Police	53.3	13.3	66.8	47.4
	2.2 per 1,000	4.1 per 1,000*	2.5 per 1,000	2.0 per 1,000

A secondary analysis on staffing specifically was performed for the police department to consider the day-time population of the city and how per-capita normalization would apply to account for the populations in the city during the day. Item 7 in the Appendix details the total in-commuter population and out-commuter population which lead to the day-time population in Burlington, West Burlington, the combined Burlington and West Burlington, and the average peer communities. When accounting for the combined in and out commuters, the Project Team accounted for commuters who live in West Burlington, but work in Burlington (and vice versa), by subtracting those from their specific commuting totals.

Below is the analysis of the changes the communities see and how that impacts their FTE per capita with respect to the daytime population.

Figure 14: 3-Year Average (FY2022-FY2024) of Staffing and FTEs per 1,000 in Police with the Daytime Population

	Population	Daytime Population	% Change in Population	FTE	FTE per Capita (Normal Population)	FTE per Capita (Daytime Population)
West Burlington	3,197	7,350	129.9%	13.3	4.1/1,000	1.8/1000
Burlington	23,982	23,375	-2.5%	53.3	2.2/1,000	2.3/1,000
Combined B/WB	27,179	31,060	14.3%	66.8	2.5/1,000	2.2/1,000
Peer Communities	24,120	27,038	11.7%	47.4	2.0/1,000	1.8/1,000

Comparisons among police departments should consider factors beyond population. Crime rates can help build understanding about efficiency within departments when compared to peer communities in a third analysis for the police department.

The FBI Crime Explorer Data Discovery Tool provides data on violent crime and property crime. This page displays crime data as reported by law enforcement agencies in the FBI's Universal Crime Reporting (UCR) Program. Violent crime includes murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. Property crime includes burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson. The FBI data reflects the hierarchy rule, stating that "only the most serious offense in a case be counted" and "although arson is also a property crime, the hierarchy rule does not apply to it. In cases in which an arson occurs in conjunction with another violent or property crime, both crimes are reported." Note that more minor crimes, such as traffic violations, are not included in the data. The data depends on reporting from law enforcement agencies and therefore depends on active participation in the program to provide accurate information.

Figure 15: 2022 Property and Violent Crime in West Burlington, Burlington, Clinton, Fort Dodge, and Muscatine (source: FBI Crime Explorer Data Discovery Tool)

	2022 Pop.	Violent Crime	Property Crime	Total Crime	Violent Crime Rate	Property Crime Rate	Total Crime Rate
WB	3,164	19	293	312	6.0 per 1,000	92.6 per 1,000	98.6 per 1,000
Burlington	23,581	138	877	1,015	43.6 per 1,000	37.2 per 1,000	43.0 per 1,000
WBB Combined	26,745	157	1170	1,327	49.6 per 1,000	43.7 per 1,000	49.6 per 1,000
Clinton	24,346	138	921	1,059	43.6 per 1,000	37.8 per 1,000	43.5 per 1,000
Fort Dodge	24,667	138	769	907	43.6 per 1,000	31.2 per 1,000	36.8 per 1,000
Muscatine	23,436	83	391	474	26.2 per 1,000	16.7 per 1,000	20.2 per 1,000
Peer Average	24,149	120	694	814	37.8 per 1,000	28.7 per 1,000	33.7 per 1,000

Figure 15 shows that West Burlington had a relatively low violent crime rate in 2022 (6.0 per 1,000 residents) and a relatively high property crime rate (92.6 per 1,000 residents) compared to Burlington and other peer communities. Burlington has a higher violent crime rate than peer communities and has slight fewer property crime rates than Clinton, but more than Fort Dodge and Muscatine. Merging the data shows that West Burlington and Burlington together have both higher violent crime rates and property crime rates compared to the peer communities.

Figure 16: 2022 Property and Violent Crime in West Burlington, Burlington, & Peer Communities compared to FTE staffing (3-year average)

	2022 Crimes	Police Department FTE (average 2022-2024)	FTE/Crime Ratio
WBB Combined	1,327	66.8	5.0 FTE per 100 crimes
Peer Community Average	814	47.4	5.8 FTE per 100 crimes

Figure 16 compares the average police department staffing size of Burlington and West Burlington combined with the average police department staffing size of the peer communities. Burlington and West Burlington have fewer FTE staff (5.0 FTE per 100 crimes) compared to the average of the peer communities (5.8 FTE per 100 crimes).

Applied Decision-Making Tool

While Burlington and West Burlington share similarities in the services they provide, efforts toward deeper collaboration face significant challenges, particularly related to political feasibility and community identity. Burlington has expressed interest in a merger, but West Burlington is not currently open to the idea. Additionally, the departments have different organizational cultures, with some West Burlington personnel expressing hesitations about working under Burlington. The two departments sharing would potentially offer cost savings, but the concerns around representation outweigh these benefits. A merged department would also face challenges in balancing call volumes, making full integration unlikely to succeed. However, opportunities for collaboration remain, particularly through joint training sessions and the possibility of a shared investigator.

Burlington: **$6,163,727.30 Expenditures / 53.30 FTE -** West Burlington: **$1,226,019.38 Expenditures / 13.33 FTE**
*Based on 3-year averages (FY2022-2024) of expenditures and staffing

CRITERIA	BURLINGTON	WEST BURLINGTON	SOURCE
Challenges meeting current staffing needs?	No	No	Dept. Head Interviews
Expect retirements to impact staffing in the next 10 years?	Yes	Yes	
Expect to significantly invest in upgrades or new capital purchases in the near future?	Yes	Yes	
Opportunities to collaborate outside of merging staffing or services?	Yes	Yes	
Opportunities to merge staff lines?	No	No	
Opportunities to merge services (e.g. 28E agreement)?	Yes	Yes	
Opportunities to share *existing* physical or technical resources (e.g. equipment)?	Yes	Yes	
Opportunities to share costs of *future* capital equipment purchasing?	Yes	Undetermined	
Would detract from the community identity?	Yes	Yes	
Concerns about the current quality of services to residents?	No	No	
Opportunities to improve the quality of service for residents?	Yes- Wolverine Lake and the city of Walled Lake		Literature Review
Significant opportunities for cost savings?	Yes- UK Police Department		
Combined staffing higher than the average among peer communities?	Yes, 19.44 FTEs higher		Expenditure & Staffing Analysis
Combined spending per capita higher than the average among peers?	Yes, $36.05 higher		

<u>OPPORTUNITIES</u>
Sharing investigator: West Burlington lacks a full-time investigator, and Burlington has an investigations unit that could provide support on cases.
Share training resources and equipment: Burlington has strong training facilities, and both cities could benefit from joint training to reduce spending and eliminate redundancy in training resources.

Public Works

PUBLIC WORKS

Interview Findings

Capital

Burlington's Public Works Department has a detailed capital improvement plan but is lagging in technological adoption. Staff expressed interest in GPS and camera systems for trucks and tablets for work order management, but funding constraints have stalled progress. West Burlington's Public Works Department anticipates the need to replace major equipment in the next 10 years, including a backhoe, dump trucks, loader truck, and bucket truck.

Staffing

Burlington is not understaffed but would benefit from additional personnel. The department has 59 FTEs and 14 part-time employees. It is expected that 10-15 people may leave over the next 10 years. West Burlington, though smaller, feels adequately staffed for its size, 10 full-time workers. However, they noted that additional capacity would improve maintenance programs for roads and water infrastructure.

Efficiency

Burlington and West Burlington staff have shared equipment before. There is conversation surrounding shared equipment purchases, such as a paint truck and sewer camera. However, sharing equipment like dump trucks and backhoes is receiving less consideration currently.

Quality of Service

Burlington's department is divided into six divisions including solid waste, transit, street and sewers, property maintenance, and engineering. They lack quality of services metrics. West Burlington has described their team as trying to do their best to improve what they already have.

Community Identity

Burlington's Public Works Department is open to shared services but is concerned about the distribution of resources and wonders how tracking can be done properly to make sure that each community is paying for its respective share. West Burlington's Public Works Department is wary of being subsumed by a larger neighbor, there are also fears of resource drain in a shared model. Departments in both cities seem to agree that equipment should be shared, but anything more than that is not a priority.

Financial Analysis

Over the past three years (FY 22-24), Burlington spent an average of $494.07 per capita on public works, while West Burlington spent $1,371.72 per capita. If their budgets were combined, the two cities would have spent $603.97 per capita. In comparison, the average per capita spending on Community Development across the three peer communities, Clinton, Muscatine, and Fort Dodge, was $326.17 over the same period.

Looking at FTEs, Burlington had an average of 1.1/1,000 (26.5) FTEs, while West Burlington had an average of 3.0/1,000 (9.7). Combined, the two cities averaged 1.3/1,000 (36.2) FTEs. In comparison, the average FTE across the three peer communities, Clinton, Muscatine, and Fort Dodge, was 1.5/1,000 (36.9) over the same period.

Figure 17: 3-Year Average (FY2022-FY2024) of Per Capita Spending in Public Works Adjusted for Inflation

	Burlington	West Burlington	B/WB Combined	Peer Communities	Difference
Public Works	$494.07	$1,371.72	$603.97	$326.17	$277.80 higher

Figure 18: 3-Year Average (FY2022-FY2024) of Staffing and FTEs per 1,000 in Public Works

	Burlington	West Burlington	B/WB Combined	Peer Communities
Public Works	26.5	9.7*	36.2	36.9
	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

Applied Decision-Making Tool

Joint purchases like a sewer camera and paint truck have already proven effective, and future collaboration on GPS, tablets, or software could reduce capital costs. Both departments are fully staffed, but Burlington would benefit from additional personnel. Direct staff sharing may be challenging due to concerns about equity and control. While concerns about emergency response delays and identity persist, both cities already collaborate on maintenance and equipment use. Shared services could lower West Burlington's per capita costs and improve service delivery, making further cooperation recommended with clear agreements.

Burlington: **$11,696,319.00 Expenditures / 26.53 FTE** West Burlington: **$4,320,110.95 Expenditures / 9.67 FTE**
*Based on 3-year averages (FY2022-2024) of expenditures and staffing

CRITERIA	BURLINGTON	WEST BURLINGTON	SOURCE
Challenges meeting current staffing needs?	No	No	Dept. Head Interviews
Expect retirements to impact staffing in the next 10 years?	Yes	Yes	
Expect to significantly invest in upgrades or new capital purchases in the near future?	Yes	Yes	
Opportunities to collaborate outside of merging staffing or services?	Yes	Yes	
Opportunities to merge staff lines?	No	No	
Opportunities to merge services (e.g. 28E agreement)?	Yes	Yes	
Opportunities to share *existing* physical or technical resources (e.g. equipment)?	Yes	Yes	
Opportunities to share costs of *future* capital equipment purchasing?	Yes	Yes	
Would detract from the community identity?	Maybe	Yes	
Concerns about the current quality of services to residents?	No	No	
Opportunities to improve the quality of service for residents?	Yes – Holzer and Fry		Literature Review
Significant opportunities for cost savings?	Undetermined – not found in the literature review		
Combined staffing higher than the average among peer communities?	No, 0.70 FTEs less		Expenditure & Staffing Analysis
Combined spending per capita higher than the average among peers?	Yes, $267.56 higher		

OPPORTUNITIES
Collaborate on capital purchases (e.g., sewer camera, paint truck) to reduce costs.
Continue equipment lending and joint emergency responses as appropriate.
Explore contracted services (e.g., painting) instead of staff sharing.

General Recommendations

General Recommendations

If shared services are to be implemented for any of the above services, the Project Team recommends the following steps be taken to ensure the goals of service sharing are met. The recommendations are prioritized by what the Project Team sees as the most urgent

1. *Task Force* – In order to properly administer shared services between the two communities, it is recommended that Burlington and West Burlington form an oversight board that manages decision-making related to shared services. As mentioned in the Literature Review and Case Study chapter, the cities of Grimes and Johnston created a board which includes the mayor, city administrator, and two council members from each community. Such a board would be a natural progression from the joint council meetings Burlington and West Burlington held in recent months.

2. *Quarterly Check-Ins* – In the spirit of collaboration between the community, the Project Team recommends the two cities have quarterly check-ins between department leaders. If the two communities have a time set-up to discuss current operations and future needs, the two communities will be able to discuss if joint equipment purchases or service provision may be well suited. Department leaders may take the first step by taking an inventory of current equipment, the average lifespan of equipment, and when departments plan to purchase new e

3. *Service Quality Metrics* – One of the goals of shared services is to at least maintain current quality levels, if not improve them. From discussions with department leaders, both communities lack proper metrics on performance in each department. It is recommended that both communities develop quality of service metrics to ensure the level of service remains at good levels. With proper metrics, West Burlington and Burlington can properly adjudicate whether service provision has changed since sharing.

4. *Annual Consultation with Decision-Making Tool* – In order for shared services to achieve the goals for both communities, routine consultation with the components of the decision-making tool with be necessary. Reviews of capital, staffing, efficiency, quality of service, and community identity ought to be performed by the governing board overseeing shared services.

5. ***Incremental Steps*** – A common theme throughout interviews with department leaders was concern around losing ownership of the department or community identity. To maintain both, 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 in the future. The position would help ensure that residents in both Burlington and West Burlington receive clear and consistent information. The staff in this position would also build trust in the service sharing process and help both communities stay informed

Appendix

APPENDIX

Item 1: Expenditures Lines for Financial Analysis in All Study Communities

Expenditure Lines for Departments	
Burlington	
Community Development	Planning & Zoning, Building Code Administration
Fire	Administration, Fire Control, Fire Prevention, Haz Mat, Ambulance, Airport Fire Control, Ambulance Station 3
Parks and Recreation	Parks and Recreation – Parks Maintenance, Recreation, Swimming Pool, Forestry, Flint Hills Golf Course
Police	Crime Prevention, Canine Unit, Security Guard, Narcotics Task Force, Animal Control, Parking Enforcement
Public Works	Public Works Admin, Engineering, Transit, Public Works Building, Traffic Signals/Public Lighting, Street Maintenance, Snow Removal, Sanitary Sewer Maintenance, Storm Water, Sewer, Solid Waste Management, Depot, Other Public Works, Parking Maintenance, Vehicle Maintenance
West Burlington	
Community Development	Building, Economic Development, Housing & Urban Renewal, Planning & Zoning, Other Comm & Eco Dev
Fire	Fire
Parks and Recreation	Parks, Rec/Pool
Police	Police
Public Works	Roads, Bridges, Sidewalks, Streetlighting, Traffic control and safety, Garbage & Recycling, Water, Sewer
Clinton	
Community Development	Economic Development, Community Development
Fire	Fire Operations, Fire Ambulance, Fire Inspection
Parks and Recreation	Parks, Recreation Admin & Rec Center, Pool, Other
Police	Police
Public Works	Streets, Traffic Control/Signals, Snow Removal, Sewer, Solid Waste
Fort Dodge	
Community Development	City Planner's Office, Historic Preservation Comm.
Fire	Fire
Parks and Recreation	Recreation General, Aquatics, Park General, Parks/Hotel-Motel, Community Recreation

Police	Police
Public Works	Roadway Maintenance, Snow & Ice Control, Street Cleaning, Electrical & Traffic Signals, Sanitary Sewer, Solid Waste Collection, Water Warehouse, Water Meters & Services
Muscatine	
Community Development	Economic Development, Community Development
Fire	Fire Operations
Parks and Recreation	Parks Administration, Parks Maintenance, Kent Stein Park Operations, Recreation, Aquatic Center, Soccer Complex Operations
Police	Police Operations, Animal Control
Public Works	Roadway Maintenance, Street Cleaning, Traffic Control Operations, Snow and Ice Removal, WPC Administration WPC Plant Operations, Refuse Collection, PW Administration, Engineering Operations

Item 2: Department Interviews

Department	Burlington	West Burlington
Community Development	Eric Tysland	Mark Crooks
Finance	Stephanie Stuecker	Angie Moore
Fire	Nathan Toops	Jesse Logan
Parks and Recreation	Eric Tysland	Chase Williams
Police	Adam Schaefer	Jesse Logan
Public Works	Nick MacGregor	Chase Williams

Item 3: Interview Questions

General Questions

- Capital
    - What do you anticipate upcoming costs to be with tech and capital? What do you need, but don't have the money to purchase?
    - List and price of ongoing capital projects?
    - Can you share an inventory of major (cost and use wise) capital/technology?
- Staffing
    - How many FTE are in your department?
    - How many part-time employees are in your department?
    - What is the typical employment period in your department?
    - Estimate of staff scheduled to retire/exit your department in the next X years?
    - Do you feel fully staffed? Do you see opportunities to share with other municipalities? Can you do all the things that you want to do (staffing capacity)?
- Efficiency
    - Do you have examples of working with the department in another city? In what ways do you collaborate?
    - Do you think that should happen more often and why
    - How do you interact with the other city's department
    - Do you have a working relationship?
    - Are there ways you think shared services could be effectively used between the two municipalities?
- Quality of Service
    - Tell me about the services you offer/provide.
    - How do you measure quality of service for the services your department delivers?
    - What concerns do you have about possibly service sharing in your department with respect to quality-of-service delivery?
- Community Identity/Political identity
    - What concerns do you have about possibly service sharing in your department with respect to community identity and equitable distribution of resources?
- Is there anything else you want to tell us?

Department Specific

- *Community Development*
    - Efficiency: Are code changes/fee schedules/permitting rules/code enforcement updates communicated with the other department?
- *Public Works*

o Efficiency: Are there any shared contracts for infrastructure maintenance (e.g., snow removal, street repairs)?

Questions to send prior to meeting:

Capital

- List and price of ongoing capital projects
- Inventory of major (cost and use wise) capital/technology

Staffing

- How many FTE are in your department?
- How many part-time employees are in your department?
- What is the typical employment period in your department?
- Estimate of staff scheduled to retire/exit your department in the next X years?

Item 4: 3 Year Average (FY2022-FY2024) of Per Capita Spendings for All Departments Adjusted for Inflation

Department	Burlington	West Burlington	B/WB Combined	Peer Communities
Community Development	$38.17	$42.98	$38.74	$25.72
Fire	$261.63	$141.59	$247.51	$217.12
Parks and Recreation	$46.75	$65.18	$48.92	$78.48
Police	$260.70	$388.64	$275.69	$239.00
Public Works	$494.07	$1,371.72	$603.97	$326.17

Item 5: 3-Year Average (FY2022-FY2024) of Staffing and FTEs per 1,000 for All Departments

Department	Burlington	West Burlington	B/WB Combined	Peer Communities
Community Development	7.9	1.3	9.2	6.3
	0.3 per 1,000	0.4 per 1,000	0.3 per 1,000	0.2 per 1,000
Fire	49.7	26.7	76.4	50.4
	2.1 per 1,000	8.4 per 1,000	2.8 per 1,000	2.1 per 1,000
Parks and Recreation	3.5	9.7*	13.1	16.4
	0.1 per 1,000	3.0 per 1,000*	0.5 per 1,000	0.7 per 1,000
Police	53.3	13.3	66.8	47.4
	2.2 per 1,000	4.1 per 1,000	2.5 per 1,000	2.0 per 1,000
Public Works	26.5	9.7*	36.2	36.9
	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

Item 6: Blank Decision-Making Tool

CRITERIA	BURLINGTON	WEST BURLINGTON	SOURCE
Challenges meeting current staffing needs?			
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 *existing* physical or technical resources (e.g. equipment)?			
Opportunities to share costs of *future* capital equipment purchasing?			
Would detract from the community identity?			
Concerns about the current quality of services to residents?			
Opportunities to improve the quality of service for residents?			
Significant opportunities for cost savings?			
Combined staffing higher than the average among peer communities?			
Combined spending per capita higher than the average among peers?			
OPPORTUNITIES			

Item 7: Commuting Patterns in Burlington, West Burlington, Combined B/WB, and Peer Communities

	Population	In-Commuters	Out-Commuters	Daytime Population	% Change in Population
West Burlington	3,197	5,338	1,185	7,350	129.9%
Burlington	23,982	6,435	7,042	23,375	-2.5%
Combined	27,179	9,728*	5,847*	31,060	14.3%
Peer Combined	24,210	8,428	5,599	27,038	11.7%

*Accounts for cross commuting between Burlington and West Burlington by subtracting the populations who live in West Burlington and work in Burlington and populations who live in Burlington and work in West Burlington