



Niles Charter Township
EST. 1833



BERTRAND
CHARTER TOWNSHIP

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Project Name: Joint Fire District Feasibility Study Proposal

Project Location: South Central Berrien County Michigan

Issue Date: July 27, 2026

Bid Due Date: September 2, 2026 10:00AM EST

Purpose of Request

The City of Buchanan, Buchanan Charter Township, Bertrand Charter Township, Niles Charter Township, and the City of Niles are requesting proposals from qualified public safety, fire service, municipal management, or emergency services consulting firms to conduct a joint fire service feasibility and operational study.

The purpose of the study is to determine whether it is operationally, financially, legally, and administratively feasible for the five jurisdictions to create one joint fire district or, if supported by the analysis, two fire districts serving the combined area. The study should not begin with the assumption that a single model is the preferred outcome. Rather, the consultant will be expected to evaluate the current fire service system, compare existing station locations, staffing, equipment, apparatus, service areas, response patterns, costs, governance, and capital needs against accepted fire service best practices, and then recommend the model or models that make the most sense for the communities involved. The final product should provide the participating jurisdictions with the information needed to make an informed policy decision on whether to pursue a joint fire district, two coordinated fire districts, another shared-service model, or maintain the current structure with recommended improvements.

Background

The participating communities are located in southwest Berrien County, Michigan, near the Indiana state line and within the broader Niles-Benton Harbor and South Bend regional economy. Together, the five jurisdictions represent a mixed service area of small-city neighborhoods, historic downtowns, rural and agricultural land, commercial corridors, industrial areas, schools, parks, riverfront areas, major transportation routes, and

residential subdivisions. Using 2024 ACS 5-year Census Reporter data, the combined study area includes approximately 36,393 residents across roughly 112 square miles. Buchanan has an estimated population of 4,223 in 2.5 square miles, the City of Niles has 11,803 residents in 5.8 square miles, Buchanan Township has 3,439 residents in 32.1 square miles, Bertrand Township has 2,600 residents in 34.4 square miles, and Niles Township has 14,328 residents in 37.3 square miles.

The City of Buchanan is a compact historic community with a traditional downtown, older neighborhoods, former industrial properties, parks, schools, and public facilities. Buchanan's history as a manufacturing community, including its connection to Clark Equipment Company and Electro-Voice, continues to shape its built environment and public service needs. Buchanan Charter Township surrounds much of the City of Buchanan and includes a more rural and residential development pattern, natural areas, riverfront land, and larger geographic coverage needs. Bertrand Charter Township is a largely rural township in the southern portion of the county, with residential, agricultural, and transportation-related service needs and proximity to the Indiana border. Niles Charter Township is the largest of the participating townships by population and includes a mix of residential neighborhoods, commercial corridors, rural areas, and development connected to the greater Niles and South Bend area. The City of Niles serves as a larger urban center in the study area with a historic downtown, established neighborhoods, commercial and industrial activity, and more concentrated service demand.

Like many Michigan communities, the participating jurisdictions are evaluating how to provide fire and emergency services in a way that is sustainable, accountable, and responsive to current and future needs. Fire departments are facing increasing pressure related to staffing availability, recruitment and retention, training requirements, apparatus costs, equipment replacement, station conditions, capital planning, daytime response coverage, and increasing expectations for emergency response. At the same time, each jurisdiction must balance public safety needs with local tax capacity and other municipal service demands.

The communities are interested in a study that looks beyond current jurisdictional boundaries and evaluates what system would make the most operational sense if fire service were designed across the full service area. This should include an assessment of whether existing fire station locations are properly positioned, whether apparatus and equipment are distributed efficiently, whether staffing models are adequate and

sustainable, and whether one or two fire districts would provide better long-term service, cost efficiency, accountability, and capital planning.

The consultant should be familiar with accepted fire service planning standards and benchmarking resources, including NFPA 1710 for career fire department organization and deployment, NFPA 1720 for volunteer and combination fire department organization and deployment, and community risk assessment/standards of cover approaches commonly used to evaluate fire station location, response performance, staffing, and community risk. NFPA maintains standards addressing organization and deployment of career, volunteer, and combination fire suppression operations, emergency medical operations, and special operations.

Project Objectives

The primary objective of this project is to provide the participating jurisdictions with a clear, practical, and defensible analysis of whether a joint fire district model would improve fire service delivery, emergency response, staffing, equipment use, capital planning, and long-term financial sustainability.

The study should answer several key questions. First, what is the current condition of fire service delivery across the five jurisdictions? Second, how do existing station locations, apparatus, staffing, response patterns, and capital resources compare to accepted best practices and the actual risk profile of the service area? Third, if the communities were designing a fire district from the ground up, where should stations, equipment, staffing, and administrative functions be located? Fourth, would one district serving all five jurisdictions make the most sense, or would two districts better reflect geography, call demand, response time, operations, cost allocation, and local identity? Fifth, what governance, funding, staffing, and implementation models would be available if the jurisdictions decide to move forward?

The final study should be useful to elected officials, appointed boards, fire chiefs, firefighters, municipal staff, residents, and other stakeholders. It should provide enough detail to support future policy decisions, public discussion, funding decisions, and possible implementation.

Scope of Work

The selected consultant will be expected to complete a comprehensive fire service feasibility and operational study. The scope below is intended to identify the expected work, but respondents may recommend additional tasks or refinements if they believe those items would improve the final product.

Part 1: Existing Conditions Review

The consultant shall begin by collecting and reviewing information from each participating jurisdiction. This should include current department structure, service areas, station locations, staffing model, call volume, call types, response times, mutual aid and automatic aid use, apparatus and equipment inventory, facility conditions, operating budgets, capital budgets, revenue sources, contracts, ordinances, policies, training requirements, insurance ratings, fire prevention activity, inspection programs, emergency medical response role, dispatch data, and any existing service agreements.

The existing conditions review should include interviews with municipal managers, township supervisors, fire chiefs, command staff, firefighters, finance staff, elected officials or board representatives, and other key stakeholders. The consultant should also conduct site visits of all current fire stations and review the condition, location, functionality, capacity, limitations, and future usefulness of each facility.

Part 2: Community Risk and Standards of Cover Analysis

The consultant shall complete a community risk assessment for the combined service area. This should include a review of population, geography, land use, major buildings, schools, senior housing, industrial and commercial properties, rural and agricultural areas, water supply, transportation corridors, rail lines if applicable, rivers and water hazards, target hazards, special events, high-call-volume locations, and other local risks.

The consultant shall develop a standards of cover analysis that evaluates current and potential future deployment models. This should include response time analysis, travel time mapping, station coverage mapping, staffing availability, apparatus deployment, overlapping coverage, mutual aid reliance, and service gaps. The analysis should compare current performance to reasonable fire service benchmarks, recognizing that the study area includes both urban and rural service conditions and may involve a combination of career, paid-on-call, part-time, and volunteer staffing.

Part 3: Station Location and Apparatus Analysis

The consultant shall analyze existing station locations and determine whether they are properly located for the current and future risk profile of the combined service area. The study should include GIS-based drive-time and response-time mapping from existing stations and should identify potential gaps, duplication, or opportunities for improved deployment.

The consultant shall also review all major apparatus and equipment, including engines, tankers/tenders, brush units, rescue units, command vehicles, utility vehicles, SCBA, turnout gear, hose, radios, tools, and other major equipment. The study should identify the condition and useful life of major apparatus, replacement needs, duplication, specialized equipment needs, and opportunities for more efficient fleet planning if the communities move to a district model.

The consultant should identify whether the existing station network should remain as-is, be modified, be consolidated, be supplemented, or be reorganized under a one-district or two-district model. This should include consideration of station functionality, response coverage, staffing, geography, future growth, facility costs, and operational efficiency.

Part 4: Staffing and Operational Model Analysis

The consultant shall evaluate current staffing levels, firefighter availability, command structure, training, officer development, daytime response, overnight response, recruitment, retention, compensation, and administrative support. The analysis should identify whether the current staffing system is sustainable and what staffing model would be recommended under each potential district scenario.

At a minimum, the consultant should evaluate the following operational models: maintaining separate departments with improved mutual or automatic aid; shared administration or shared fire chief; contract-for-service model; one unified district covering all five jurisdictions; two fire districts based on geography or service demand; combination staffing model with paid-on-call, part-time, and full-time personnel; duty crew model; and phased implementation models that allow the communities to move toward greater consolidation over time.

The consultant should also review command, incident management, standard operating guidelines, training consistency, fire prevention, inspections, public education, records

management, dispatch coordination, purchasing, grant writing, maintenance, and administrative support functions.

Part 5: Governance, Legal Structure, and Funding Options

The consultant shall evaluate possible governance and organizational structures for a joint fire district or districts. The study should not replace legal review by the participating jurisdictions' attorneys, but it should identify practical options for future legal review and policy discussion. Possible models may include an interlocal agreement, a joint fire authority or district, a lead-agency contract model, shared department administration, or other structures available to Michigan local governments.

For each model, the consultant should evaluate board composition, voting structure, representation, budget approval, asset ownership, staffing authority, labor and personnel issues, insurance and liability, debt, capital assets, equipment transfer or lease options, facility ownership, service contracts, ordinances, public accountability, and withdrawal or amendment provisions.

The consultant shall also develop funding options for each recommended model. This should include consideration of taxable value, population, calls for service, geographic area, road miles, station location, risk profile, equal shares, blended formulas, millage, special assessments, contract payments, capital improvement funding, grants, and reserve policies. Each funding model should be clear enough for elected officials and residents to understand how costs would be allocated and why.

Part 6: Financial and Capital Planning Analysis

The consultant shall prepare a financial analysis of current fire service costs across the five jurisdictions and compare those costs to potential future models. The financial analysis should include operating costs, staffing costs, payroll and benefits, training, equipment, apparatus replacement, station maintenance, station improvements, utilities, insurance, dispatch or technology costs, administrative support, fire prevention costs, and capital replacement.

The study should include at least a five-year and ten-year financial forecast for each recommended model. It should also identify any startup costs, transition costs, potential savings, cost increases, capital needs, and funding gaps. The analysis should be realistic and should clearly distinguish between operational efficiencies, true cost savings, avoided

future costs, and additional investments that may be needed to bring the system to a best-practice level.

Part 7: Implementation Plan

The consultant shall prepare an implementation plan for any recommended model. The plan should identify the major steps needed to move from the current structure to the recommended structure, including governance approvals, legal review, public engagement, financial decisions, staffing changes, asset transfers, contracts, policies, ordinances, operational integration, communications, branding, records management, and timeline.

If the consultant recommends a phased approach, the implementation plan should identify short-term, mid-term, and long-term steps. This may include immediate improvements that can be implemented even if a district is not created, such as automatic aid refinements, joint training, common standard operating guidelines, shared purchasing, coordinated apparatus replacement, or shared administrative support.

Part 8: Public Engagement and Presentations

The consultant should anticipate a transparent and collaborative process. The selected consultant will be expected to meet with a steering committee made up of representatives from the participating jurisdictions. The consultant should also be prepared to present findings at public meetings or joint board meetings. At a minimum, the proposal should include a kickoff meeting, stakeholder interviews, at least one interim presentation, and a final presentation to the participating jurisdictions.

The consultant should describe how it will communicate complex fire service, financial, and governance information in a way that is understandable to elected officials, firefighters, staff, and residents.

Deliverables

The selected consultant shall provide the following deliverables:

- A kickoff meeting and final project work plan.
- A written data request list.
- An existing conditions report.
- A community risk and standards of cover analysis.

- GIS maps showing current station coverage, drive-time/service-area coverage, response patterns, and recommended alternatives.
- A station, apparatus, equipment, and staffing assessment.
- At least three service delivery alternatives, including the current structure with improvements, one joint district, and a two-district option. The consultant may include additional models if appropriate.
- A governance and funding options analysis.
- Five-year and ten-year operating and capital cost projections for each recommended model.
- An implementation roadmap.
- Draft final report for review.
- Final report in PDF and editable Word format.
- Presentation materials in PowerPoint format.
- Final presentation to the participating jurisdictions.
- All maps, tables, financial models, and supporting data shall be provided to the participating jurisdictions in usable electronic format.

Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be reviewed by representatives of the participating jurisdictions. The jurisdictions may conduct interviews with one or more firms before making a recommendation. Selection will be based on the proposal deemed to be in the best interest of the participating jurisdictions.

The following evaluation framework may be used:

- Understanding of the project and proposed approach: 30%
- Relevant fire service, municipal, and shared-service experience: 20%
- Qualifications and availability of project team: 15%
- Cost and overall value: 15%
- Quality of proposed deliverables, public engagement, and presentation approach: 10%
- Schedule and ability to complete the work in a timely manner: 5%
- References and past performance: 5%

The participating jurisdictions reserve the right to adjust these criteria, request clarification, conduct interviews, negotiate scope and cost, reject any or all proposals, or select the consultant deemed most qualified and best suited for the project.

Anticipated Schedule

The anticipated schedule for this RFP is as follows:

RFP issued: July 27, 2026

Questions due: August 12, 2026

Responses to questions issued: On or before August 19, 2026

Proposals due: September 2, 2026

Interviews, if needed: Week of September 14, 2026

Consultant selection: September 18, 2026

Contract approval: September 28, 2026

Project kickoff: October 5, 2026

Draft report due: January 27, 2027

Final report due: February 24, 2027

The participating jurisdictions may modify this schedule as needed.

Questions and Submission Instructions

All questions regarding this RFP shall be submitted in writing to the lead contact by the deadline stated above. Responses to questions may be shared with all known interested respondents to ensure a fair and transparent process.

All questions should be directed to Tony McGhee, Buchanan City Manager at 269-695-3844 ext. 15, or via email to tmcghee@cityofbuchanan.com.

Information to Be Provided by Participating Jurisdictions

The participating jurisdictions anticipate making available existing records reasonably necessary for the consultant to complete the study. This may include budgets, audits, call data, response data, station information, apparatus inventories, equipment inventories, staffing records, service agreements, mutual aid agreements, policies, capital plans, maps, taxable value information, population data, and other available information.

The consultant should identify any specific information needed from each jurisdiction in its proposal and should be prepared to assist the jurisdictions in organizing data in a consistent format.

Desired Outcome

The desired outcome of this project is a practical, data-driven, and locally realistic fire service roadmap. The participating jurisdictions are not seeking a report that simply recommends consolidation because consolidation is being studied. The jurisdictions are seeking an honest assessment of what model provides the best balance of response capability, firefighter safety, fiscal responsibility, local accountability, operational sustainability, and long-term capital planning.

The final report should clearly identify whether one fire district, two fire districts, or another shared-service model makes the most sense. It should explain why, show the operational and financial impacts, identify the steps required to implement the recommendation, and provide decision-makers with enough information to decide whether to move forward.

Standard terms and conditions

The following standard clauses shall apply to the subject Requests for Proposals (RFPs). Submission of a proposal constitutes acknowledgment and acceptance of these terms.

Right to Reject or Accept Proposals

The partner communities (Parties) reserve the right to accept or reject any or all proposals, to waive any informalities or irregularities in the proposals received, and to award the contract in whole or in part to the proposer deemed to be in the best interest of the Parties.

No Obligation to Award

Issuance of this RFP does not obligate the Parties to award a contract, and the Parties shall not be liable for any costs incurred by proposers in the preparation, submission, or presentation of proposals or in anticipation of award.

Proposal Costs

All costs associated with the preparation, submission, and presentation of a proposal shall be borne solely by the proposer. The Parties shall not be responsible for any costs or expenses related to this process.

Right to Negotiate

The Parties reserves the right to negotiate with one or more proposers deemed most responsive and qualified, to request additional information or clarification, and to conduct interviews or presentations as necessary.

Proposal Validity

All proposals shall remain valid and binding for a period of not less than ninety (90) days following the proposal due date unless otherwise specified in the RFP.

Addenda and Modifications

Any interpretation, correction, or change to this RFP will be made by written addendum issued by the Parties. Only those communications identified by formal written addendum shall be binding.

Disclosure and Public Record

Proposals submitted in response to this RFP become public records subject to disclosure under the Michigan Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), MCL 15.231 et seq., following award or rejection of all proposals.

Award and Contract Execution

The successful proposer shall be required to enter into a written agreement with the Parties. The Parties reserve the right to accept or reject proposed contract terms and to make modifications in the best interest of the Parties.

Compliance with Laws

The proposer shall comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws, ordinances, codes, and regulations, including but not limited to those governing non-discrimination, safety, and employment.

Reservation of Rights

The Parties reserves the right to:

- Reject any proposal deemed non-responsive or non-responsible;
- Withdraw or cancel the RFP at any time without obligation;
- Negotiate with one or more proposers;
- Postpone proposal submission or opening dates; and
- Consider any other factors deemed to be in the Parties' best interest.

SCHEDULE

In order to be considered, the proposal must be received at the City of Buchanan, 302 N Redbud Trail, Buchanan MI 49107, on or before **September 2, 2026 10:00AM EST**. All proposals shall be in a sealed package marked: ATTN: BID – Joint Fire District Feasibility Study Proposal. Electronic bids are not accepted. Bids received after this date and time cannot be accepted.

Please submit your sealed bid by **September 2, 2026 10:00AM EST** to:
Kalla Langston-Weiss, City Clerk
302 North Red Bud Trail
Buchanan, MI 49107

For any questions regarding the project, please contact:
Tony McGhee, City Manager
tmcghee@cityofbuchanan.com
269-695-3844 ext. 15

Existing Fire Station Locations and Population Density Map

