

**Report: Westshore Joint Implementation Committee (JIC) Fire Study Meeting, August 20, 2014
by LWV observers Susan Murnane, Claire Banasiak, Mick Banasiak, and Conda Boyd (Bay Village Chapter)**

This report, which contains observations and selected highlights, is not an official statement of the LWV. Official minutes are prepared by Mayor Clough's office.

Present: **Bay Village** - Mayor Debbie Sutherland, Fire Chief Chris Lyons, Safety Director Scott Thomas; **Fairview Park** - Mayor Elaine Patton, Council Member Peggy Cleary, Fire Chief Tony Raffin; union representative Mike Fink; **Rocky River** - Mayor Pam Bobst, union representative Kevin Bednarski; **Westlake** - Mayor Dennis Clough, Fire Chief James Hughes, Assistant Fire Chief Gregory Mortus, union representative Patrick Graelis

The meeting began at 3:05 and adjourned at 4:20. Attendance was taken and the minutes of the February 24 2014 meeting were approved.

Mayor Sutherland began the meeting by stating that the purpose of the \$100,000 grant is to hire a project manager to oversee the feasibility of implementing the ESCI recommendations, which range from collaborative efforts to operational efficiencies up to possible fire district consolidation. In her understanding, acceptance of the grant did not require consolidation.

Mayor Clough said he understood that a decision on consolidation would not be made until the end of the study.

Mayor Bobst emphasized that the project's purpose was not consolidation, but saving money while maintaining or improving the level of services.

Mayor Patton noted that circumstances have changed since the ESCI study, and she wanted to change the focus of the grant away from full consolidation toward achieving cost savings within the context of the existing shared services, especially the Westshore Central Dispatch Center. The number of municipalities involved in potential consolidation had shrunk from seven to four, and while many of the recommendations in the ESCI report had already been achieved, there were many more to be considered. In her opinion, some aspects of consolidation, such as repositioning assets, do not meet the needs of Fairview Park's citizens. The westshore communities already cooperate extensively to enhance service and can profitably look to do more of that.

Mayor Bobst strongly concurred and felt that incremental operational efficiencies should be pursued before considering consolidation.

The mayors questioned whether they needed a legal opinion as to whether an implementation study focused only on operational efficiencies still fell within the parameters of the grant. Mayor Sutherland said that she believed it did but she would ask Mr. Ebert for his opinion.

Mayor Clough and Mayor Sutherland would prefer to leave the question of consolidation to the end of the study. The extent to which the ESCI study needed updating was discussed. Mayor Clough questioned why they needed an outside project manager if they were not going to consider consolidation. Mayors Patton and Bobst argued that the reason for a project manager — having a disinterested party dedicated to implementation — remained whether the goal was consolidation or operational efficiency.

Fire Chief Raffin argued strongly for deciding whether to include or preclude consolidation as the ultimate goal before hiring the project manager, stating that the contours of the implementation study would change dramatically depending on the desired outcome. The scope of the project must be defined for it to be successful. He also observed that ESCI's draft job description assumed the project manager's job was to implement consolidation.

Mayor Sutherland reminded all participants that the grant was time limited, although an extension could probably be obtained. The mayors, fire chiefs, and union representatives agreed to meet as separate groups to draft job descriptions and exchange the drafts by September 1. The next meeting will be September 3 at 9:30 am in the Westlake Mayor's Conference Room.

In July 2013, the four JIC cities received a \$100,000 grant from the Local Government Innovation Fund for the Westshore Regional Fire District Phase Two Feasibility Study, to be completed by July 2015. The original study, conducted by Emergency Services Consulting International (ESCI), was completed in October 2010. All JIC meetings are open to the public.