

## County legislator crusades to consolidate fire departments

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Syracuse (WSYR-TV) - In recent months, [NewsChannel 9 has explored](#) some of the millions of dollars spent by 57 different fire departments in Onondaga County, and some of the overlap and inefficiencies. The county executive has called for cost-cutting through consolidation.

One county lawmaker is taking it one step further. A proposed local law, now filed with the legislature, seeks to abolish all of the existing fire departments, and create one, countywide department.

From where County Legislator Tom Buckel sits, it makes no sense for taxpayers to pay for 57 fire departments in one county. His local law cites "numerous redundancies and inefficiencies" in the current system. He "proposes the formation of a unified Onondaga County department of fire protection."

"That's the fastest-growing segment of our local costs, and it's very difficult to get a handle on it because basically we have a 19th-century system that in some cases serves us well and, in other cases, it doesn't, but in all cases, it costs us a ton of money," Buckel said.

Buckel says for some fire departments their reasons for remaining included the protection of major adjacent industrial facilities. Lyncourt, for example, protected Syracuse China, a business that no longer exists.

Buckel says counties in other states run their own fire service. He says Onondaga County is long overdue to at least start talking about it.

East Syracuse Fire Chief Michael Cramer says fine, let's talk, but the cost savings would not be substantial.

"If they came to you and said, we can reduce your property tax by a thousand dollars, you're going to say, okay, I'm going to listen. We're going to reduce your property tax by 20 bucks? You know, it's not worth the fight," Cramer said.

"There's no doubt we are going to get better service for less money, if we begin the process of



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modernizing the way we deliver these services," Buckel said.

Buckel's proposal calls for voters to make the call on this in a countywide referendum.

Buckel has also proposed a second law that seeks to eliminate all town and village governments, transferring all local government functions to the county. He expects his proposals will be placed on the legislature's agenda next month, and will then be referred to committee for further study.

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