

Indianapolis Raised One Tax. Here's How We Can Lower Another

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Indianapolis just raised the wheel tax and vehicle excise surtax to help fund roads. I opposed that increase, but the vote is over. A fair question for anyone who just asked residents to pay more: where can we help them pay less? I have an answer: consolidate the remaining three township fire departments into the Indianapolis Fire Department. Residents could see their fire-protection tax fall by as much as 60 percent, roughly \$150 a year on a \$100,000 home and not impact their services.

If we are willing to ask Indianapolis residents to shoulder another tax, we should be eager to challenge costly government structures and find savings for taxpayers.

That brings us to Pike, Wayne and Decatur townships. Most of Marion County already receives fire protection through IFD. Long ago, Washington, Warren, Franklin, Perry and Lawrence townships consolidated their departments into it. Pike, Wayne and Decatur remain separate, which means taxpayers in one consolidated city are still paying to maintain multiple bureaucracies for essentially the same services.

This is not about reducing fire protection, closing neighborhood stations, or cutting firefighters. Any consolidation must protect staffing, maintain appropriate neighborhood coverage, and set clear standards for response times. Are separate township bureaucracies the most efficient and fiscally responsible way to deliver protection? I don't think so, here's why:

We already have evidence. In 2024, Wayne Township pursued a merger with IFD and estimated that residents in its fire district could see their fire-protection tax rate fall from about 76 cents per \$100 of assessed value to roughly 27 cents, about a 60 percent reduction, with estimated savings of around \$150 a year. Those figures reveal why fire protection consolidation deserves another look.

The obstacle: state law. Today, a Marion County township fire consolidation requires approval from the township trustee and the township advisory board before it can even reach the City-County Council and the mayor. I believe the General Assembly should change that.

Lawmakers considered it in 2024 through Senate Bill 54, which would have removed township officials' ability to block a consolidation approved through Indianapolis city government. The bill did not advance. This session I urge lawmakers who want to reduce taxpayers financial burden to revisit it.

At a minimum, the law should remove the township advisory board's veto while empowering trustees, board members, firefighters and residents to help make decisions over personnel, equipment, stations, debt and service levels through public hearings and negotiations.

This matters more because of Senate Enrolled Act 1. The state passed SEA 1 to address rising property taxes, and it is now pressuring local governments and townships to rethink their

budgets. The answer to that pressure cannot always be to saddle residents with another tax or fee. Sometimes the officials must challenge its status quo and operate differently.

If consolidating Pike, Wayne and Decatur into IFD can maintain or improve public safety while lowering the property-tax burden, we should pursue it. If state law blocks Indianapolis from having that conversation on reasonable terms, the General Assembly should change the law this legislative session.

The Council just asked taxpayers to pay more for roads. Now we should prove we are just as serious about helping them pay less. Fire consolidation is a good place to start.