

A sign of the times? Three fire companies face uncertain future due to a lack of people, money

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By Marnie Eisenstadt / The Post-Standard



Frank Ordonez / The Post-Standard, 2011 Plainville Fire Department Chief Mike Stock sits on a 1992 model fire truck, which is considered to be outdated. According to a new study, the Plainville and Seneca River fire departments won't survive the next five years the way they are now.

The Lysander Fire Department doesn't have enough people to fight fires in its own district, according to a new study on the future of fire service in the town.

The consultant, Michael Dallessandro, wrote that the Lysander department, with a \$200,000 annual budget, needs to immediately come up with a new plan to cover its territory.

Right now, the Baldwinsville department responds to all of the Lysander department's calls because the latter often does not have enough people. Lysander has just six firefighters who are qualified to go into a burning building and 10 active firefighters in all.

Dallessandro was asked to do the study by the seven departments that serve the town of Lysander. It cost \$27,500.

He also wrote that the Plainville and Seneca River departments will not survive the next five years the way they are now, and that they should consider merging with other departments. Dallessandro declined to answer questions about the report.

"People-wise, we're hurting," said Jack Kline, chairman of the Lysander fire board of commissioners.

Kline said he wasn't surprised by the recommendations. He said his department has been talking about merging with the Baldwinsville department for more than a year. Both departments hope to bring the issue to a vote late this year. The town boards in Lysander and Van Buren would both have to approve it.

The Baldwinsville Fire Department, which covers territory in Lysander and Van Buren, has 90 members and a budget of close to \$800,000 a year. It depends on contracts with both towns for that money. By combining with the Lysander department, which is a fire district, Baldwinsville would no longer have to ask the towns to approve its budget. It would set its own tax rate, said Tom Perkins, a spokesman for the Baldwinsville department.

Dallessandro, the consultant, suggested that Plainville be part of the merger discussions with Baldwinsville and Lysander. In his report, he said the two smaller departments should become part of a single fire district with Baldwinsville and that Baldwinsville should become the lead organization. But right now Plainville is not part of the conversation.

Plainville Chief Mike Stock said his department's reluctance to be part of those discussions is starting to weaken. He said he knows something has to change for the department to survive.

"It's a long road, but at least we're looking in the right direction," Stock said.

Plainville has had a manpower problem for several months, and this summer asked Baldwinsville to go on all of the calls to its Station 3, on Route 370 near the Byrne Dairy, which is in the heart of its coverage area.

The consultant's report also criticized Plainville for failing to upgrade its equipment. The department has already improved there, Stock said. He's hoping the department's new, \$395,000 truck will be ready to go in the spring.

Dallessandro said the Seneca River Fire Department, with a budget of \$76,000, also needs to think about its future. He said the department does an admirable job for an organization of its size, but it is not prepared to handle increasing training and management mandates.

Dallessandro said that department should be looking at becoming part of the Belgium-Cold Springs Fire District.

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