

ALLEN COUNTY FIRE & EMS DISTRICT

Office of the Executive Fire Chief

Serving Allen County, Indiana

Community Update: Fire & EMS Unification

Governance, Funding, Staffing, and Response-Time Strategy

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This update summarizes the priorities and progress shared by the leadership team. Our purpose: to eliminate service disparities across Allen County, improve response outcomes, and build a sustainable organization with full operational launch targeted for January 1st, 2027. The following pages outline where we stand and what comes next.

What This Means for Residents

Unification is a governance and funding change, but its purpose is service. For residents, the day-to-day impact is straightforward:

- **Familiar faces:** Continued service from local firefighters, medics, and stations residents.
- **Stronger response:** Improved staffing levels and emergency response capability on day one, with further improvements over time.
- **Consistent standards:** More consistent fire and EMS standards applied across the entire county.
- **Coordinated response:** Better coordination of resources during major emergencies.
- **Volunteers:** Volunteer organizations continue to serve their communities alongside the district.

Why We Are Unifying

Allen County currently has uneven fire and EMS coverage. Roughly 110 of the district's approximately 550 square miles lack full-time service, and some residents in the more rural areas of the county experience response times that stretch beyond 30 minutes. Unification standardizes service countywide, spreads costs across a broader base, and positions the organization to respond faster where delays are most severe.

Some communities in our county simply cannot afford full-time fire and EMS service on their own. Additionally, declining volunteerism has made staffing and coverage harder to sustain under the current fragmented model. By consolidating resources and coordinating operations, the district can deliver more consistent, reliable emergency response than any single legacy department could on its own.

Governance and Legal Framework

The district is being built utilizing state code for interlocal agreements and Indiana home rule authority, in coordination with the Department of Local Government Finance for taxing approval. The County Commissioners have passed a resolution recognizing a nine-member Board of

Trustees. The leadership team has prioritized continuity throughout this transition, drawing on trust and working relationships built across the participating departments over many years. Continuity of the current board assignments is essential to this effort. These individuals have been involved for years, and they carry the institutional knowledge and hands-on experience necessary to oversee a transition of this scale and see it through successfully.

- **Board composition:** Six trustees have been appointed; three council appointments remain pending.
- **Timeline:** Formal board authority begins January 1st, 2027.
- **Compliance:** Legal opinions have been secured to ensure compliance with Indiana's dual-office-holding restrictions, and affected appointments are being resolved accordingly.

Allen County is taking on a challenge that very few communities have attempted at this scale. While there isn't a one-size-fits-all roadmap for this process, we are building on proven public safety principles, years of local experience, and a commitment to transparency every step of the way. We rely on the home rule authority granted to local government entities under Indiana law to act in the best interest of our residents, and we ground those decisions in the governance framework, interlocal agreements, and local ordinances provided under state code. The decisions we make here will help chart the path for other Indiana communities considering the same work.

Budget, Tax Rate, and Funding

Transparency in funding is a core commitment. The fiscal year budget of approximately \$49 million is being posted to the state's Gateway portal for public visibility, alongside an Adaptive Framework already published at allencountyfire.org.

Near-Term Tax Rate

The near-term projected rate is approximately \$0.31 to \$0.32 per \$100 of assessed value. This figure includes roughly \$0.0333 dedicated to an equipment replacement fund, which is outlined by state code and ensures apparatus and gear are rotated and upgraded on schedule.

Longer-Term Projections and Local Income Tax

Longer-term rates depend heavily on how Local Income Tax revenue is distributed. When more LIT is directed toward fire and EMS, the property tax rate trends lower; when less is directed, the rate trends higher. Final taxpayer impact will depend on the council's LIT redistribution decisions, and the district's preference is for LIT to offset property taxes wherever possible.

The district is also monitoring a potential statewide cap near \$0.40 per \$100 of assessed value. Our planning does not assume exceeding that threshold.

Staffing and Operations

Firefighter safety and effective emergency response depend on adequate crew size. In some areas of the county, engines are currently staffed with only two personnel, which is unsafe. The district's goal is four-person per apparatus staffing, consistent with national research showing optimal crew performance around an average of 3.7 personnel.

Hiring Plans

- **Civilian paramedics:** 15 to 20 civilian paramedics, with employment beginning January 1, 2027 and recruitment opening in September 2026.
- **Firefighters:** 8 to 10 firefighters anticipated for the Northwest and Northeast areas by the end of 2026.

Civilian paramedics will strengthen engine staffing and allow firefighters to be reassigned where they are most needed, improving both coverage and capability across the district.

Response-Time Strategy

The district's countywide response-time goal is eight minutes. A four-minute response, while recognized as the national standard, is cost-prohibitive countywide; achieving it everywhere would require a tax rate higher than \$0.60 per \$100 of assessed value, which is not feasible for taxpayers.

The eight-minute target represents a responsible balance between life-safety outcomes and cost. Investments are structured to reduce the worst extremes first, such as travel times reaching 18 minutes in the Monroeville area, with incremental improvements tied directly to staffing gains as they are achieved.

Capital Planning and Station Development

The district has developed a 10-year Capital Improvement Plan estimated at approximately \$45 million, addressing both apparatus replacement and necessary station construction and renovations. Importantly, these capital needs are not a result of unification. They exist regardless of how fire and EMS services are structured. Unification provides an opportunity to strategically plan for these expenses, coordinate capital investments, and better absorb these costs over time.

Several existing stations were not originally designed or constructed to support full-time staffing and will require renovation or replacement as staffing models evolve. In addition, apparatus replacement represents a significant and increasingly volatile expense. Current estimates place fire engines at approximately \$1.0 to \$1.5 million each, while ladder trucks can cost approximately \$2.5 to \$3.0 million each.

As part of the long-term capital strategy, it has also been discussed that the district could seek County General Fund support for certain capital projects, which could help offset the amount that must ultimately be funded directly by district taxpayers.

The goal of the 10-year plan is to move away from reacting to major capital expenses as they occur and instead establish a predictable, responsible replacement and construction schedule that protects service delivery while minimizing the financial impact on taxpayers.

A GIS survey is underway to identify optimal station locations and coverage gaps, with completion expected by the end of August 2026. New station construction, estimated at \$4 to \$6 million, will be guided by that data rather than assumption. Existing facilities are being assessed for suitability, with temporary solutions planned where stations were not originally built to house full-time staff.

Fiscal Responsibility

Cost discipline starts at the top. The Executive Fire Chief has declined 2026 district health insurance, saving approximately \$18,000, and declined purchasing a new district vehicle in favor of mileage reimbursement. Those 2026 savings are being redirected into unification work, including a GIS analysis.

Beyond leadership choices, the district is evaluating shared purchasing, coordinated fleet management, standardized equipment, and consolidated administrative functions to reduce duplication and maximize taxpayer value.

The district begins from a strong financial position with minimal existing debt. The preference is to use savings to offset capital costs rather than bonding or borrowing wherever feasible, and any future borrowing would be evaluated carefully.

How We Will Measure Success

Accountability requires measurable results. The district will track and publicly report on the following:

- **Coverage:** Reduction in areas experiencing extended response times.
- **Staffing:** Increased number of apparatus staffed with four personnel.
- **Response:** Improved fire and EMS response times countywide.
- **Equity:** Reduced differences in service between rural and urban areas.
- **Sustainability:** Financial resilience toward apparatus replacement and facility improvements.
- **Transparency:** An annual public report of these key performance indicators.

Transparency and Community Engagement

The district is committed to open, documented communication with residents and elected officials. Our Adaptive Framework, which lays out exactly how your fire and EMS district will operate, was provided to every elected official in April 2026, and each was asked to weigh in with changes or recommendations. Budget materials, board biographies, hiring notices, and the Adaptive Framework are and will be available at allencountyfire.org.

Public town halls are being held across communities throughout August 2026 and into 2027. The district is expanding its social media presence, monitoring and responding to questions on its Facebook page, and working with local newspapers, electronic signage, and community channels to reach residents wherever they are. We welcome the community's help in sharing accurate information.

Frequently Asked Questions

Will my local fire station close?

No station closure decisions or discussions have been made as part of unification. Facility decisions will be driven by service needs and the GIS analysis currently underway.

Will firefighters or medics lose their jobs?

No. The goal is to strengthen and stabilize staffing levels across the county, not to reduce emergency response personnel. This includes our volunteers, who continue to serve their communities.

How are tax rate increases controlled without a tax cap?

The Allen County Fire & EMS District cannot raise taxes on its own. Each year, it must submit a public budget that justifies its funding needs. The Allen County Council reviews and approves the district's budget, levy, and tax rate in public hearings, and the Indiana Department of Local Government Finance certifies the final rates. Public transparency, taxpayer input, County Council oversight, and state review all work together to prevent excessive tax increases.

Will residents still be served by their volunteer departments?

Yes. Volunteer organizations continue to serve residents alongside the district. Unification is designed to support and coordinate with them, not replace them.

Looking Ahead

The path to January 1, 2027 is clear. Governance compliance is being finalized, the budget is being posted publicly, hiring is opening this fall, and data-driven capital planning is underway. The district's commitment throughout is to accuracy, transparency, and a service model that protects every resident of Allen County, regardless of where they live.

Every resident deserves timely and professional emergency response regardless of their ZIP code or township. The Allen County Fire & EMS District is committed to building a sustainable organization that delivers equitable service, protects taxpayers, and enhances public safety for generations to come.

Residents with questions are encouraged to visit allencountyfire.org, attend an upcoming town hall, or reach out directly to the Office of the Executive Fire Chief at info@allencountyfire.org.