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OPINION

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Now it is time for cities to work together

In these tough economic times, cities especially need to find ways to operate more efficiently. With that in mind, efforts by the Westshore Council of Governments to explore ways of combining fire fighting and emergency medical services among the seven communities could not be more timely.

And even better is word that the project won a \$100,000 grant from the Fund for Economic Future. The cash will help fund a study to examine ways the cities can collaborate on services and equipment. The fact that the project beat out 65 other proposals in 16 counties indicates officials here are on the right track. The council will use the grant money to pay for most of a study by Emergency Service Consulting, which is expected to be finished by December.

The study will examine ways in which cities can integrate staffing, equipment, facilities, communications and personnel as well as risk and fiscal analyses and legal considerations. It is possible that there could be less duplication and operations could be streamlined in all the cities. This could improve the bottom line for every city involved — something which should make taxpayers happy.

EDITORIAL

And people should remember this is not a completely new idea. Westshore Council of Government members — Bay Village, Fairview Park, Lakewood, North Olmsted, North Ridgeville, Rocky River and Westlake — already share a number of operations, including a hazardous material rescue team and a fire investigation team.

North Olmsted Safety Director Lisa Thomas knows people are fearful that service will decline, and knows it will take public education to show how this can be a viable plan.

There is no need to rush to combine fire and EMS services, but in these difficult economic times it is imperative for officials to keep looking for ways to cut costs while still maintaining residents' safety.

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