

FIRE SERVICES REPORT 2020

ST. TAMMANY PARISH, LOUISIANA

ST. TAMMANY FIRE CHIEFS ASSOCIATION

www.STFCA.org



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Executive Summary

Whether serving in local government, living here, or owning a business here – “if you reflect on the changes you have witnessed, you will agree that the speed of life has transformed dramatically. A reflective look shows just how much the fire and emergency services have evolved in just the last two decades. From the equipment in use, new applications in technology, changes in the workforce, use of social media, the speed of information, and the shift and increase in the calls responded to -- all have made for a dramatic difference.”¹

“Beyond the obvious need of protecting lives and property from fire and other hazards, today’s fire and emergency services organizations play a vital role in sustaining the overall economic vitality of their communities”². “The negative effects of unmitigated fires and other hazards can translate to the broader public policy environment through unrealized tax revenues, difficulty in attracting new businesses, reduced property values and other negative community impacts”³.

For these reasons and more it is essential that government provide the most cost-efficient all-hazards protection for St. Tammany Parish possible. This must be done based on community size, population distribution, population density, and development type. Through the use of data, national consensus standards, best practices, and the Fire Suppression Rating Schedule (FSRS), used by Property Insurance Association of Louisiana (PIAL), a community risk assessment can be created. With these factors calculated a needs assessment can be determined, responsible decisions can be made balancing services, cost, and community stakeholder expectations while adequately funding the needs of the fire service. The St. Tammany Parish Fire Chiefs Association (STFCA) was created to bring the fire departments of St. Tammany Parish together to share knowledge, resources, plan for the future, and improve public safety and quality of life. The purpose of this report is to review the progress of the STFCA strategic goals developed through 2014 and formally adopted in 2015, review and report on the current fire and emergency services departments in St. Tammany Parish, and compare them regionally in Louisiana. Lastly, review considerations for the future to help achieve the best and most cost-effective fire and emergency services for the citizens and stakeholders of St. Tammany Parish.

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History

On January 14th, 2014 the Fire Chiefs of St. Tammany Parish and the City of Covington formally met to discuss the state of Fire and Emergency services in the parish; from this meeting an outline for a strategic plan was created. Over the next four months fire officials and subject matter experts met by committee to create a plan to address the pressing issues involving the fire service in St. Tammany Parish. From these meetings and the great body of work that came from them, the inspiration to formally unite as a parish wide association of Fire Chiefs developed. On July 8th, 2014 The St. Tammany Fire Chiefs Association was formed, officers were elected and by-laws officially adopted⁴. By early 2015 a formal strategic plan was created and the work to accomplish the established goals began⁵. The St. Tammany Fire Chief's Association is a group of fire service professionals representing each of the thirteen fire departments in St. Tammany Parish. The St. Tammany Fire Chiefs Association is a perpetual non-profit corporation of Louisiana whose objectives include:

1. To promote the science and methods of fire prevention, fire protection, emergency medical services, rescue and hazardous materials response in St. Tammany Parish.
2. To make this information available to the fire service organizations of St. Tammany Parish.
3. To participate in any activity as an Association in the interest of preventing the loss of life and property by fire or any other disaster and to further the quality of all emergency services in St. Tammany Parish.
4. To establish a closer bond and understanding among the various members of the Association.
5. To promote and encourage participation and cooperation of all St. Tammany Parish agencies and government, municipal agencies and government, community organizations, business organizations and all other entities and citizens who seek to improve the quality of life in the parish and who will work to implement and further develop the Association's Strategic Plan.

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The St. Tammany Fire Chiefs Association’s purpose is to become the premier fire and emergency service model by reducing millage rates, improving services, and achieving efficiencies. This will be accomplished by bringing fire and emergency services together to efficiently and effectively ensure the safety of our community while protecting our quality of life.

Goals and Objectives

“To become the premier fire and emergency service model by improving services and achieving efficiencies.”

OBJECTIVE 1

Create a tax fairness plan, while promoting a positive economic impact and maintaining necessary funding.

OBJECTIVE 2

Improve existing fire services and operational efficiencies through standardized training, equipment and response guidelines.

OBJECTIVE 3

Provide peer and Fire Board assistance through STFCA.

The following is a summary of efforts to accomplish Objective 1, creating a tax fairness plan, while promoting a positive economic impact and maintaining necessary funding found in the 2015 strategic plan:

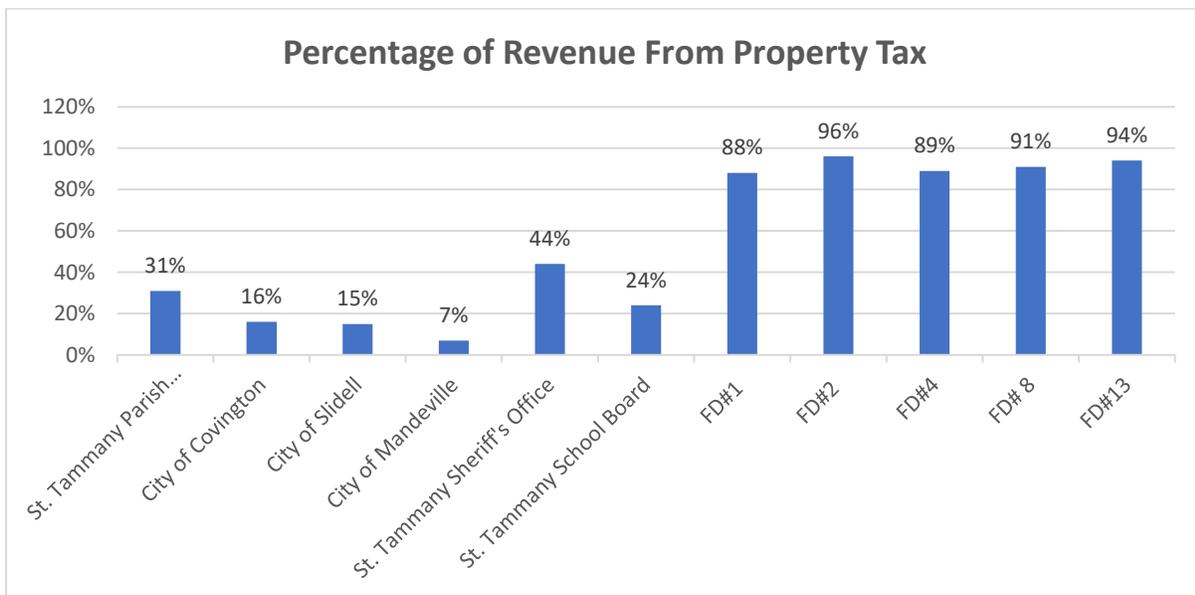
“The STFCA studied several options; such as sales tax, electric meter fees, parcel fees, and the removal of the homestead exemption for fire service.”

Objective 1 creating a tax fairness plan, while promoting a positive economic impact and maintaining necessary funding was at the forefront of the STFCA agenda. No issue has been a bigger challenge to the mission of protecting life, property, and the environment from fire and other hazards than adequate funding. There has been considerable political and business organization pressure to roll-back millages without addressing the shortfalls in funding roll-backs can produce. The STFCA studied several options; such as sales tax, electric meter fees,

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parcel fees, and the removal of the homestead exemption for fire service. The only realistic option was the parcel fee; however, parcel fees do not adjust for inflation and create the continued need of millage roll-forwards that are such a source of contention. Regardless, parcel fees were pursued since this was the only option available that did not require legislation, a constitutional amendment or an uncooperative public service commission. Three fire districts attempted to pass parcel fees in lieu of millage increases, all three failed. At the same time, millage renewals and roll-forwards were generally accepted by the voting public. All fire district millage renewals have passed by large margins and very few citizens have opposed roll-forwards despite considerable efforts by some elected leaders and business groups to garner opposition. The Fire Chiefs Association recognizes the need to keep millage rates low but the only readily available alternative funding option was rejected by voters. To understand the challenge fire departments' face regarding the current funding structure, a better understanding of the other parish governmental essential services funding by comparison is required. The following charts illustrate the dependence on each essential parish government agency as well as the three largest municipalities on millage, sales tax, and other funding sources.⁶ Note that only fire districts are nearly exclusively dependent on ad valorem property tax (millages).





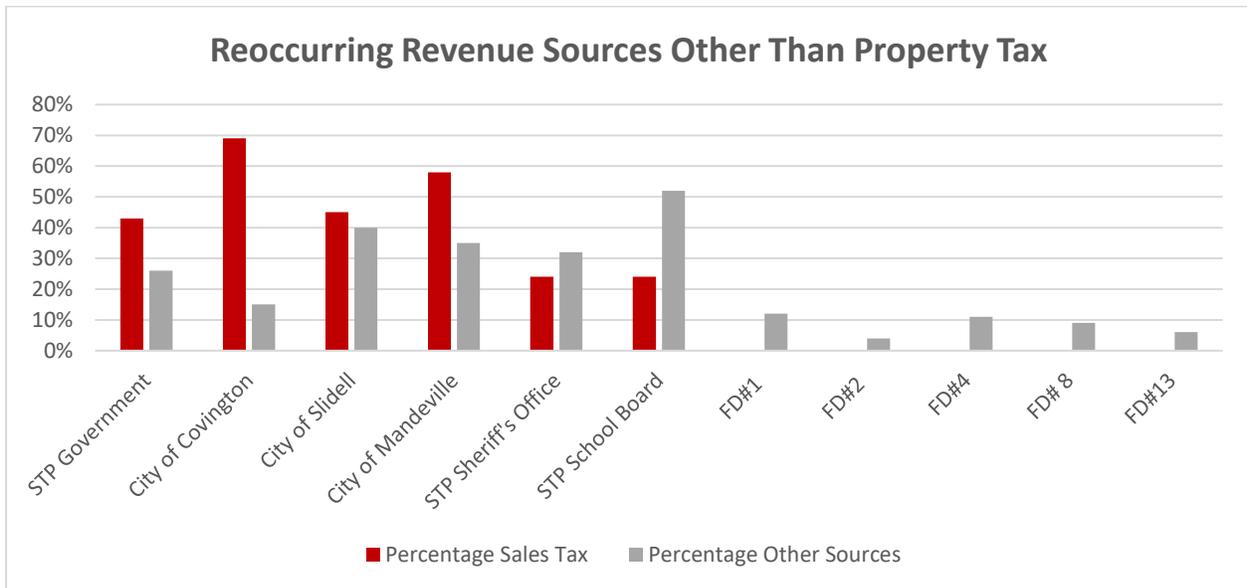
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“Never adjusting millages for inflationary cost erodes services; in addition, using new growth to fund inflation under-funds additional services needed...”

Although property taxes collected on a millage generally increase with nonexempt new community growth, this does not account for inflation. As the cost of living increases with inflation, property values generally increase as well. Reassessment allows a reset of the tax base which when needed can give taxing authorities an adjustment for inflation. This important provision is essential at times to continue to meet the service demands of the community.

Never adjusting millages for inflationary cost erodes services; in addition, using new growth to fund inflation under-funds additional services needed to meet community growth demands.

The next chart shows the percentage of sales tax revenue and other reoccurring revenue by taxing body. Note that other sources for fire districts is minimal and sales tax is nonexistent.



“Those agencies who receive both millage and sales tax are at an advantage...”

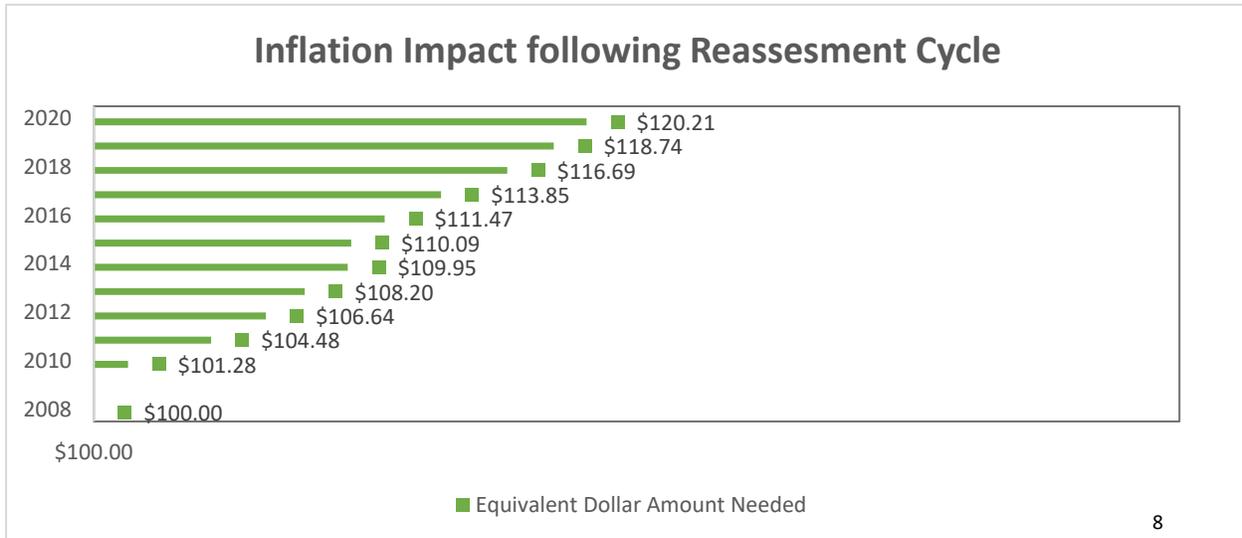
Those agencies who receive both millage and sales tax are at an advantage in two important ways: sales tax adjusts with inflation and growth real time and there is no delay in receipts. This reduces the reliance on millage and particularly the need to address increased costs due to inflation using the roll-forward after reassessment. Secondly, voter approved sales tax rates do

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not adjust or roll-back. To better illustrate how inflation can impact budgets consider the following cumulative inflation impact following a 4-year reassessment pattern:

\$100.00 from 2008 is worth only \$80.00 in 2020 buying power?



“For those taxing bodies funded by only property tax such as fire districts, the results of inflation can be financially severe.”

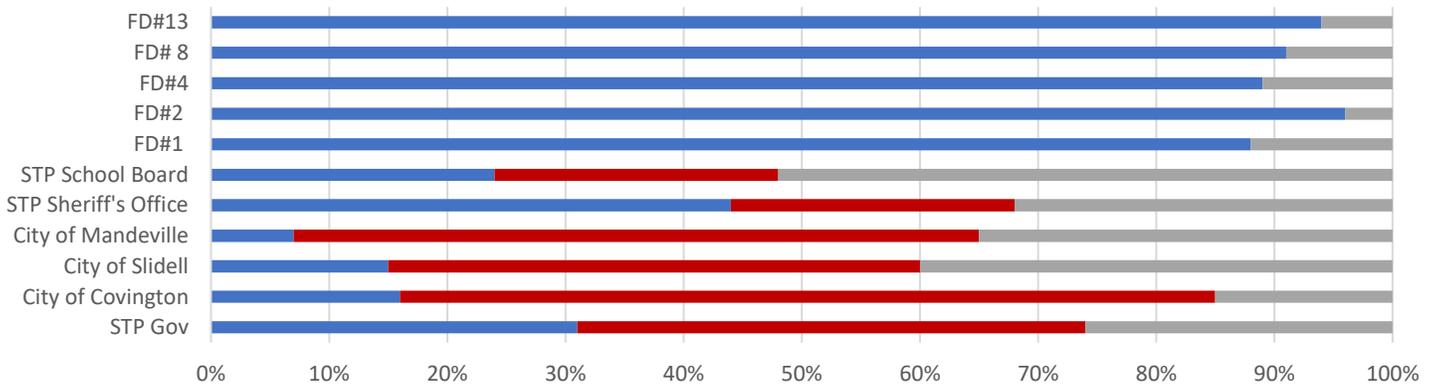
Although national inflation rates are not a precise measure of local inflationary impact, it provides a uniformed measure of cost increase for the same goods and services over time. For those taxing bodies funded by only property tax such as fire districts, the results of inflation can be financially severe. Agencies who solely operate on millage receive funding a year after providing services, not real time, and have only the roll-forward every four years to cover increased inflationary costs. Additionally, voter approved millage rates are lost if not rolled-up and collected at some point between reassessment. When this occurs, it further reduces the voter approved tax rate that can be collected over time. Although many millage funded taxing bodies will see growth in revenue from new development, that growth may not even cover the costs required to support additional needed services. Without a roll-forward these agencies will be impacted by inflation and will have to use new money from growth to cover inflationary costs. Using new growth to cover inflation creates a deficit in services that is cumulative over time. It is tantamount to using borrowed money to live on or to operate a business, eventually the borrowed money runs out (growth stops). Once this occurs not only is there no way to

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cover increased costs but the services that are already deficient are generally cut because growth was not addressed with the revenue it brought. This results in a much more dramatic impact if already inadequate services are further reduced to make up for the created deficit from using growth to cover inflation. History clearly shows it is much more expensive to try and play catch up then to just adequately fund the needed services in the first place. The next chart clearly illustrates the dependance fire departments have on property tax millages verses the diversified revenue of other essential government services.

Percentage of Revenue By Essential Government Agencies



	STP Gov	City of Covington	City of Slidell	City of Mandeville	STP Sheriff's Office	STP School Board	FD#1	FD#2	FD#4	FD# 8	FD#13
■ Millage	31%	16%	15%	7%	44%	24%	88%	96%	89%	91%	94%
■ Sales Tax	43%	69%	45%	58%	24%	24%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
■ Other Revenue	26%	15%	40%	35%	32%	52%	12%	4%	11%	9%	6%

■ Millage ■ Sales Tax ■ Other Revenue

“When considering why fire districts generally state they need to roll-forward millages and other taxing bodies do not, there are very clear reasons why.”

In addition to the revenue advantages most other taxing bodies have over the fire districts, there are other beneficial exceptions that allow a higher collection of property tax such as no homestead exemption for municipalities¹⁰, and for the Sheriff’s Office and Assessor’s Office, there is no requirement to pay the 2.7625% in pension costs from the gross ad valorem tax required by Louisiana Revised Statute 11:82¹¹. To illustrate the impact such additional



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advantages can have on an annual budget, by the 2020 Certified Grand Recap the Sheriff's Office will collect an estimated \$732,720 and the Assessor's Office will receive an additional \$162,643 by not paying the state pension costs that fire districts must pay. Note that the required pension payment from the Ad Valorem gross tax revenue does not fund the Firefighters' pension. This pension payment is for the following funds: Assessors' Retirement Fund, Clerks' of Court Retirement and Relief Fund, Municipal Employees' Retirement System of Louisiana, Parochial Employees' Retirement System of Louisiana, Sheriffs' Pension and Relief Fund, District Attorneys' Retirement System, Registrars' of Voters Employees' Retirement System, Teachers' Retirement System of Louisiana. In the case of municipalities that are excused from the homestead exemption, this is significant when considering the impact that homestead exemption has on revenue collected. For illustrative purposes, if the fire districts were exempt from the homestead exemption, collectively on average the millage rates could be 5.50 mills lower and collect the same revenue. Another example of how funding for some taxing bodies is supplemented at the expense of others is the requirement for tax recipients to be billed for their proportionate share to "provide and bear the expense" or "cost of such furniture and equipment, supplies, and maps..." needed by the tax collector and assessors of each parish. For example, the Assessor's Office bills the parish taxing bodies \$400,000 annually for their expenses on top of the millage they receive. This amount will be increased in 2021 to \$500,000 per notice sent by the Assessor's Office dated October 30th, 2020, this is a 25% increase. When considering why fire districts generally state they need to roll-forward millages and other taxing bodies do not, there are very clear reasons why. From sales tax, to various other revenue sources, fees, exemptions from pension and homestead exemption, none of which fire districts have. These circumstances result in the fire districts dependence on millage roll-forward to cover inflation costs.

"Despite the challenges there have been some clear successes..."

Despite the challenges there have been some clear successes, with the biggest being an overall reduction in millage rates from 2015 to 2020. In 2015 the average combined millage rate for all fire districts was 29.37 mills and as of 2020 that number is down to 28.65 mills. Although not a huge reduction, this is significant considering from 2015 to 2020 (YTD) inflation rose by 9%¹².



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Eight of the thirteen fire departments have lowered rates, three are the same, and two are higher. This reduction came as departments were continuing to expand needed services and while improving fire ratings across the parish despite increasing costs to do so.

The St. Tammany Fire Chiefs Association has successfully obtained cooperative “regional” grants from 2015 to 2020 totaling over \$ 1,039,715¹³ for interoperable communications equipment, an incident accountability system and ID makers, and a driver simulator for training firefighters on driving large apparatus without being on the road. These grants provided revenue with no additional expense to taxpayers while benefitting all of St. Tammany Parish. Regional cooperative fire department grants are being written every year to collectively improve safety and address needs parish wide.

“The system has now been successfully used for ITEP and PILOT projects and has benefited business while still providing needed funding for essential fire services.”

The St. Tammany Fire Chiefs Association formally presented to parish government the problem of Industrial Tax Exemption Programs (ITEP) and Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) programs as it relates to millage rates. The work of the Fire Chiefs documenting the negative impact this was having on millage rates lead to a cooperative endeavor with St. Tammany Corporation to develop a cost of fire protection based on development. There is no prepackaged program for calculating such costs and no known example from other communities has ever been found after an exhaustive search. All other communities assess impact fees based on a desired revenue dollar or percentage of budget. This required a tremendous effort to create a system to develop a clear process to provide for the calculation of cost of fire protection in St. Tammany Parish based on development size and scope. This was done using national consensus standards, best practices, and the Fire Suppression Rating Schedule (FSRS), used by Property Insurance Association of Louisiana (PIAL). With these costs calculated, responsible decisions can be made balancing incentives for developments and the funding needs of the fire service. The system has now been successfully used for ITEP and PILOT projects and has benefited business while still providing needed funding for essential fire services.

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“The funding issue will remain a top priority for the St. Tammany Fire Chiefs Association.”

Under the current circumstances, fire districts will have to rely on reassessment and millage roll-forward to make up inflationary cost increases. Other untested measures being considered is a closer study of what qualifies as tax free (non-profit) and what can be done to balance non-profit exemptions and tax fairness for everyone. Additional funding sources such as a possible parish wide fire services sales tax and the consideration of a public private partnership with Acadian Ambulance Service for a parish wide fire-based emergency ambulance transport service. Using a tiered response system based on emergency medical dispatching, a parish wide fire based 911 transport service utilizing cross trained firefighter medics would generate needed revenue and add needed staffing providing a double benefit. Using an exclusive rights non-emergency and roll-over emergency response for Acadian ambulance would reward Acadian and be an incentive to keep ambulances for roll-over and mass causality incidents. This is an option that requires extensive research and well thought out analysis but could be a huge benefit to St. Tammany Parish. New and innovative ways to provide the needed revenue and services in the most cost-efficient way possible must be a focus. The funding issue will remain a top priority for the St. Tammany Fire Chiefs Association.

The following is a summary of efforts to accomplish Objective 2, Improve existing fire services and operational efficiencies through standardized training, equipment and response guidelines found in the 2015 strategic plan:

“Within this objective is the overarching functional consolidation of fire and emergency services.”

Within this objective is the overarching functional consolidation of fire and emergency services. The fire districts had already initiated this process prior to 2015, but delved deeper into what could be done to improve services and create efficiencies. Many of the fire chiefs felt that consolidation could be the answer and this has never been off the table. However, the more



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the merits are studied the more it was realized that for various reasons there is not a current benefit to geopolitical consolidation. The focus has been functional consolidation now to reduce expenses by sharing resources, best practices, aligning training standards, interoperable equipment and shared services. Examples are consolidated training through the St. Tammany Parish Fire Training Association which includes a website data base for fire and emergency training.¹⁴ This collaborative effort has extended to Washington Parish who has greatly benefited from their participation. Through this effort, training classes are shared to prevent duplication and reduce cost. Much of the training has been free of cost and hosting has been shared across St. Tammany Parish. Additionally, joint cost sharing between districts has funded construction of additional training props that will greatly enhance the quality of training. One example is the planned 5,500 square foot, 3-story burn building with a 4-story tower that will be constructed using the joint maintenance, repairs and improvement (MRI) account. Each department pays a fraction of their net budgeted receipts towards the maintenance and improvement of the training facility. In doing so by MOU, all benefit on their fire rating and from using the facility while having full access for training their personnel. Using this consolidated training model saves a tremendous amount of taxpayer money while providing the facilities and resources needed for the community fire rating and maintaining properly trained fire and emergency responders. Future plans include hosting fee for training classes to generate revenue from outside parish agencies and further reduce training cost in parish.

“St. Tammany Parish created the model that the Louisiana Fire Marshal’s office is now promoting throughout the state for providing fire prevention services.”

Fire Prevention is another joint cooperative effort that was accomplished through the work of the St. Tammany Fire Chiefs Association. In 2015 there were only three recognized fire prevention bureaus today there are ten recognized fire prevention bureaus who work through the Louisiana Fire Marshal’s Office. The St. Tammany Parish Chiefs Association membership make up the President, Vice President and Secretary of the Louisiana Fire Prevention Chiefs Association. Through the association free training and multijurisdictional coordination is occurring effecting legislature at the state and even national level. The St. Tammany Fire Chiefs



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have an interagency agreement to respond and assist on fire investigations and work closely with the State Fire Marshal and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF). The St. Tammany Fire Chiefs Fire Prevention committee was instrumental in creating and having adopted the Parish Fire Alarm ordinance which has reduced the number of false alarms in St. Tammany Parish. The reduced false alarms free up resources, reduces unnecessary risk during emergency response and reduces complacency brought on by false alarm fatigued that was preventing appropriate response when an alarm is sounded. The fire prevention committee has assisted the water committee set up by parish government with a rewrite of the water systems ordinance specific to water supply for fire protection. The fire prevention committee has also created a fire safety video series that has been adopted as the fire safety curriculum by the St. Tammany Parish School Board and will be used to obtain additional points in the fire rating under community risk reduction. This will help improve fire ratings for all fire departments in St. Tammany Parish. Through functional consolidation, with minimal cost and a skeleton crew of highly trained personnel strategically located, St. Tammany Parish created the model that the Louisiana Fire Marshal's office is now promoting throughout the state for providing fire prevention services.

“This consolidated team approach correlated into a great unified effort that served hurricane Laura victims in south west Louisiana extraordinarily.”

A coordinated St. Tammany Parish Emergency Response Team (STPERT) has been created and has responded on multiple deployments to assist neighboring communities during large scale events. Members from all thirteen fire departments have participated in the STPERT. Joint training and operational coordination using the National Incident Management System has been very successful. This consolidated team approach correlated into a great unified effort that served hurricane Laura victims in south west Louisiana extraordinarily.¹⁵ St. Tammany Parish has been very well represented by this consolidated emergency response team that has received attention and praise from around the state for their professionalism, skill set, and quick deployment.

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“...the St. Tammany Fire Chiefs Association was able to agree to a way forward for a unified single dispatch.”

Five years ago, there were three fire dispatch centers in St. Tammany Parish, in 2017 that number was reduced to two. With the centralized communications established by the St. Tammany Parish Communications District and the new 700 MHz radio system in place, the St. Tammany Fire Chiefs Association was able to agree to a way forward for a unified single dispatch. This consolidated dispatch under Fire District 1, will ensure all fire districts unique needs are met and that the requirements for PIAL Communications section of the fire rating can be achieved at the same or higher level than before the consolidation. With a detailed business plan and a transition plan in place the final consolidation is scheduled for January 1st, 2021.

“To ensure qualified and experienced experts are managing these very important responsibilities and doing so in the most cost-efficient manner, outsourcing of these responsibilities has been supported.”

As the fire departments have worked on controlling long term expenses that could be consolidated or streamlined, the cost of administrative staff has been a topic of discussion. One of the benefits of consolidation can be the reduction of administrative costs by having all services handled under one umbrella of staff. Some technology examples being used are shared Information Technology (IT) services, joint report management systems (RMS), asset management, time and attendance program, shared geographic information system (GIS), etc. Transversely, sometimes as agencies become large as would fire districts if consolidated, the cost of managing 400 to 500 employees can be significant. Additionally, because of the unique work schedules, FLSA laws and state mandates relating to firefighters, the human resource, civil service, payroll and other functions are very different than other forms of government or private sector business. To ensure qualified and experienced experts are managing these very important responsibilities and doing so in the most cost-efficient manner, outsourcing of these responsibilities has been supported. Personnel Management Inc. (PMI) provides outsourced solutions, including payroll and tax administration, employee benefits, benefits administration,



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workers' compensation and industry specific-related insurance, safety, risk management and human resources services for the fire service¹⁶. PMI has over 30 years' experience in resource management with over 18 years' experience specifically with Louisiana fire departments. PMI provides services for over fifty fire departments in Louisiana and currently six in St. Tammany Parish. For smaller departments, as they transition to greater administrative services needs now have a prepackaged option that uses the best practices and operational efficiencies suited for the fire service industry. The ability for fire districts to choose the complementary services that work best for their situation makes this high level of service very beneficial as well as affordable. In the five years since the strategic plan, PMI went from one department in St. Tammany Parish to five new departments and has provided services for two others. This has eliminated the need to add additional clerical and payroll staff while ensuring compliances with FLSA, State Law, Civil Service, and PIAL. Additionally, PMI Staff have assisted the Fire Chiefs Association with several projects benefiting all fire departments in St. Tammany Parish for no fee. One important example is the extensive work done with the Firefighter Retirement System (FRS) Board to help reduce the retirement expense to tax payers. PMI was instrumental in helping the St. Tammany Chiefs Association bring in an outside investment firm Wilshire Associates to analyze the investment strategies and performance of the Firefighter Retirement System.¹⁷ The work with the FRS Board continues and is of significant importance as this is an increasing expense that fire departments are mandated to fund by state law. PMI has also played a large part in helping consolidate the communications dispatch services of all the St. Tammany Parish fire departments that will begin January 1, 2021.

The following is a summary of efforts to accomplish Objective 3, provide peer and Fire Board assistance through the STFCA found in the 2015 strategic plan:

"...empowering board members with national standards, best practices and data provides the best results for high quality and cost-efficient services to our communities."



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One of the challenges our elected officials stated concerned them was the appointed board of commissioners who make funding and other governing decisions in regards to the fire districts they serve. They felt that they may lack the knowledge or not have the needed resources to make informed decisions regarding funding, long range planning, etc. The Chiefs Association also recognized that sometimes having an outside subject matter expert can be helpful in answering questions and gathering information needed to make the best decision. Certainly, a “government of the people, by the people, for the people”¹⁸ is the best model and therefore having each board member be a tax paying citizen within the fire district board they serve is a great equalizer. Any tax cut, reduction of service, etc. is a direct impact to the level of protection that board member, their family and neighbors receives. Likewise, any tax increase or spending is a direct impact to that board member, their family and neighbors. The St. Tammany Fire Chiefs Association has established a network of experts in all facets of the fire service, including experienced board members to assist fire boards as well as fire chiefs. Board members from other districts have attended board meetings to answer questions for fire boards and to share experiences and information. Fire chiefs have attended meetings and made themselves available to answer questions and provide resources and information. Examples of peer to peer assistance include fire prevention programs, PIAL fire rating assistance, pay and benefits, civil service, policies, procedures and operating guidelines, strategic planning, and more. Providing information and resource material for board members allows them to do their own research and determine the best course of action for the community they represent. There is no one size fits all and empowering board members with national standards, best practices and data provides the best results for high quality and cost-efficient services to our communities. This piece of the plan has proven to build even stronger relationships beyond the emergency incident to the publics benefit. Intergovernmental cooperation has made automatic aid agreements, equipment and resource sharing, consolidated training, fire prevention and other such services not only possible but seamless.



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Study of Current Fire Services

“Providing fire protection and emergency medical service by fire protection districts is a governmental purpose essential to the public health, safety and protection of citizens and property in the state.”

As highlighted in the executive summary, the importance of the fire service to St. Tammany Parish public safety and therefore quality of life cannot be overstated. The State “Legislature of Louisiana recognizes that providing fire protection and emergency medical service by fire protection districts is a governmental purpose essential to the public health, safety and protection of citizens and property in the state.”¹⁹ Today’s fire departments face an array of challenges, such as balancing the need for properly trained firefighters, reliable tools, equipment, and apparatus along with adequate stations and communications infrastructure, all while considering the economic demands on the community²⁰. The need for fire and emergency leaders to take an incisive look at their operations has never been greater. “Providing fire protection and emergency services is a core function of local government”,²¹ “the complex public policy environment where today’s fire and emergency service managers must operate is influenced by politics, economics, demographics, geography, and sociology. A number of public policy issues can affect localities as they deliver a wide range of services to address emergencies arising from all hazards”.²² Considering the significance of fire and emergency services, the laws that govern the creation and authority of fire districts, and the various influences on how they are operated, it is important to understand the circumstances in which fire districts exist in St. Tammany Parish. To gain this understanding it is essential to consider how geography, demographics, and development effect and shape the fire departments and how that compares with surrounding Parishes in Louisiana.



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St. Tammany Parish Geography

“A close study of the boundaries of the fire districts helps shine light on why they were created in the manor that they were; every district is bound by a natural or man-made barrier.”

To understand the makeup of the 13 fire districts/department in St. Tammany Parish it is important to consider the geographical influence on their creation. Prior to 1952 fire departments served cities, towns or villages; wherever population and development existed. The need to provide fire protection to communities outside of municipal limits and the need to fairly distribute the cost of doing so lead to the creation of fire districts. As in other Louisiana communities St. Tammany Parish created these fire districts as codified in LA. R.S. 40:1490-1500²³. Fire District 1 serving the city of Slidell and surrounding unincorporated areas was the first established in St. Tammany Parish on January 17, 1952 and Fire District 13 being the last created on June 16, 1988.²⁴ As each community formed, adding population and development, the need for fire protection increased and parish government responded by creating fire districts. A close study of the boundaries of the fire districts helps shine light on why they were created in the manor that they were; every district is bound by a natural or man-made barrier. Examples of the natural barriers are rivers, creeks, and bayous; and man-made barriers like subdivisions, railroads, and the biggest man-made barrier being Interstate 12.²⁵ Each of these barriers drastically limits travel and therefore limits the ability of fire departments to cover areas just on the other side of these obstacles. St. Tammany Parish has an abundance of waterways, the parish has total area of approximately 1,124 square miles, but 279 square miles or 25% is water, leaving roughly 846 square miles of land.²⁶ Based on ESRI ArcGIS modeling roughly 30 square miles of water is inland. This explains why the inland area covered by fire districts is calculated at 875 square miles instead of the 845.55 of just land mass. Additionally, Interstate 12 spans almost the full width of the Parish, from the Tangipahoa Parish line to Interstate 10 near Slidell, dissecting the Parish north and south. These natural and man-made barriers drastically limit response from one side to the other by limiting routes of access. Through eventual development more exits, overpasses, bridges and other access points will be

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created and these challenges will be reduced. Until that occurs, careful consideration must be taken when planning coverage areas and response zones for emergency response.

St. Tammany Parish Demographics and Statistics

St. Tammany Parish is one of the fastest growing and geographically largest in Louisiana.²⁷ The following chart shows how St. Tammany Parish compares to surrounding parishes:²⁸

Rank by Parish (64 Parishes)	Population	Population Density	By Geography	10-Yr. Growth
St. Tammany Parish	4th	6th	7th	11.40%
<i>Tangipahoa Parish</i>	<i>10th</i>	<i>13th</i>	<i>9th</i>	<i>11.30%</i>
<i>Livingston Parish</i>	<i>9th</i>	<i>9th</i>	<i>11th</i>	<i>10.30%</i>
<i>East Baton Rouge</i>	<i>1st</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>16th</i>	<i>-0.001</i>
<i>West Baton Rouge</i>	<i>36th</i>	<i>15th</i>	<i>24th</i>	<i>11.30%</i>
<i>Jefferson Parish</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>18th</i>	<i>0.00%</i>
<i>Lafayette Parish</i>	<i>5th</i>	<i>4th</i>	<i>21st</i>	<i>10.20%</i>

Not only is St. Tammany Parish one of the most populated in Louisiana but it is one of the most populated in the South. Out of 82 counties in Mississippi there are none more populated than St. Tammany Parish, out of 75 counties there are only two more populated in Arkansas, out of 254 counties in Texas there are only 20 counties more populated and out of 67 counties in Alabama there are only 3 more populated than St. Tammany Parish. Despite this population count, St. Tammany is still rather large by geography comparatively. It is the 7th largest in Louisiana by geography and compared to many other Southern states it is well above the median. This is important to understand when considering how many fire departments are needed to cover a large and populated Parish with many natural and man-made barriers segmenting it.



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St. Tammany Parish Fire Departments Comparison to Neighboring Parishes

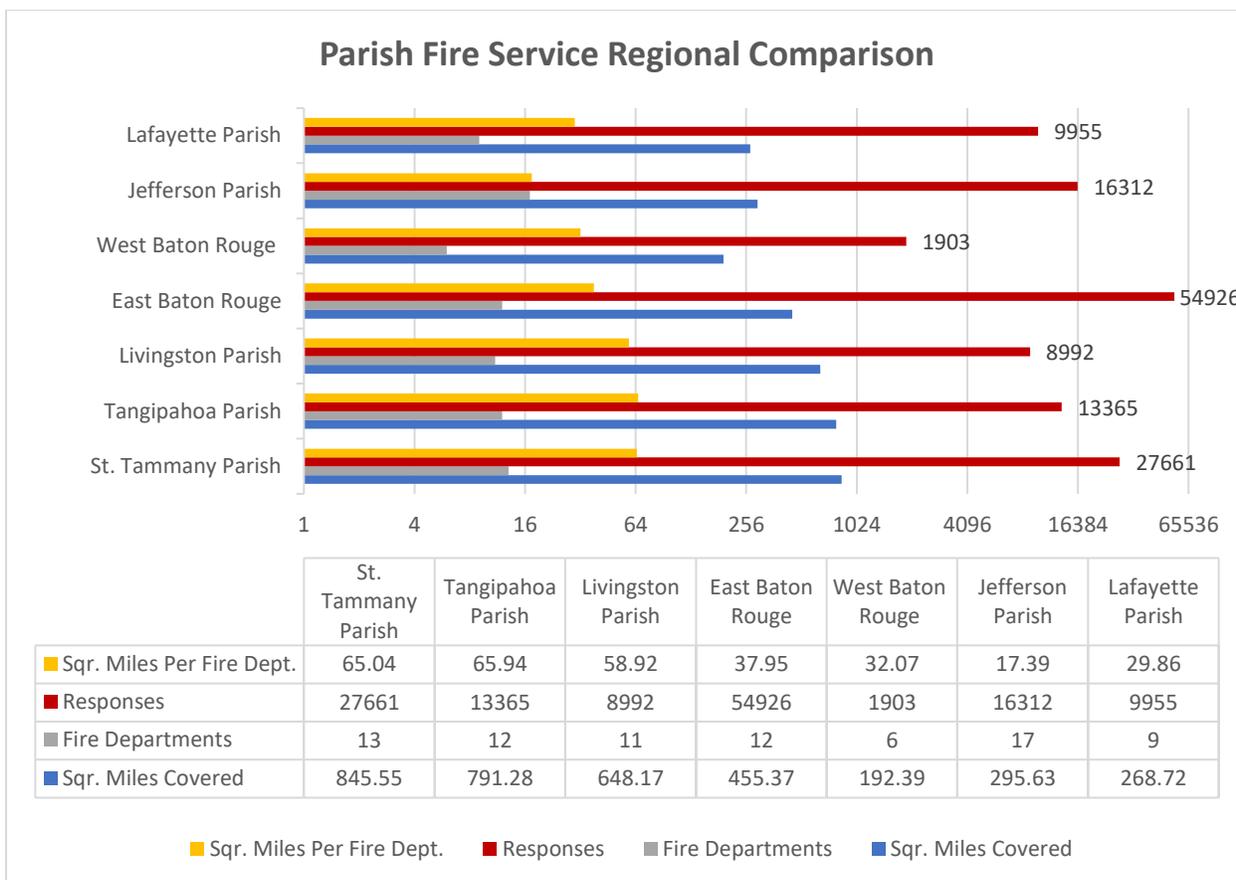
As part of analyzing the current fire services in St. Tammany Parish an assessment of surrounding parishes gives a good perspective of what other communities are doing in comparison. The following Parishes were included in the analysis: Tangipahoa, Livingston, East Baton Rouge, West Baton Rouge, Jefferson and Lafayette, these are the same Parishes listed in the previous chart. These Parishes were selected for their proximity, similar makeup, and similar growth. Several key indicators were compared that include: Number of annual responses, number of fire departments, square miles covered, number of fire departments per square mile. Averages for the seven Parishes are as follows:

Seven Parish Averages	
Avg. Sqr. Miles Covered	500
Avg. Fire Departments	11
Avg. Sqr. Miles Per Fire Dept.	44
Avg. Number of Responses	19,016

By comparison St. Tammany Parish covers the greatest number of square miles, and likewise has the second most fire departments. However, when evaluating square miles covered per fire department, St. Tammany and Tangipahoa are both covering over 65 square miles per fire department which is the largest coverage area average; Jefferson Parish is the smallest coverage area per department at 17 square miles per department. When it comes to annual responses St. Tammany Parish has the second highest annual number of responses only behind East Baton Rouge with West Baton Rouge having the fewest responses annually. The next chart provides a side by side comparison of the “seven parishes” fire department data.

“By comparison St. Tammany Parish fire departments cover the largest geographical area, they cover the most area per fire department (near tie with Tangipahoa), and respond to the second highest number of calls behind only East Baton Rouge.”

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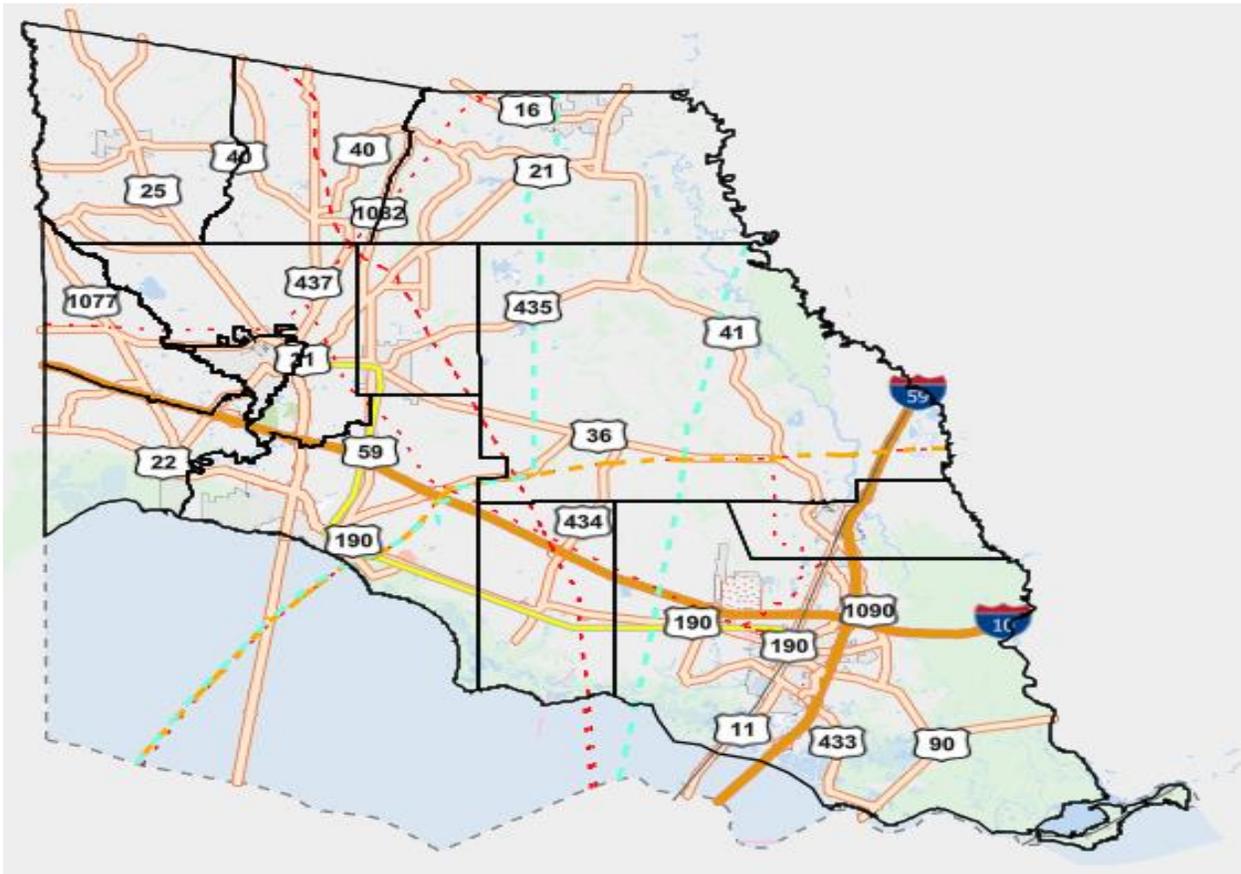
By comparison St. Tammany Parish fire departments cover the largest geographical area, they cover the most area per fire department (near tie with Tangipahoa), and respond to the second highest number of calls behind only East Baton Rouge. St. Tammany Parish fire departments are high performing and compare favorably with surrounding parishes. An attempt to compare cost proved very difficult, most do not have financial information available; however, we found that several had millage, service fees, parcel fees and sales tax, some operated solely from millage. Many were all volunteer or mostly volunteer but used paid personnel to supplement. In the case of Jefferson Parish, the entire west bank uses the umbrella of non-profit volunteer fire departments but pays contract firefighters to staff apparatus. With all this said, each Parish and in many cases each fire department does something a little different based on the needs of the community served. Financial information was available for Jefferson Parish Fire Departments and for 2020 Jefferson Parish fire departments had a total budget of \$83,789,674³⁰ compared to St. Tammany Parish at \$63,026,696. St. Tammany Parish Fire services cost tax payers



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\$20,762,978 less than Jefferson Parish Fire Services. There are varying factors like Jefferson Parish has 40% more population, St. Tammany Parish handles 41% more responses spread over two thirds more area covered, St. Tammany Parish provides coverage with 13 fire departments compared to 17 by Jefferson Parish. What does this say for these two Parishes? Nothing really, despite their proximity they are different communities; they have different populations, dispersed differently over different geography; each is unique in its demographics, social and political environment. What determines the value is the quality of service and the satisfaction of the community served; does the community feel they are receiving a good value for their tax dollars? Does the service meet the community expectations and needs? Do the services meet national standards and best practices? Are the services financially sustainable? These are the questions that determine the success of any government service provided.

St. Tammany Parish Fire Departments



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In analyzing fire services in St. Tammany Parish there is much to be proud of. Even the smallest, least funded departments provide a wide spectrum of services at a high level. One of the most significant measures of improvement parish wide is the changes in fire ratings over the last five years. In 2015 there was only one class 2 fire department and no class 1 rated departments in St. Tammany Parish. The average parish wide cumulative rating was a class 4. There is now a class 1 fire department and three class 2 fire departments in St. Tammany Parish with an average class 3 rating. Seven fire departments have maintained their ratings, five have improved, and three of the five improved by two classes. Unfortunately, due to a significant blow to millage revenue, one department has increased their rating from a class 3 to class 4 in this same time period. This department is working with STFCA subject matter experts to find ways to overcome that.

PIAL Rating Analysis		
Fire Dept.	2015	2020
CFD	3	3
FD 1	3	2
FD 2	5	2
FD 3	3	4
FD 4	2	1
FD 5	4	4
FD 6	5	5
FD 7	4	4
FD 8	3	3
FD 9	4	4
FD 11	4	2
FD 12	3	3
FD 13	4	2
Average	4	3

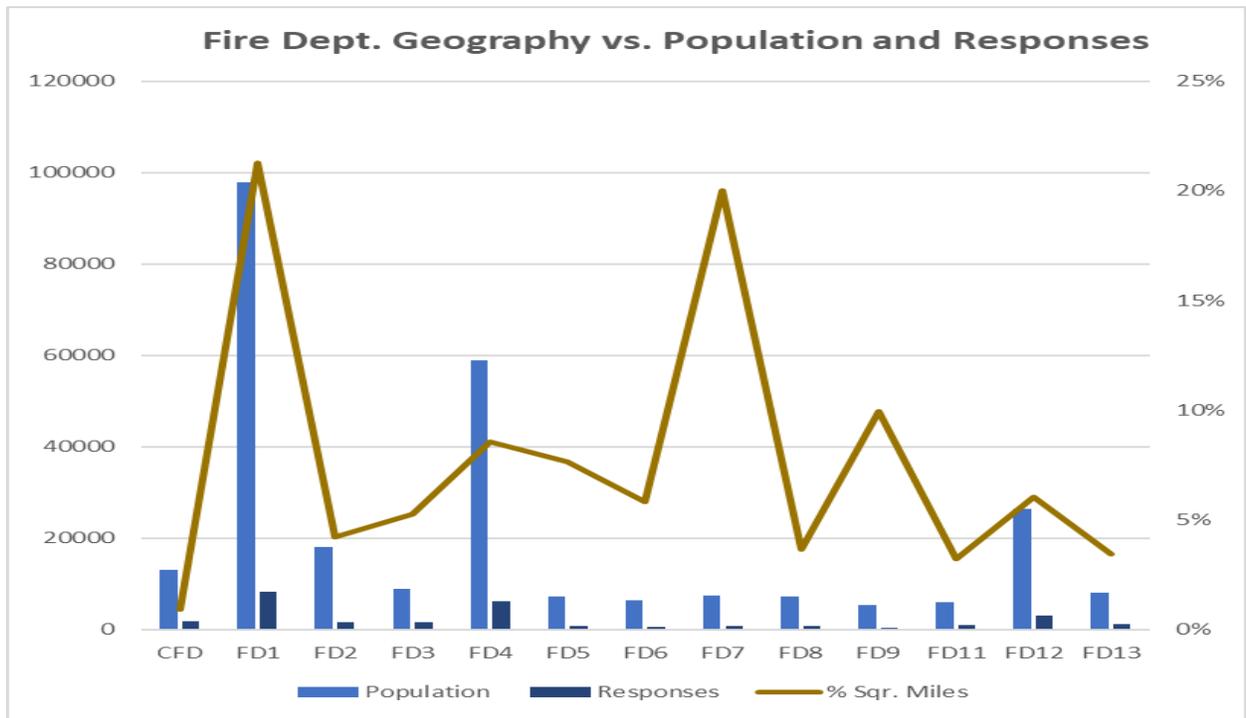
“...73% of the Parish population resides in 37% of the parish land and accounts for 70% of the services...”

One thing that has not changed much is the distribution of population and responses. Fire District 1, Fire District 4, and Fire District 12 account for 68% of the entire St. Tammany Parish population and 63% of the responses. If you include the City of Covington and their 8 square miles covered, those numbers rise to 73% of the population and 70% of responses. In other words, 73% of the Parish population resides in 37% of the parish land and accounts for 70% of the services; the other 27% of the population lives in the remaining 63% of the Parish and create the remaining 30% of the responses. This is nearly identical to the analysis in 2015; growth has occurred throughout the Parish but it has continued to grow in the same manner. A deeper dive into the numbers shows that how the responses occur are proportionate to geographical size and population density as well as socioeconomic status. The smaller departments generally have higher call volume per capita but also have better fire ratings. The

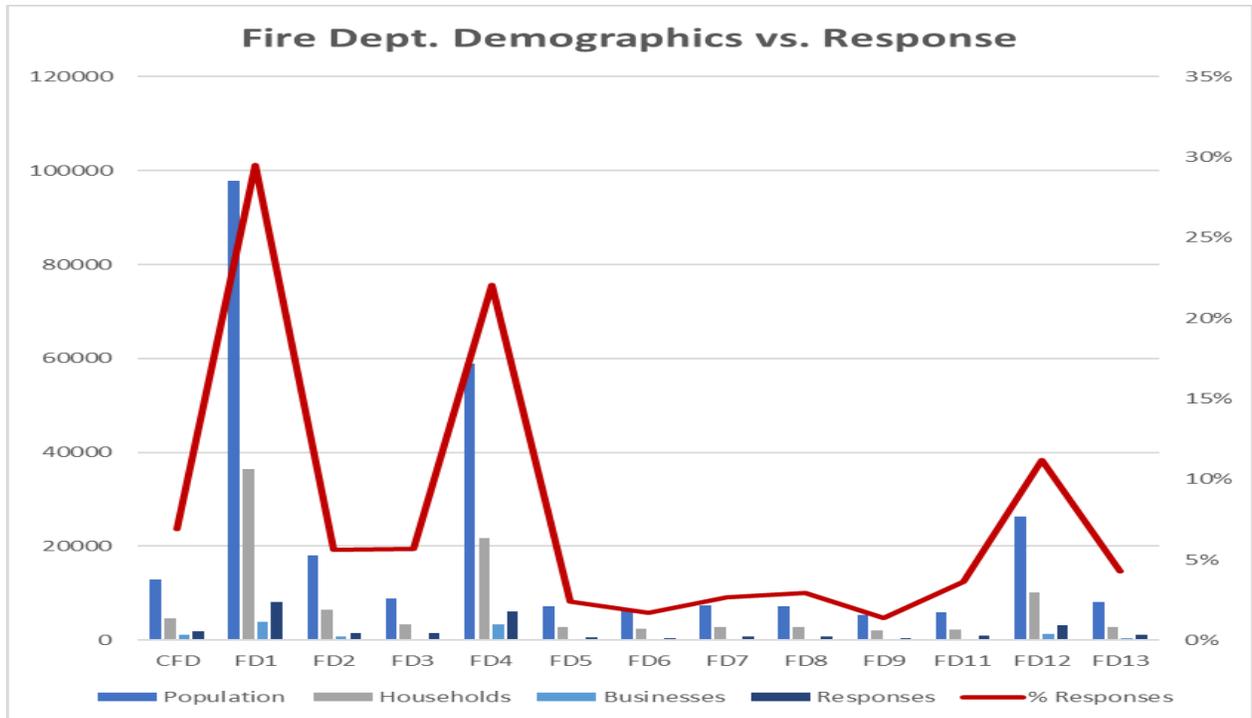
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worst ratings are in the largest districts with the smallest millages; they also run the least calls comparatively. The following chart demonstrates the relation to geography and responses.



The next chart illustrates the relationship of population to responses.





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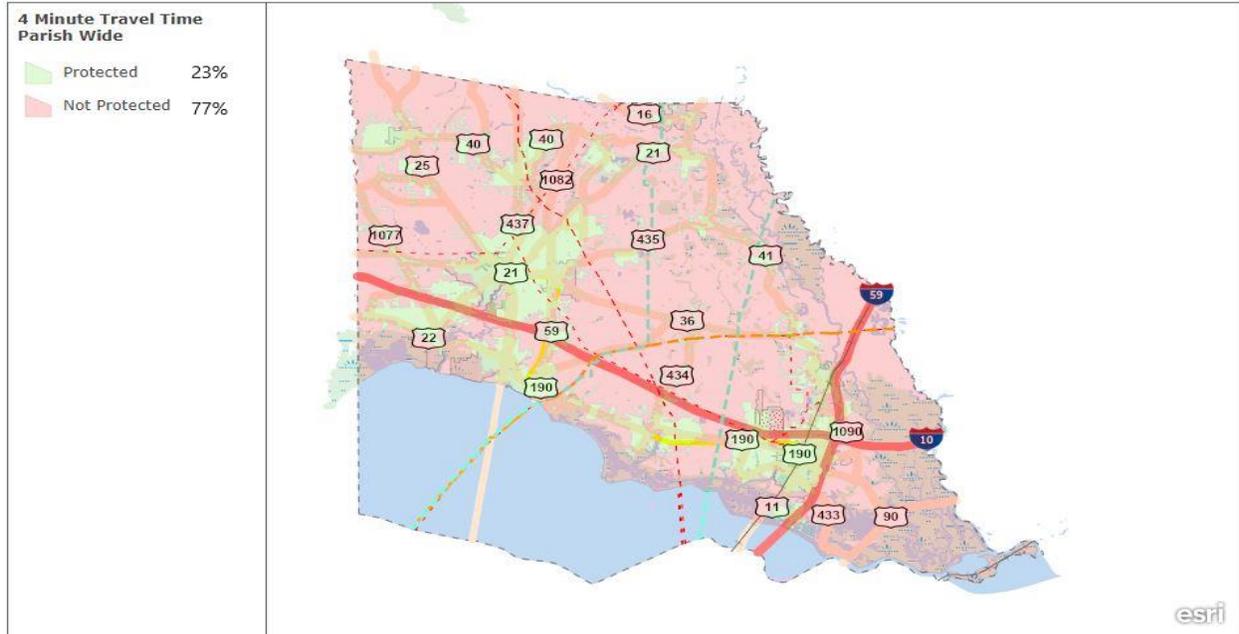
When it comes to outcomes in emergency responses for any type of event, response time matters. How quickly a community can assemble an effective response force, one properly trained, equipped and in sufficient quantity has the biggest impact on outcome. The sooner the emergency is addressed appropriately the losses are immediately impacted. The duration of the event is decreased, the consequences are reduced and life, property, and environment are preserved.³¹ The following analysis is looking at the distribution of resources throughout St. Tammany Parish. Questions to answer include, are there overlapping coverage areas, are there fire stations that could be eliminated, and is their adequate coverage for the communities served? Using ESRI ArcGIS spatial analysis toolsets³² a simulated study of response throughout St. Tammany Parish including all 49 fire stations was completed based on three important response standards:

1. 4-minute travel time
2. 8-minute travel time
3. Areas beyond 7 road miles from a fire station.

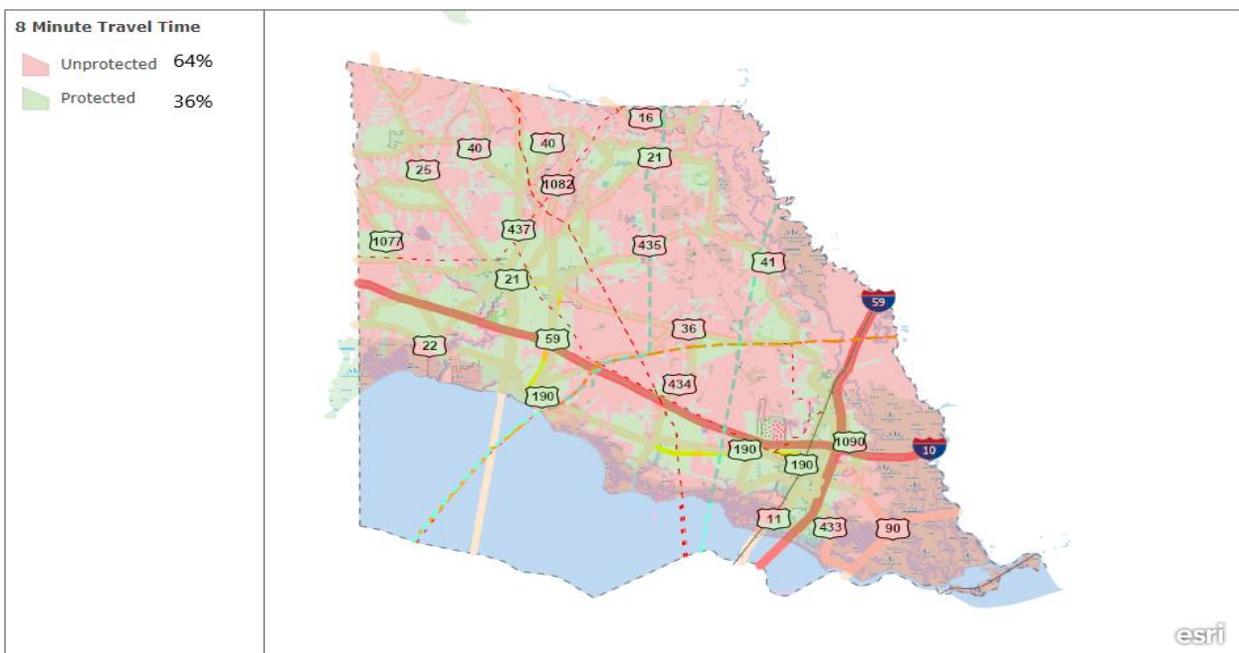
The national response time components of 4-minutes and 8-minutes are found in the NFPA 1710 Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Career Fire Departments³³ and the exclusion of areas beyond 7 road miles is found in the Insurance Service Office (ISO) Fire Suppression Rating Schedule³⁴ and in Property Insurance Association of Louisiana (PIAL) Addendum to the Fire Suppression Rating Schedule.³⁵

The data shows that only 23% of the parish is within the 4-minute travel time for a first arriving unit, with 36% of the parish within the 8-minute travel time for the “first full alarm assignment”, meaning all of the initial units dispatched for the response. The following maps illustrate the results of the analysis.

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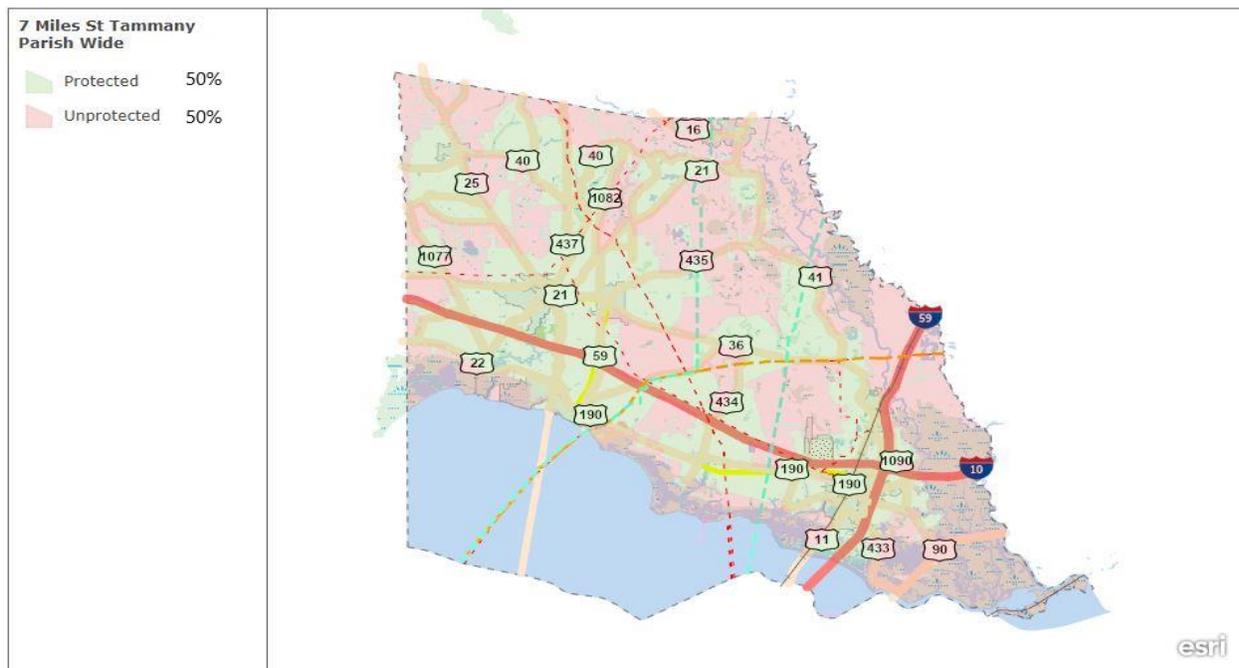
As should be expected, the most populated locations generally are among the 23% that fall within the 4-minute coverage areas. Likewise, as should be expected the areas that are generally less populated are the furthest beyond it. Government and Fire District leaders have done a generally good job of placing stations, there is no overlapping coverage and though there is a deficiency in stations there is coverage for the majority of the Parish population.





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The changes in ISO FSRS and PIAL Addendum to the FSRS now allows for fire departments to use historical data collected from response records to demonstrate compliance with response times. This replaces the 1.5 road miles and 2.5 road miles that were previously used under “distribution” in the rating, this has helped improve ratings in areas where departments were able to out-perform the road miles model. Most departments have been able to double the coverage area previously credited; despite this, only ¼ of the Parish geographically is within the 4-minute travel time standard. The good news is that most of the 23% geography covered within 4-minutes is in the most populated 37% of the Parish. Regardless of deployment analysis, any structure beyond 7 road miles from a fire station is designated a Class 10 fire rating. There are some property owners who fall into this situation in rural areas of the Parish.



The analysis shows that the best response times are met where the most populated areas exist and likewise the worst response times are found in the least populated areas of St. Tammany Parish.

“How quickly a community can assemble an effective response force, one properly trained, equipped and in sufficient quantity has the biggest impact on outcome.”



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NFPA 1710 Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Career Fire Departments, not only addresses response times but also gives minimum staffing requirements. NFPA 1710 uses specific examples but the NFPA Handbook provides a more specific classification as follows:

- High-Hazard Occupancies — Schools, hospitals, nursing homes, chemical plants, refineries, high-rise buildings and other high life hazard or large fire potential occupancies.
- Medium-Hazard Occupancies — Apartments, offices, mercantile and industrial occupancies not normally requiring extensive rescue by fire fighting forces.
- Low-Hazard Occupancies — One-, two- or three-family dwellings and scattered small business and industrial occupancies

NFPA provides the following minimum staffing requirements based on examples of these occupancy hazard classes³⁶:

- Low-Hazard Occupancies – Total effective response force with a minimum of 16 (17 if an aerial device is used)
- Medium-Hazard Occupancies – Total effective response force a minimum of 27 (28 if an aerial device is used)
- High-Hazard Occupancies – Total effective response force a minimum of 42 (43 if the building is equipped with a fire pump)

St. Tammany Parish wide Occupancies are classified as follows:

High Hazard	Medium Hazard	Low Hazard
1,023	4,966	106,721

³⁷

NFPA 1710 also calls for a minimum staffing per apparatus, the standard is four personnel per apparatus; “in response zones with a high number of incidents, geographical restrictions, geographical isolation, or urban areas”, five personnel per apparatus are required and “in first-due response zones with tactical hazards, high-hazard occupancies, or dense urban areas, as identified by the AHJ, these fire companies shall be staffed with six personnel.”³⁸

Based on the standard only two fire departments currently meet the minimum staffing of apparatus with four personnel most of the time. As expected, these are the two departments serving the most population and structures, being Fire District 1 and 4. There are only two fire



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districts that can solely assemble the minimum effective response force for Low and Medium-Hazard Occupancies in the initial full alarm assignment, and none that can do so for High-Hazard Occupancies. However, using automatic aid/mutual aid, nine can assemble the minimum effective response force in the initial full alarm assignment for Low-Hazard occupancies. Two departments can assemble a minimum effective response force for a Medium-Hazard Occupancy and one can with automatic aid/mutual aid being Fire Districts 1, 4 and 12 respectively. Two departments can assemble an effective response force in the first alarm for High Hazard Occupancies with automatic aid/mutual aid being Fire District 1 and 4. From this analysis it is very clear that the most populated areas with the most structures are receiving the most coverage and are meeting national standards the majority of the time. None of the less populated areas are meeting the standards and therefore the distribution of resources matches the level of risk. In other words, there are not an abundance of redundant resources and there are not too many resources in areas that would not be expected to have them. To better illustrate the risks associated with each district consider the following data taken from ESRI ArcGIS GeoEnrichment platform calculating the number of households and businesses per fire department compared to percentage of total population and responses in St. Tammany Parish:

FD	% Population	% Households	% Businesses	% Responses
CFD	5%	5%	9%	7%
FD1	36%	36%	32%	30%
FD2	7%	6%	6%	6%
FD3	3%	3%	2%	6%
FD4	22%	22%	28%	22%
FD5	3%	3%	2%	2%
FD6	2%	2%	1%	2%
FD7	3%	3%	1%	3%
FD8	3%	3%	1%	3%
FD9	2%	2%	1%	1%
FD11	2%	2%	2%	4%
FD12	10%	10%	11%	11%
FD13	3%	3%	3%	4%



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The data shows that the departments generally match the responses, and level of service in correlation to the share of the population, households and businesses they protect.

The last analysis regarding St. Tammany Parish Fire Departments is the millage rates of each. Much has been said regarding millage rates and why there are such differences between each district. The simple answer is each community's tax payers within that fire district decide with their vote what they are willing to pay for fire services. Fire Districts cannot levy any more tax than what the voters approve; there is a much better explanation however, it directly correlates to the demographics of each district. As displayed earlier, population and development bring the need for services and increased responses in a community. Using the three most populated fire districts as the example, consider that each has a different millage rate; District 1's is the highest of the three at 33.65-mills, Fire District 12's is the lowest at 24.5-mills. Fire District 1 also has a parcel fee that brings an additional 1.3 million, Fire District 4 has a millage assessed at 25.38-mills and receives revenue from an ambulance transport service of 1.4 million. Fire District 1 has the most population of 97,835 but also has the added expense of that population being spread over the largest geographical area of all fire districts covering 186 square miles. District 4 is the second most populated with 58,914 residents, but only the fourth largest geographically at 75 square miles, and District 12 has the third most populated with 26,325 residents and the fifth largest geographically at 53 square miles. In addition to the differences in area covered and population that effect millage rate, the most impactful is property values. When analyzing millage, it is essential to look at the value of that millage. Non-profits, Homestead Exemption, Tax Incentives, overall value per building and land impact the revenue generated. Next is a chart comparing the district millage rates gross revenue and Homestead Exemption expense as percentages:

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St. Tammany Parish Fire District Millage Analysis			
Fire District	Mills	%Total Gross Tax	%Homestead Exempt
Fire Dist 1	33.65	34%	42%
Fire Dist2	20.62	9%	6%
Fire Dist 3	34.95	3%	4%
Fire Dist 4	25.38	26%	20%
Fire Dist 5	29.68	2%	3%
Fire Dist 6	18.98	1%	2%
Fire Dist 7	19.74	1%	2%
Fire Dist 8	32.25	2%	3%
Fire Dist 9	35	2%	2%
Fire Dist 11	40.3	3%	3%
Fire Dist 12	24.5	11%	10%
Fire Dist 13	28.71	6%	4%

Note that Fire District 1 collects 34% of the millage tax for all fire districts but covers 36% of the population, additionally 42% of the total Homestead exempt fire district tax dollars are in District 1. In contrast, Fire District 4 collects 26% of the millage tax with 22% of the population and only has 20% of the Homestead exemption expense; Fire District 12 covers 10% of the population receives 11% of the millage tax with 10% of the homestead exemption expense. It is easy to see why Fire District 1 in Slidell would require higher millage rates to provide the same or similar level of service as Fire District 4 in Mandeville or District 12 in Covington. There are factors like value per square foot for residential and commercial properties for both structures and land that impact the value of each mill. If you were to rebuild Slidell, Covington and Mandeville to be identical using average values as they exist today, in order to generate the same funds to provide the same level of services Slidell would require a higher millage rate than Covington and Mandeville. The cost of the service is essentially the same in both areas but the value of the property is less in Slidell than Covington and Mandeville therefore generating less revenue. According to Realtor.com and Latter-Blum.com the following is the breakdown of average list value by community as of November 2020:

Fire District	Residential listing per Sq.Ft.	Commercial listing per Sq.Ft.
Slidell area	\$ 111.00	\$ 218.00
Covington area	\$ 138.00	\$ 252.00
Mandeville area	\$ 143.00	\$ 228.00



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The analysis provided is a simplified explanation using a snap shot data set; there is a difference in fair market value, listed value, and assessed value but the differences are still consistent. It will take more assessed mills to generate the same revenue in Fire District 1 than in Fire District 4 or 12. These three were used but the same holds true throughout St. Tammany Parish, those areas with lower valued properties take more millage to generate equal revenue and that is compounded the bigger the geographical size of the district. In reality, those who pay more for their homes and businesses per square foot and a smaller millage rate verses those who pay less and a higher rate are actually paying a similar amount for the same services. For Example, in Fire District 1 a typical 2,000 square foot home would list for \$222,000 the same home in Fire District 4 would list for \$286,000. For the purpose of illustration, if the assessed value was the same as the list value with the homestead exemption applied, in Fire District 1 a 30-mill tax would generate \$441.00 annually and in Fire District 4 the same home would generate \$633.00 annually. This is a \$192.00 difference or 44% more revenue in Mandeville verses Slidell. Essentially a property owner of a 2,000 square foot home in Slidell assessed for \$222,000 at 30-mills would pay about the same as a 2,000 square foot house in Mandeville assessed for \$286,000 at 21-mills. When considering consolidating fire districts or making a “parish-wide millage rate” for fire districts, this is a hard reality, one group would pay way more and one much less in actual dollars for the same exact service. This would raise taxes on some and lower tax on others or would under fund essential services; additionally, not every community requires the same resources and funding. Population, development type, and density determine the need for resources and therefore the need for funding; additionally, the voters determine what they are willing to pay for it.

It is important to note that the City of Covington Fire Department is excluded from this millage rate analysis. Covington Fire Department has a dedicated 10-mill tax but it is excluded from homestead exemption, they collect on the full value of that millage. Considering the population covered of 10,564 citizens, 1,047 businesses, along with the geography of only 8 square miles, there are tremendous advantages for the City of Covington Fire department. The residents and especially businesses of Covington enjoy the lowest millage rates in St. Tammany Parish. If the City of Covington Fire Department was to consolidate with Fire District 12, those citizens and

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businesses would see a significant property tax increase. The municipal exclusion from homestead exemption would be lost, Fire District 12 could not lower the millage rate they currently levy and continue to provide the same level of service, the levy would at least remain the same. This would result in 24.5-mill levy, district wide for City of Covington residents instead of 10-mills. This would equate to about a 9-mill increase to homeowners, they would be exempt now on the first \$7,500 assessed value, and a 14.5-mill increase to businesses as a result of consolidation. This clearly illustrates why the City of Covington remains a municipal department and simply uses automatic aid and mutual aid agreements to supplement the additional resources when needed.



U.S. Census Bureau St. Tammany Parish Regional Municipal Map



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Conclusion

As stated in the recent white paper 21st-Century-Fire-and-Emergency-Services, “The political dynamic at all levels of government in the past, while still challenging, was less polarized and much more collegial than exists today. This shift has resulted in organizations needing to position their efforts at times as much to address political dynamics as to do what is best for the community.”⁴² Clearly most communities are facing similar challenges throughout the country; citizens want more or improved services and at the same time lower taxes. This has put elected officials and government leaders in difficult circumstances, there is only so much that can be cut before services are diminished, and value for tax dollars spent are eroded. This political environment has created a competition for tax dollars and what services should receive funding. Regardless, fire departments, government officials, business and citizens all have the responsibility to work together for the public safety and welfare of the community. Fire services are a core service of government and are responsible for providing protection from all community hazards that can reasonably be expected to occur. Through community risk assessment known hazards can be identified and measured against three basic components of fire department emergency response performance:

- Availability—The degree to which the resources are ready and available to respond.
- Capability—The abilities of deployed resources to manage an incident.
- Operational Effectiveness— A product of availability and capability. It is the outcome achieved by the deployed resources or the ability to match resources deployed to the risks to which they are responding.⁴³

The needs and therefore the level of service required to provide reasonably for those needs is dependent on community population, development and geographic size. The more densely populated the greater the risk and the more resources required. Additionally, development size and scope effect risk as well as vulnerability to environment and other external forces. This risk assessment outlines the community needs to meet national standards and best practices for providing services. With the needs and the standards in mind fire service leaders can appropriately plan for community safety with standards-based department specific data. This



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information when shared with the community stake holders empowers government leaders and tax payers with the information needed to determine the level of service they are willing to fund. The St. Tammany Fire Chiefs Association is working diligently to be the model for providing premier all hazards protection with efficiency and effectiveness in mind. There will need to be continued unified efforts, communication, and planning to make sure that the most cost-effective, highest level of service is always provided. “If organizations hope to maintain their effectiveness and remain sustainable in the future, they must act today to address these issues and develop the organizational bandwidth needed to resolve them.”⁴⁴ The St. Tammany Fire Chief Association will be working to refine and update its strategic goals based on the latest data contained in this report. The St. Tammany Chiefs Association is acting with purpose to continue focus on consolidating efforts and seeking alternate funding sources to better diversify the revenue needed to provide services. We seek the support of government, community leaders, business leaders, and citizens to help us achieve these important goals.

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- ⁴⁰ <https://stpao.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/grand-recap-2020.pdf>
- ⁴¹ https://www.realtor.com/realestateandhomes-search/Mandeville_LA/overview & <https://www.latterblum.com/slidell-la-commercial-real-estate.html>
- ⁴² <https://icma.org/sites/default/files/21st-Century-Fire-and-Emergency-Services-White-Paper-Final-07.15.20.pdf>
- ⁴³ <https://www.nfpa.org/-/media/Files/Membership/member-sections/Metro-Chiefs/UrbanFireVulnerability>
- ⁴⁴ <https://icma.org/sites/default/files/21st-Century-Fire-and-Emergency-Services-White-Paper-Final-07.15.20.pdf>