

ALLEN COUNTY FIRE & EMS DISTRICT (ACFEMSD)

Executive Summary — Progress Update

Prepared for the Allen County Commissioners, County Council, & Oversight Committee

July 2026 thru September 2026

Office of the Executive Fire Chief • Issued September 2026

Posted publicly at allencountyfire.org • info@allencountyfire.org

Overview

On July 10, 2026, the Allen County Commissioners adopted the unification resolution and the legal name change, establishing the Northeast Allen County Fire Protection District as the surviving entity renamed the Allen County Fire & EMS District. With that vote, the work shifted from securing agreement to executing a launch.

Three efforts defined the period: adoption of the first consolidated district budget, seating and orientation of the Board of Fire Trustees, and completion of the leadership selection process down through the civilian and 40-hour command ranks. Alongside those, the district closed out its response-time and coverage analysis, opened hiring for the 2027 workforce, and began resolving the legacy liabilities that would otherwise cross into the new organization on January 1.

This summary reports what has been finalized since the April thru June 2026 update provided to the Allen County Commissioners, County Council, and Oversight Committee. It outlines what remains in progress, the risks leadership is actively managing, and the immediate next steps ahead of the January 1, 2027 operational go-live.

Key Milestones Accomplished

Organizational Formation & Governance

- **Unification resolution adopted.** The Commissioners voted July 10, 2026 to unify Allen County fire and EMS service and approve the legal name change under Ordinance 07-10-26-11. Associated DEA, EMS, and state paperwork followed. This item is complete.
- **No reversion is available.** Effective January 1, 2027, Northwest, West Central, and Southwest merge into the surviving district and cease to exist as separate entities, and the Woodburn-New Haven Fire & EMS Protection Territory, known locally as East Central, dissolves because every participating unit withdrew under IC 36-8-19-13. Under IC 36-8-19-15, the only reversion the statute provides is title to real property returning to the unit that transferred it; nothing in the chapter restores a dissolved territory, and nothing restores a merged district. Those resolutions and ordinances were adopted in March and April 2026 with a fixed January 1, 2027 effective date, and no budget action reverses them. Without a funded district there is no successor entity for the historical Northeast, Northwest, West Central, Southwest, or Territory service areas, or for the Jackson, Madison, and Monroe Township communities of southeast Allen County including Monroeville, and no full-time emergency protection would be provided to them.
- **Board of Fire Trustees seated.** Six Commissioner-appointed trustees were appointed in July 2026 and are seated and active: Bob Byrd, Garry Morr, Larry Owen, Mike Messman, Brian Minich, and Barry Kunkle. The three Council-appointed seats were filled in September 2026 and will be seated upon swearing in, completing the nine-member board contemplated under IC 36-8-11.
- **Inaugural board business conducted.** The six seated trustees held the board's first working meeting on August 31, 2026 at Citizens Square to act on the 2027 budget, meeting the statutory September 2 deadline for submission to County Council. Notice of the meeting, stating date, time, location, and business to be conducted, was distributed to the media in advance.
- **Open Door Law compliance protocols established.** Meeting practices were set to prevent an unintended quorum outside a publicly noticed meeting, including a rotation schedule for standing at large discussions. Executive session use has been scoped to permitted subjects with required Indiana Code citations.

- **Trustee eligibility resolved.** The dual-office-holding question under Article 2, Section 9 of the Indiana Constitution and IC 36-8-11-12(b) was addressed through a legal opinion issued by district counsel Christopher Nusbaum of Carson LLP. Affected appointments are being resolved accordingly.
- **Board bylaws drafted.** Unified bylaws are in committee review, covering roles and responsibilities, spending limits, credit card policy, purchasing, and whistleblower protections. Fiscal sections remain under review by the fiscal officer.
- **Legal foundation verified.** Merger authority under Anderson v. Gaudin, IC 36-8-11-4, and Indiana home rule is confirmed and reflected consistently throughout the formation documents. Interlocal agreement execution under IC 36-1-7 is documented.
- **Merit system in development.** A county merit system is being drafted with three Merit Board representatives to be selected before year-end 2026.
- **CFAI accreditation.** Accreditation remains the long-term roadmap for the organization and continues to shape strategic planning and measurement design.

Financial Foundation

- **2027 consolidated budget adopted.** The Board of Fire Trustees approved a preliminary 2027 budget of \$48,988,990, an increase of approximately \$677,000, or 1.4 percent, over the combined operating and CUM budgets of the legacy districts and territory. The budget was posted to the state's Gateway portal on August 14, 2026 and submitted to County Council on September 2, 2026, per state code, with the public hearing set for September 17, 2026.
- **Baker Tilly analysis incorporated.** The maximum levy modeling and Local Income Tax scenario work is complete and reflected in the certified budget position.
- **Near-term rate established.** The blended levy rate target for 2027 is approximately \$0.31 to \$0.32 per \$100 of net assessed value, including roughly \$0.0333 dedicated to equipment replacement. Estimated impact is approximately \$880 per year on a \$275,000 home outside the City of Fort Wayne. Future planning does not assume exceeding the potential statewide cap near \$0.40.
- **DLGF levy appeal filed.** The maximum levy appeal under IC 6-1.1-18.5-12 has been filed and is being processed ahead of the October 2026 deadline. The board will be notified immediately upon receipt.
- **State Board of Accounts audit requested.** A request has been made for SBOA to audit the remaining four districts, closing out the departmental audit work begun in the prior period.
- **Liquidity planning underway.** A tax anticipation loan is being discussed, to be drawn only if needed, along with a December tax draw calculation covering the first six months of 2027.
- **Fiscal integration completed.** Payroll and HR alignment and standardized financial reporting are in place across all districts and the territory. IT, HR, fiscal, and supply functions are supported through consultants rather than full time positions, holding down 2027 cost.

Leadership & Command Structure

- **Command selection process completed.** Interviews were held for all 40-hour leadership and civilian positions. Each candidate completed a formal leadership and personality assessment paired with a structured interview, giving every candidate the opportunity to speak to their own experience and history. Panels included civilians, elected officials, and district representatives.
- **2027 organizational chart.** The leadership chart consists of approximately 26 command positions plus four full-time and three part-time civilian roles. Positions filled through the selection process are listed below.
- **Training command positions in final selection.** The District Chief of Fire Training and Assistant Chief of Training and Development postings drew 14 applicants, including out-of-state candidates. Interviews were conducted the second week of September with board participation and a remote option for distant candidates.

- **Officer placement strategy set.** The district is short approximately ten officers. Leadership adopted managed placement rather than open rebid, matching officer for officer and paramedic for paramedic, with battalion chiefs holding preference conversations to address geographic placement. A countywide captain assessment followed by a lieutenant assessment will build the promotional and shift-commander lists.
- **Battalion chief and shift commander structure.** Battalion chief and officer placements are being finalized, including the fifteenth battalion chief position that determines shift commander assignments. Individual briefings for the battalion chiefs and three shift commanders are planned ahead of the transition.

Staffing, Hiring & Workforce Transition

- **Minimum manning model set.** The target staffing level is 65 full-time personnel, with a minimum of three personnel per station as the core standard. Part-time staff are additive to fill daily schedule gaps and are not counted toward the 65 for budgeting purposes. Seasonal manning held at 65 through July and stepped to 67 on August 1 with the incoming recruit class.
- **Southeast Allen County staffing increased.** The adopted plan staffs three per station, six total, to guarantee a crew.
- **Lateral academy underway.** Ten lateral candidates began the lateral academy on September 14, 2026, with placement in the engine house by October 5.
- **Civilian paramedic program launched.** Applications released in early September 2026, with hiring in October and offers in early November following budget certification. The district anticipates 15 to 20 civilian paramedics, with employment beginning January 1, 2027. Part-time hiring before January is under consideration to complete training ahead of the transition. Placing civilian paramedics across the county returns firefighters to engine assignments.
- **Firefighter hiring.** Ten firefighters are anticipated for 2027.
- **Hiring standards strengthened.** Firefighter onboarding now includes questionnaires and leadership and personality assessments, with CPAT required as a minimum standard and a one-year probationary period applied to all new hires.
- **Vacation and personal time banks being zeroed out.** Banked leave will not roll into 2027 at time-and-a-half. The district is resolving all balances before year-end through a combination of scheduled time off and payout, within daily manpower limits, so the new organization does not inherit the liability. This reduces financial exposure to Allen County Fire & EMS and clears the operational staffing overhang that would otherwise compete with January staffing. Implementation requires salary ordinance changes and budget reallocation, and employees with pre-planned 2027 travel have been asked to notify leadership early so county contract arrangements can be applied.
- **Sick leave and occurrence policy drafted.** A draft policy is in board review: an occurrence limit on a rolling twelve months, leave duration of up to six months per occurrence extendable to a year with board approval, documentation requirements consistent with current practice, concurrent FMLA designation, and defined alternate-duty standards. The occurrence cap and FMLA threshold are being finalized.
- **Part-time & Volunteer workforce structure.** Pay rates and a formal availability and assignment process are being established before slots are offered.

Systems, Accountability & Change Management

- **Task management system migrated.** The standalone platform used to track division-level items has been transitioned into the Microsoft environment, consolidating tracking with the district's email, calendar, and document infrastructure. Approximately 250 Microsoft 365 licenses are budgeted.
- **Change management system in use.** The structured change and decision tracking system is in regular use across divisions, with email notification on item uploads and a dashboard tracking receipt, positions, approvals, and information needs. It supplements, and does not replace, official meetings and votes.

- **Records and technology transitions scheduled.** The ESO records platform implementation begins now with a November start; current legacy contracts end October 31, 2026 and billing has been cut off after that date to prevent double billing. Ambulance billing transitions to ABS at year-end. Scheduling implementation is underway with payroll integration and user onboarding, and a training compliance platform is under evaluation.
- **Dispatch and field technology.** Duty chief authority to dispatch units directly is being pursued with the dispatch center. Mobile connectivity devices are being procured ahead of announced price increases, with reliability issues under active evaluation.

Operations, EMS & Logistics

- **Response-time and coverage analysis completed.** The DLZ GIS study has been submitted, with findings delivered in September 2026, and an independent internal evaluation was produced for comparison, supported by the supplemental \$21,500 coverage analysis. Current modeling shows four, eight, and twelve minute coverage by road speed, identifies gaps along rail and river corridors, and flags a coverage gap near Churubusco warranting evaluation of a potential northwest station.
- **Response-time strategy set.** The countywide goal is an eight-minute response. A four-minute response, while the national standard, would require a rate above \$0.60 per \$100 of assessed value and is not feasible for taxpayers. Investment is sequenced to reduce the worst extremes first, including travel times reaching eighteen minutes in the Monroeville area.
- **Standing orders and protocols finalized.** Countywide standing orders are complete in content, printed copies were circulated for review with feedback closed August 28, and a testing and sign-off platform is being built for completion by January 1, 2027. Medical direction is in place under the lead and deputy medical directors appointed in the prior period.
- **Capital improvement plan refined.** The ten-year capital improvement projection is approximately \$45 million covering apparatus, renovations, and new construction, with apparatus representing the majority of the cost. The cumulative fund is budgeted at nearly \$6 million with revenue projected at \$4.5 million next year. Apparatus service life is being extended for lower-mileage, well-maintained units where appropriate.
- **Fleet and facilities strategy.** The district is considering an in-house mobile oil-change program, retaining skilled part-time maintenance capacity, rebuilding a live shared fleet inventory, and redoing station audits to drive retain and retire equipment decisions.
- **Community Risk Reduction program.** A CRR document integrating public education, fire investigations, and code enforcement is in adoption review, with accreditation-aligned measurement structure and functional separation between code enforcement and fire investigation lanes.
- **Asset transfer and township agreements.** Township contracts governing asset transfer, including retention or lease of apparatus, are underway with counsel.
- **Allen County Cares subscription program.** The subscription program relaunch is targeted for mid-September with costs split evenly among districts. Because Allen County cannot receive the funds directly, a segregated accounting line under East Central tracks revenue separately until year-end transfer, with conservative revenue projections.

Communications

- **Public communication meeting volume.** In 2026 the district has held or participated in eleven public meetings across Allen County. Five were district-hosted public meetings and town halls: southeast Allen County public meetings in Monroeville on March 16, 2026 and at Hoagland Fire and Rescue on March 23, 2026, a the west central quadrant town hall in Arcola on April 8th, the northwest quadrant town hall in Huntertown on August 13, 2026, and the northeast quadrant town hall at the Cedarville Pavilion in Leo on September 3, 2026. Five were Allen County Commissioners' Community Conversations, at which the district staffed a table alongside county departments and answered residents' questions directly: Fox Island on August 4, the Woodburn Community Center on August 11, St. Joseph Township Hall on August 18, the New

Haven Community Center on August 25, and the Hanauer Reserve on September 1, 2026. One was a meeting with the public and volunteer organizations on July 16, 2026 to discuss the transition. Additional town halls will be scheduled monthly through the January 1 launch and into 2027, and materials including QR code sheets and handouts are distributed.

- **Written community update published.** Quarterly overviews posted on our website under Executive Chief updates, a full community update covering governance, funding, staffing, and response-time strategy was issued August 16, 2026 and posted publicly, along with the Adaptive Framework, budget materials, board biographies, and hiring notices at allencountyfire.org.
- **Internal communications cadence established.** Weekly video updates to firefighters began August 21, 2026.
- **County Council/County Commissioners.** The district has kept County Council and the Commissioners informed throughout consolidation and has actively sought members' input. Since the Executive Fire Chief took office in April 2026, leadership has sent multiple written updates addressed to members, including a quarterly executive summary, the Adaptive Framework, public engagement updates, and the 2027 budget projections. Individual meetings have been offered to every member and several have been held, and communication has carried an open invitation to contact Chief Bush or Deputy Chief Boren directly. Beyond written updates, the district has held meetings every two weeks throughout consolidation that have included the County Council President, a County Commissioner, district and territory representatives, fire representatives, fiscal representatives, legal counsel, and members of the public, to work through unification efforts and decisions on district processes and the budget.
- **Social media.** The district maintains an active social media plan that keeps residents informed of ongoing district information, including budget updates, hiring notices, and public meeting announcements, posted on a regular cadence across Facebook and Instagram. Posts direct residents to allencountyfire.org for full documents and to info@allencountyfire.org for direct questions.

Command Positions Filled

The following positions have been filled through the district's leadership selection process. Each individual participated in a detailed leadership and personality assessment and a structured interview that included civilians, elected officials, and district representatives. Positions shown as open were posted externally and are in final selection.

Position	Officer
Executive Office	
Executive Fire Chief	Jeremy Bush
Deputy Chief	Robert Boren
District Chief of Health & Safety	Nate Thompson
Executive Assistant / Payroll Oversight (civilian)	Cheryl Degler
Public Information Officer (civilian)	Christina Perez
Fiscal Officer Assistant (civilian)	Brett Wygant
Administrative Assistant / ARAP (civilian)	Shawonna Harmon
Payroll Assistant (civilian)	Kendra Rivera
Administrative Assistant / HR Assistant (civilian)	Shannon Doswell
EMS Billing / HR (civilian)	Chris Camp
EMS & Personnel Development	
Division Chief of EMS & Personnel Development	Doug Call

Position	Officer
Assistant Chief of EMS & Standards	Tyler Martin
District Chief of EMS	Barb Stelzer
District Chief of EMS Training	Bryan Peterson
Captain of EMS	Mitch Maisonneuve
Captain of Fire Training	Jim Noll
Captain of EMS Training	Ben Masten
Captain of EMS Training	Julie Ehle
Assistant Chief of Training & Development	Open — interviews held September 2026
District Chief of Fire Training	Open — interviews held September 2026
Logistics & Emergency Resources	
Division Chief of Logistics & Emergency Resources	Gale Stelzer II
Assistant Chief of Logistics	Steve Thurber
District Chief of Narcotics & EMS Supplies	Troy Holzinger
District Chief of Asset Management	TJ Goodwin
Prevention & Public Education	
Division Chief of Prevention & Public Education	Don Patnoudé
Fire Marshal	Brian Armstrong
District Chief of Investigations	Brad Hite
Captain of Investigations	Jeff McBride
Captain of Public Education	Mike Feely
Captain of Public Education	Josh Hale
Captain Inspector	Mark Hoepfner
Operations & Deployment	
Division Chief of Operations & Deployment	Jeff Berning
Assistant Chief of Operations	Rob Roy

Key Risks Evaluated & Recognized

The district's planning is grounded in a clear assessment of the risks facing Fire & EMS service in Allen County. The most significant risks identified and actively managed include:

- **Firefighter safety and staffing** — maintaining safe staffing levels across a 550-square-mile area, where extended response intervals and insufficient staffing levels increase risk to responders and the public. The district remains short approximately ten officers, and the move to a three-person minimum per station is the near-term mitigation.
- **Citizen safety** — in some areas of Allen County, response times have significantly exceeded nationally recognized benchmarks, and these delays can contribute to diminished patient outcomes in time-sensitive emergencies. Completed GIS modeling now quantifies where those gaps fall.
- **Declining volunteer availability** — shrinking volunteer ranks against rising call volume threaten coverage, particularly in southeast Allen County.

- **EMS capacity strain** — growing EMS demand competes with safe fire staffing; the Civilian Paramedic Program is the primary mitigation, with recruitment now open and employment beginning January 1, 2027.
- **Fiscal and funding risk** — reliable and consistent emergency response coverage and long-term sustainability depend on factors partly outside district control, including state legislation, Allen County Council tax allocation, the pending DLGF determination, Local Income Tax distribution decisions, and assessed-value growth.
- **Operational interoperability** — variation in training and protocols across districts creates risk during incidents. Unified standing orders, a common records platform, and a single scheduling system are the mitigations now in implementation.
- **Legal and compliance** — standardizing policies, reporting, and asset and debt assignment across districts to meet state, OSHA, and NFPA standards.
- **Public confidence and information accuracy** — inaccurate information circulating through unofficial channels has created avoidable anxiety among personnel and confusion among residents. The district is countering it through documented public reporting, a defined social media policy and response posture, and direct internal and external communication.

Next Steps

- Complete the County Council budget process, including the September 17, 2026 public hearing, and secure certification of the 2027 budget and levy.
- Close out the DLGF maximum levy appeal ahead of the October 2026 deadline and act on the written rate determination when received.
- Swear in the three council-appointed trustee positions and adopt the unified board bylaws.
- Hold the next Board of Fire Trustees meeting on September 28, 2026, with public notice posted in advance.
- Finalize the training command positions and complete battalion chief, shift commander, and officer placements, followed by the countywide captain and lieutenant assessments.
- Complete the civilian paramedic and firefighter hiring cycles, with offers in early November and employment beginning January 1, 2027.
- Zero out vacation and personal time banks before December 31, 2026 through scheduled time off and payout, and process the salary ordinance changes and budget reallocations required to fund it.
- Finalize and publish the sick leave and occurrence policy, and establish the county merit system with three Merit Board representatives selected before year-end.
- Integrate the GIS findings into the January 1 deployment plan and the ten-year capital improvement plan, including evaluation of a potential northeast station.
- Complete the records, billing, and scheduling platform transitions and the testing and sign-off workflow for countywide standing orders by January 1, 2027.
- Execute the township asset transfer agreements and complete station audits and fleet inventory.
- Continue public engagement through quadrant town halls, the district website, social media, and community outreach through the January 1 launch.
- Next Oversight Update — December 2026.