Business Proposal: Consolidation of Collier Township Fire Departments

To: Township Commissioners

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Executive Summary

This proposal outlines a plan for the strategic and operational consolidation of Collier Township's three volunteer fire departments—Kirwan Heights, Presto, and Rennerdale—into a single, unified department. The primary goal is to enhance fire and emergency medical services (EMS) delivery, improve efficiency, and secure the long-term sustainability of public safety in the township.

This plan builds upon the findings of the July 2019 "Assessment of the Fire Service Delivery System & Feasibility of Consolidation" report and integrates a sustainable financial model funded by a 1 mil tax rate. An essential element of this initiative is the inclusion of paid, cross-trained EMT/firefighters, utilizing the current infrastructure and workforce of 60 employees from the Collier EMS system, which will continue to operate within the same organizational structure as the new consolidated fire department.

Current Operational Analysis

The current EMS department operates with approximately 60 employees and an annual payroll of $2 million. This includes:

- 8 employees on a 24/7 schedule.
- 4 additional cross-trained firefighter positions on a 24/7 schedule.
- 2 administrators working 40 hours per week each.
- 6 additional employees working 12 hours a day, Monday through Friday.

The three fire departments are comprised of all volunteers (the daylight program covers two firefighters 9 hours a day), each with their own board of directors and operations officers. Their active volunteer numbers are as follows:

- Kirwan: averages 37 active volunteers *(per 124 Chief)*
- Rennerdale: averages 20 active volunteers *(per 126 Chief)*
- Presto: averages 25 active volunteers. *(per 125 Chief)*

Fire department call volumes during daylight hours (where volunteer response levels are at their lowest) we averaged just under 11 calls per month between 6am and 6pm this year. The average number of responders during midday fires nationally is 3 or fewer (Hall et al., 2006). Our three fire departments have averaged the following numbers this year during daylight hours:

- Kirwan: averages 3.98 firefighters per call *(per fire reports)*
- Presto: averages 1.79 firefighters per call *(per fire reports)*
- Rennerdale averages 2.42 firefighters per call *(per fire reports)*

Outside of daylight, the fire departments average another 22 calls per month, but our volunteers have a much stronger showing due to more being available. The fire departments each make an average of between 350-500 calls a year, which is continually trending upwards, about a 65% increase since 2015 (Sohyda, 2019). As the population grows and call numbers go up, fire companies have seen a nearly 6% decrease annually in volunteer firefighters, showing the true need for a paid fire service (Orlyk, 2024).

EMS call volume in 2023 was around 7,200 calls and 2024 ended with over 8,000 transported patients. Adding these call numbers to one Fire/EMS company will better position the department to receive more grant funding. Using the EMS system in tandem with the Fire department will increase our priority to receive s SAFER grant because applicants with higher call volumes get more consideration; as well the EMS currently has a recruitment and retention coordinator allowing us to score higher within the grant process (*8 Firefighter SAFER Grant Priorities*, 2017).

Fire Service Call Volume and Nature

The recent fire study indicates a critical finding regarding the actual nature of emergency responses; the three volunteer fire departments ran a combined total of 1,109 calls over a three-year period, with over 50% of these calls being non-fire related in nature (specifically, rescue and EMS-related incidents). This data strongly validates the proposal to transition to a combination EMS & fire department model in Collier Township, emphasizing the need for cross-trained personnel.

This trend mirrors national findings, where emergency medical services (EMS) and rescue calls represent the vast majority of fire department runs—upwards of 64% in some nationwide reports—while actual fire-related incidents account for less than 4% of the total workload (USFA, 2021; Marciniak et al., 2024). The increasing reliance on the 9-1-1 system as the primary entry point for community health issues requires fire departments to adapt their staffing models to prioritize medical and rescue capabilities (Becker, 2025; Wood-Brooks, 2019). The proposed consolidation directly addresses this shift by integrating EMS and fire personnel, enhancing service efficiency, and aligning our operational model with modern public safety demands.

While the current structure meets most of our township needs, it presents an opportunity for optimization through consolidation. A unified department can eliminate redundant administrative functions, streamline command structures, and cross-train personnel to maximize resource utilization across fire and EMS functions.

Proposed Consolidated Public Safety Model

The new department will be structured to enhance efficiency and effectiveness. Key features of the proposed model include:

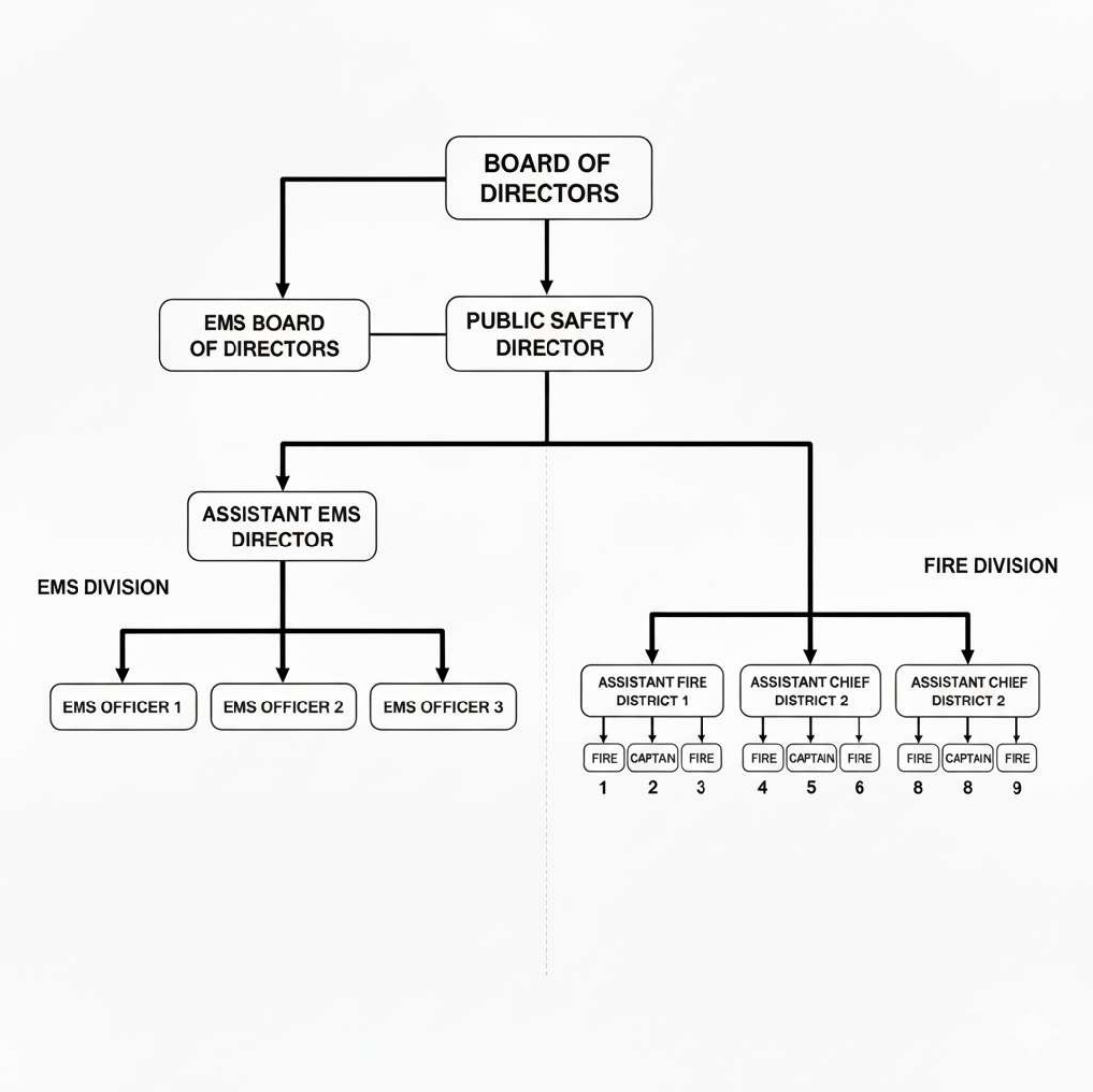
- Unified Command: A single command structure will oversee all fire and EMS operations, ensuring seamless coordination and resource deployment during emergencies.
- Integrated Staffing: Pais personnel will be cross trained to perform both firefighting and EMS duties, allowing for greater flexibility and better response times.
- Enhanced Service Capacity: To meet growing community needs and improve response coverage, the new department will add new full-time positions:
    - Four (4) Firefighter/Paramedics: These individuals will be compensated at a rate 25% higher than the current average employee salary to attract and retain highly skilled talent.

Proposed Organizational Structure

The new department will be led by a single Public Safety Director, who will be responsible for overall strategy and operations. This streamlined command will have clear reporting hierarchy to ensure accountability and efficient decision-making. The structure is as follows:

- Public Safety Director: Serves as the head of the consolidated department.
- Assistant EMS Director: Manages all EMS operations, with officers reporting directly to them.
- Three (3) Assistant Fire Chiefs: Each assistant chief will oversee one of the three fire districts, managing fire-related operations and personnel for their respective area.

This structure is designed to promote unified leadership while retaining specialized oversight for both fire and EMS functions.



Proposed Governance Structure

A Board of Directors will provide strategic oversight and guidance for the consolidated Public Safety Department. This board will be composed of dedicated firefighters and a township official to ensure transparency and accountability. The proposed structure of the board is as follows:

- President
- Vice President
- Secretary

- Treasurer
- Six (6) Directors
- Special Director Seat: One seat will be reserved for a Township Commissioner to ensure direct representation and communication with the governing body.

The board will work to ensure the department operates efficiently, fiscally responsibly, and is aligned with the community's needs and long-term public safety goals.

The EMS board of directors will provide oversight into the daily operations of EMS and more importantly give better representation to the employees of the system; so, they may have a say in how their company operates. This board will be made up of:

- President or VP of the Company
- Public Safety Director
- Secretary
- Two (2) directors [preferred at minimum one to be an employee]

This small board will work in tangent with the main board of directors to ensure the EMS system is able to work in conjunction with the overall goal of the company. They are responsible for handling such things like hiring, terminations, human resources, and representing the employees to the entire company.

Financial Impact and Justification

The consolidation is a strategic investment in the community's safety. The proposed improvements will be funded through a calculated tax increase.

- Each of the three volunteer fire departments currently operates on a separate $140,000 annual budget from the township.
- The current EMS payroll of $2,000,000 will be left untouched in the new system.
- The new tax increase would be implemented solely to cover the new firefighter salaries.

Proposed Budget: A new budget of $1.125 million will be implemented, to cover the operational expenses of the fire departments and the salaries for the new firefighters. A more detailed breakdown of this budget is provided below.

Current Annual EMS Payroll: $2,000,000

Calculated New Payroll Costs:

- Average Current Employee Salary: $2,000,000 / 60 employees = $33,333 per employee.
- Proposed Firefighter Salary (25% increase): $33,333 * 1.25 = $41,666 per firefighter.
- Cost of 16 New Firefighters: To provide 24/7 coverage for the four new firefighter positions, a total of 16 new employees will need to be hired. The cost for these new full-time firefighters is calculated at their proposed salary.
- Cost of 16 New Firefighters: 16 * $41,666 = $666,666

Total Added Payroll Costs: $666,666

Projected Consolidated Department Payroll: $2,000,000 (existing) + $666,666 (new) = $2,666,666

This enhanced payroll will be a key component of the new operational budget. The increase is justified by the need to recruit and retain highly qualified professionals and to expand the department's capacity to serve the community.

Justification for a Tax Increase

A tax increase is necessary to fund this critical public safety upgrade. The financial investment will yield significant long-term benefits for the township, including:

- Improved Response Times: Studies show that consolidated departments can reduce response times by having more efficient resource deployment and unified dispatch.
- Enhanced Fire and EMS Capabilities: The addition of highly trained staff will directly improve the quality of care and safety services provided to residents.
- Administrative Cost Savings: The elimination of redundant administrative functions across the separate departments will result in long-term operational savings that will offset future costs.
- Increased Interoperability: A single department ensures all personnel are trained on the same protocols and equipment, improving effectiveness during large-scale incidents.

Gaining Public Approval and Transparency

Successfully implementing a tax increase requires a proactive and transparent communication strategy focused on demonstrating the tangible public benefit derived from the investment, a concept central to securing citizen support for fiscal policy (Akitoby, 2018).

Key Strategies for Referendum Success:

1. **Emphasize Direct Outcomes, Not Just Costs:** Research shows that voter support increases when the tax revenue is clearly earmarked for specific, high-priority public services (Florida TaxWatch, 2018). The campaign should focus on promoting three core promises this funding will deliver:
    - **Faster, Professional EMS/Rescue Response:** Direct link between the tax and having a paid, cross-trained professional on duty 24/7.
    - **Financial Stewardship:** Highlight the $100,000 annual investment in the Truck Fund, positioning the department as fiscally responsible and moving away from expensive, emergency borrowing for apparatus replacement.
    - **Competitive Compensation:** Clearly articulate that salary increase is necessary to attract and retain the best Firefighter/Paramedics in a competitive regional market (WUSF, 2024).
2. **Establish High Political Trust and Efficacy:** Studies indicate that a high level of political trust is positively associated with support for tax increases, while a *perceived* high tax burden can dampen this trust (Park & Lee, 2022). To counteract potential public skepticism:
    - **Proactive Reporting:** Publish a dedicated annual report detailing how every dollar of the new tax levy is spent, mirroring successful school referendum strategies (Avon Schools, 2025).
3. **Address the Fiscal Trade-Off:** The public often supports lower taxes until faced with the reality of cuts to necessary public services (Boudreau & MacKenzie, 2018). The communication campaign must clearly articulate the "fiscal trade-off". A small tax increase is essential to prevent the inevitable decline and potential collapse of the current, struggling volunteer system, thereby protecting the quality of life and safety that residents currently expect.

Proposed Budget and Funding Strategy

A proposed budget of $1.125 million will cover the operational expenses of the fire departments and the salaries for the new firefighters. This budget is presented with the understanding that any potential shortfall may be covered by EMS revenue and additional fundraising efforts, such as a fund drive or a fish fry.

	2026	2027	2028	2029	2032
Increase from .4 an additional .6	**1 Mil**	**1 Mil**	**1 Mil**	**1 Mil**	**1 Mil**
	$1,125,000.00	$1,125,000.00	$1,125,000.00	$1,125,000.00	$1,125,000.00
Truck Fund	$100,000.00	$100,000.00	$100,000.00	$100,000.00	$100,000.00
Capital Fund	$25,000.00	$25,000.00	$25,000.00	$25,000.00	$25,000.00
Total Capital Expense	**$125,000.00**	**$125,000.00**	**$125,000.00**	**$125,000.00**	**$125,000.00**
Building Budgets	$300,000.00	$300,000.00	$300,000.00	$300,000.00	$300,000.00
Hydrants	$70,000.00	$70,000.00	$70,000.00	$70,000.00	$70,000.00
EOC	$10,000.00	$10,000.00	$10,000.00	$10,000.00	$10,000.00
Fuel x 3	$20,000.00	$20,000.00	$20,000.00	$20,000.00	$20,000.00
Firefighters Salaries	$700,000.00	$700,000.00	$700,000.00	$700,000.00	$700,000.00
Total Expense	**$1,225,000.00**	**$1,225,000.00**	**$1,225,000.00**	**$1,225,000.00**	**$1,225,000.00**
Surplus/Shortfall	-$100,000.00	-$100,000.00	-$100,000.00	-$100,000.00	-$100,000.00

Strategic Fleet Replacement (Truck Fund):

A dedicated annual investment of **$100,000** will be placed into a conservative-style investment account for the Truck Fund. This strategic saving measure is designed to proactively address the high cost of replacing large apparatus, such as the Presto ladder truck, that is estimated to need replaced in 2029 by the fire study.

Year	Make	Type	Replacement Year	Est. Cost
1997	E-One	Kirwan Heights Engine	2022	$0*
1998	Pierce	Rennerdale Engine @ Kirwan	2023	$580,000
		Pumper/Tanker	2024	$650,000
2004/2019	Pierce	Presto Engine	2029	$620,000
2009	Spartan	Kirwan Rescue	2034	$650,000
2009	Pierce	Presto Aerial	2029	$1,000,000
2015	Rosenbauer	Rennerdale 4WD Engine	2035	$550,000
2016	Pierce	Presto Rescue	2041	Eliminate
2019	Sutphen	Rennerdale Engine	2039	$700,000
	TOTAL			$4,750,000
	RESALE VALUE			($205,000)
	NET			$4,545,000

While the fund may not cover the entire cost of the apparatus, it will ensure sufficient funds are available for a substantial down payment, helping the department stay on track with the fire study's recommendation to replace large fleet vehicles every five years. This approach moves the township away from reliance on last-minute, large-scale borrowing for capital expenditures.

Strategic Capital Reserve (Capital Fund):

The annual $25,000 allocated to the Capital Fund is intended to serve as a general reserve for unforeseen capital needs (e.g., unexpected equipment failure, major facility repairs) and non-routine purchases. The funds will be invested, and if needed, can be utilized to cover operational expenses in the event of a severe, temporary budget shortfall. This provides the department with a crucial financial shock absorb, ensuring service continuity without the need to request emergency fund from the township.

Conclusion

The majority of emergency services provided in Collier Township are EMS and rescue-focused, not traditional fire suppression. Continuing with a fragmented, volunteer-dependent system that relies on high-acuity fire resources to address low-acuity medical needs is neither efficient nor sustainable.

This proposal for a Consolidated Public Safety Department is a crucial step to align our services with our actual community needs. By investing the necessary resources, funded through a modest tax increase, we directly achieve three major objectives: professionalizing front-line staff, streamlining command to ensure faster response, and establishing responsible capital funding for future apparatus replacement.

Our leadership urges the Township Commissioners to recognize this proposal as a vital and justified investment that transitions Collier Township from a reactive, outdated public safety model to a proactive and efficient system that prioritizes the safety and well-being of all residents for decades to come.

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