

**Feasibility Study for Merger of Clark County, KY Fire Department with City of Winchester, KY Fire/EMS**

Dear Prospective Bidders:

The Greater Clark Foundation, on behalf of and in conjunction with the Clark County, KY Fiscal Court and the Winchester, KY City Commission, seeks proposals from qualified and experienced consulting firms to conduct a comprehensive feasibility assessment for unifying (merging) the Winchester City Fire Department and the Clark County Fire Department. The feasibility study will focus on evaluating the functional, financial, regulatory, and operational issues relative to the proposed merger.

**1. Background and Context**

Community Information: Clark County is in east-central Kentucky in the Central Appalachian Region. Winchester is the county seat. Clark County is identified as a “transitional county” by the Appalachian Regional Commission. Clark County is located along Interstate 64 and is adjacent to Lexington-Fayette County, Kentucky. Clark County was established in 1792 and includes many historic sites related to the exploration and settlement of the United States prior to the American Revolution.

Demographics: Clark County has a population of 36,972 with 19,134 of the population located within Winchester city limits. There are 14,836 households in Clark County with 8,031 located with Winchester city limits. The county contains a total of 1,649 Commercial Buildings and 14,663 Residential Buildings. 14% of residents under the age of 65 years are classified as disabled. The poverty rate for Clark County is 11.6%, with 19.6% of the people in Winchester in poverty. 92.2% of the Clark County population is white alone and 88.3% of the population of Winchester city being white alone.

Background: The Winchester Fire Department and Clark County Fire Department currently operate independently, serving their respective jurisdictions. A merger of these two fire departments has been proposed as a strategic idea to enhance emergency response capabilities, optimize resource allocation, and improve overall efficiency and service delivery to our community. The feasibility study will inform how and whether the two entities might approach a merger.

- Fire stations serving Winchester-Clark County are managed by Winchester Fire-Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and the Clark County Fire Department (CCFD) (See Attachment A: Fire Department locations and drive times and Attachment B: Housing Density Heat Map).
- Winchester Fire-EMS operates from three fire stations: Station 1 on North Maple Street (KY627) in downtown Winchester, Station 2 on Fulton Road adjacent to the Bypass Road (KY1958), and Station 3 on Fortune Drive in the Winchester/Clark County Industrial Park. All Winchester Fire-EMS stations are located within the city of Winchester. Winchester Fire-EMS is responsible for:
  - Fire suppression
  - Emergency Medical Services (ambulance services) throughout all of Clark County

- Fire prevention
  - Public education
  - Fire inspection
  - Fire investigation
  - Rescue
  - Hazardous materials response
- Winchester Fire-EMS is a member of the Bluegrass Emergency Response Team which provides hazardous materials response across 11 counties.
  - The CCFD operates from three fire stations: Station 1 on Barnes Drive, Station 2 on Fulton Road adjacent to the Bypass Road (KY1958), and Station 3 on Log Lick Road adjacent to Irvine Road (KY89). Stations 1 and 2 are within the Winchester city limits and the third is located adjacent to Irvine Road in Trapp, KY. The CCFD provides services to Clark County outside the City of Winchester city limits and is responsible for:
    - Fire suppression
    - Rescue (swift water, trench, rope, confined space, farm machinery, large animal)
      - Hazardous materials response
    - Ground search and rescue
    - Fire Inspection
    - Assistance to Winchester Fire-EMS on EMS calls in the County
  - CCFD is a member of the Bluegrass Emergency Response Team which provides hazardous materials response across 11 counties.
  - The Winchester Clark County Comprehensive Plan Update (pending 2023 adoption) states the following applicable goals:
    - Goal 7: Public Services - Ensure that all residents have equitable access to high-quality public spaces and services.
      - Objective 7C: Balance the level of fire and EMS service to improve safety and security, including the existing 911 emergency system for the county. (Reference Proposed Action Steps)
    - Goal 8: Public Infrastructure - Promote the development of adequate infrastructure such as water, sewer, and high-speed internet.

Why this Project and Why Now? Many communities struggle to cultivate the political will required to consider ideas that fundamentally alter the status quo, challenge power dynamics, or change funding streams. Winchester and Clark County, KY are no different. Questions about the feasibility of unifying City and County fire services have persisted for decades. The idea has been discussed, but not properly vetted. The idea has momentum presently because both the County and the City are looking for land for new public safety and first responder services, including land for new fire stations. The Greater Clark Foundation owns property within the search parameters for both the County and the City. Realizing this could be a serendipitous opportunity, the Foundation broached the idea of unification of fire services with the respective governing bodies, the Clark County Fiscal Court, and the Winchester City Commission. To help create the space for each body to consider this idea in good faith and with nothing to lose, the Foundation has crafted two incentives. The first incentive is to provide significant underwriting and support for the feasibility study represented by this RFP. The second incentive is

predicated on the results of the feasibility study. If unification of City and County fire services is feasible, and if the political will exists to make it a reality, the Foundation has agreed to offer some of its own land for a new command center. This action will create meaningful cost savings that can be parlayed into the unification efforts and the new command center.

Project Oversight: The project will be directed by a committee of 13 members who are stakeholders representing various interests including, but not limited to, City, County, GCF, other first responders, key community leaders, and subject matter experts. A complete list can be found in Attachment C.

Role of Greater Clark Foundation in this project: The Greater Clark Foundation (GCF) wishes to incentivize the City of Winchester and the Clark County Fiscal Court in their deliberations about this merger. The impetus for this discussion is that GCF owns property inside the search parameters for current sites currently being evaluated by both the City and County fire departments (see Attachments D and E). GCF will provide leadership, facilitation, and financial support for the feasibility study.

## **2. Scope of Work**

The selected consultant will be responsible for the assessments identified below. Each assessment should be able to stand alone and clearly contribute to a larger narrative about the impact on service delivery and quality across the county. Each assessment should include quantitative AND qualitative assessments. Within each distinct assessment, the consultant should provide a feasibility rating using an objective scale and including the rationale for said rating and scale. The consultant should also provide an overall feasibility rating for a proposed city/county fire and EMS merger.

### **a) Functional Integration**

- i. Describe anticipated functional efficiencies/deficiencies that may be gained/lost through a merger, with a focus on any expanded community impact or other overall benefits.

### **b) Financial feasibility**

- i. Evaluate the financial benefits and risks associated with the merger and provide recommendations to maximize cost-effectiveness.
- ii. Assess the financial implications of the merger, including but not limited to:
  - one-time integration costs
  - ongoing operational expenses
  - potential savings
  - funding sources for the merged entity at onset and in future
- iii. Provide high-level assessment and examples of potential funding structures.

### **c) Regulatory issues**

- iv. Identify and analyze relevant legal and regulatory requirements at the local, state, and federal levels that may impact the merger process.

- v. Assess potential challenges related to compliance, licensing, and certification for personnel, equipment, and facilities during and post-merger.
  - vi. Provide guidance on how to address legal and regulatory hurdles to ensure a smooth transition.
- d) Operational integration
- vii. Assess the organizational culture of each entity including opportunities and challenges that may arise from merging two distinct organizations.
  - viii. Assess HR opportunities and challenges that may arise including workforce requirements, pipeline, compensation, and the like.
  - ix. Assess IT systems, data integration, and any other hardware or software integration opportunities and challenges that may arise.
- e) Case Studies

Consultant to provide at least three case studies of other similarly scaled and/or similarly organized communities that have completed a merger of this type. Cases studies should encompass functional, financial, regulatory, and operational aspects of each merger and should allow the reader to visualize relevance and applicability in our own community.

Potential for second phase. Client reserves the right to add additional services to the scope of work in a second phase for an additional fee. Additional services could include geographic and/or site assessment, community impact assessment, implementation plan, public education plan, or any other services that may be necessary.

### **3. Proposal Submission**

Interested consulting firms should submit their proposals by **[Proposal Submission Deadline]**.

The proposal should include the following:

- a) **Executive Summary:** A brief overview of the firm's understanding of the project and a summary of the proposed approach.
- b) **Consultant Qualifications:** A detailed description of the consulting firm's experience and expertise in conducting at least two other similar feasibility studies, especially in the public safety or emergency services sector.
- c) **Project Methodology:** An outline of the approach, tools, and methodologies that will be employed to execute the study successfully. Please outline the types of and levels of participation needed from each party to execute the scope of work.
- d) **Project Timeline:** A proposed timeline for completing the feasibility study, including key milestones and deliverables.

e) Cost Estimate: A comprehensive cost breakdown, including fees and expenses associated with the study. Note: this will be a lump sum fixed fee engagement. For purposes of comparison, please estimate the hours for the engagement, provide hourly rates for all team members who will work on the project, and provide an aggregated fixed fee rate.

#### 4. Selection Criteria

The selection of the consulting firm will be based on the following criteria (100-point scoring):

- a) Experience and expertise in conducting feasibility studies for public sector organizations, especially in the emergency services domain. (20 points)
- b) Track record of successful mergers and organizational change management. (25points)
- c) Demonstrated understanding of financial analysis and budgeting for public organizations. (20 points)
- d) Strong knowledge of relevant legal and regulatory frameworks affecting fire departments and emergency services in Kentucky. (20 points)
- e) Excellent communication skills and the ability to work collaboratively with stakeholders. (15 points)

#### 5. Timeline

- RFP Issuance: [Date]
- Pre-Submission Conference: [Date]
- Deadline for submitting questions [Date]
- Final Q&A Issued [Date]
- Proposal Submission Deadline: [Date]
- Consultant Selection: [Date]

#### 5. Point of Contact

For any inquiries regarding this Request for Proposal, please contact:

Jen Algire, President and CEO  
The Greater Clark Foundation  
[jalgire@clarkambition.org](mailto:jalgire@clarkambition.org)  
859-355-9054 (o)  
704-975-2081 (m)

We look forward to receiving your proposals and finding the right consulting partner to help us assess the feasibility of merging the City and County Fire Departments. Thank you for your interest.

Sincerely,




Attachments:

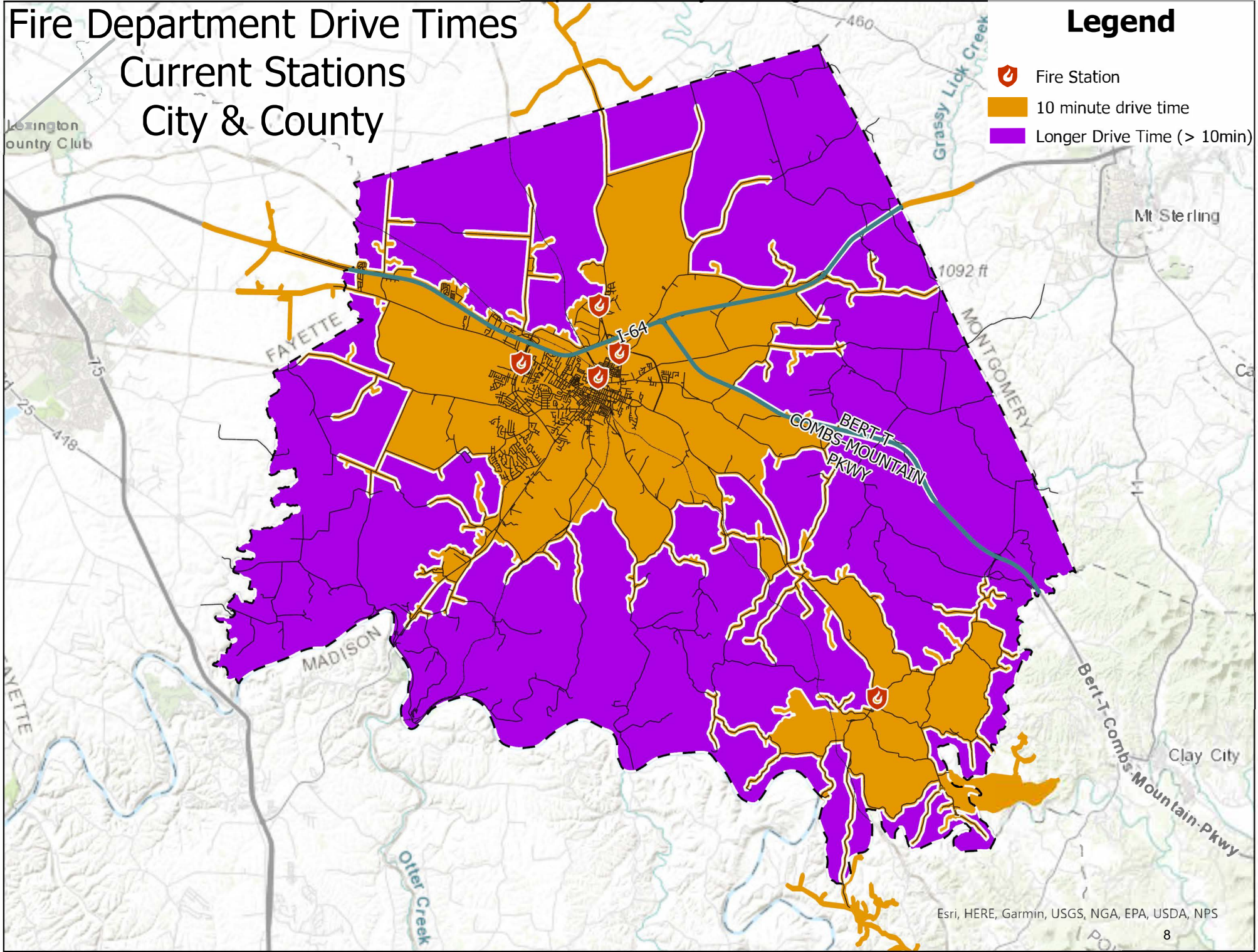
- A. Map of Clark County indicating current Fire/EMS service locations and drive times
- B. Clark County housing density heat map
- C. Feasibility Study Committee Roster
- D. Letter from GCF to County and City
- E. Map of property proposed for unified command center (if applicable)

DRAFT

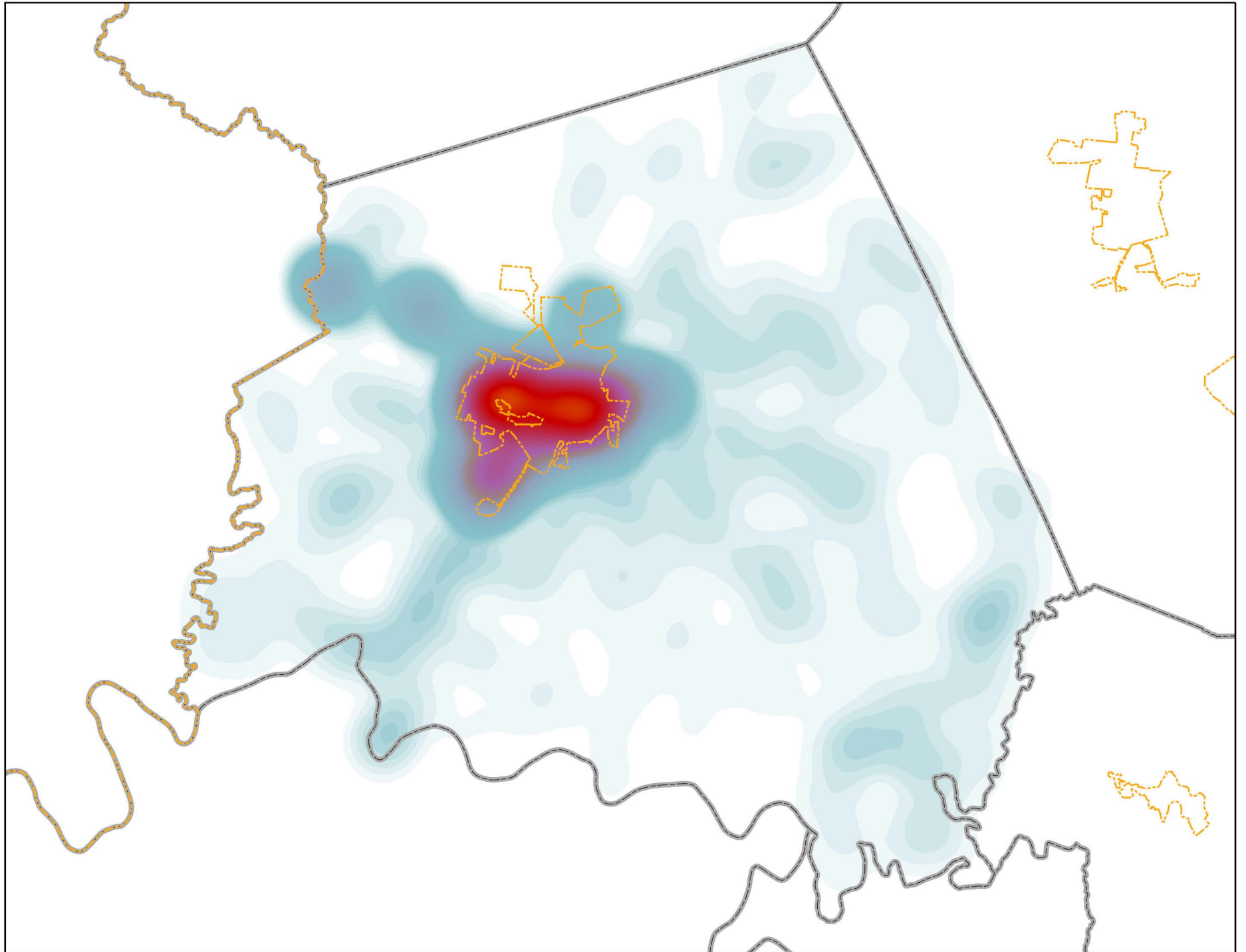
# Fire Department Drive Times Current Stations City & County

## Legend

-  Fire Station
-  10 minute drive time
-  Longer Drive Time (> 10min)



Attachment B: Clark County housing density heat map





Attachment C: Feasibility Study Committee Roster

This page intentionally left blank. To be completed once study committee is approved.

## Attachment D

July 5, 2023

Hon. Les Yates, Judge Executive  
Magistrates of Clark County Fiscal Court  
Mr. Steve Asbury, Fire Chief  
Clark County Courthouse  
34 South Main Street  
Winchester, KY 40391

Hon. JoEllen Reed, Mayor  
Mike Flynn, City Manager  
City Commissioners  
Mr. Chris Whiteley, Fire Chief  
32 Wall Street  
Winchester, KY 40391

via email and hand delivery

Dear County and City Leaders:

I am writing today with an offer and an invitation that supports the Clark County Fiscal Court, the City of Winchester, and The Greater Clark Foundation's shared goal(s) of ensuring the highest quality of services for the residents of Clark County, KY.

Based upon conversations with County Fire Chief Asbury and County Judge Executive Yates, we understand the Fiscal Court is in the process of evaluating the feasibility of replacing Fire Station #2, including potential land acquisition and site planning. Concurrently, from our conversations with City Fire/EMS Chief Whiteley and other City officials including City Manager Flynn, we understand the City of Winchester is also looking to acquire property for a new fire station. My understanding is that each entity is evaluating locations within a similar geographical area to serve its respective constituents. We believe these concurrent searches present a unique opportunity to seriously consider the feasibility and benefits of unifying the County and City Fire and EMS services to provide the highest level of emergency services to ALL residents of Clark County.

In conversations with the respective Fire Chiefs, each expressed an interest in exploring a countywide/unified Fire/EMS service, acknowledging that the long-term benefits to the community could be significant. Both Chiefs expressed that it would be a challenging undertaking yet would be worth our community's time and investment. We understand this is a complicated process, but one worth pursuing.

You may be aware that GCF owns property at the intersection of Bypass Road and Colby Road. This property, known as *The Traveling Trail*, is currently used for passive recreation via a 1-mile mowed path around the property. We believe the property is within the search parameters for the location of both the County and the City's emergency services. While GCF has its own hopes and dreams for this property, we believe the fate of all people is woven together. To facilitate the unification of Fire and EMS services, the Foundation is willing to allocate a portion of the property to be used for a public safety complex. We believe this could save roughly \$2 million in acquisition costs that could be redeployed as part of a unification process. With this letter, we invite Clark County and the City of Winchester to explore this option in partnership with GCF. To facilitate this process The Greater Clark Foundation is willing to provide a portion of the funding to assess the feasibility and necessary processes.

The potential benefits to unification are significant. First and foremost, the goal would be to provide a consistent, high level of service across the entire geography of Clark County. Done well, a unified Fire/EMS would benefit from greater efficiency, better staffing, better rescue capabilities, streamlined communications, and - with strategically placed stations and appropriate staffing - improve the ISO rating for the entire County. A unified organizational structure would allow for a unified strategic plan. There would be one common vision for the entire County with all resources aligned toward that vision. Strategic deployment of resources countywide can eliminate unnecessary redundancies and lead to more effective and efficient use of tax dollars. For example, unification would create space to redeploy two of the County's suppression apparatus, currently located

within the City, to underserved County locations. It would also ensure that all responders are operating within the same standard operating procedures, same guidelines, and same plans. There would be a stronger career path for employee development, with all personnel obtaining the same credentialing. In short, it would allow the County and the City to provide more and better services to all residents, regardless of one's address.

We estimate the cost savings that would accrue to the County and the City from GCF's contribution of the site would create an additional \$2 million that could be parlayed into the unification efforts, including a high-quality facility for the unified Fire/EMS, with additional substations strategically placed throughout the County. Our residents would benefit from a kind of municipal collaboration that has real, tangible, and long-lasting benefits. Our region would benefit by having Clark County blaze a trail, demonstrating that it is possible to use creativity and determination to do what is in the best interest of Kentucky's taxpayers.

We look forward to discussing this possibility with you and would welcome an invitation to present publicly to the Court and the Commission at the earliest convenience.

Sincerely,



Jen Algire  
President & CEO  
The Greater Clark Foundation



Darren Henry  
Chairman of the Board  
The Greater Clark Foundation

Cc: William Elkins, Clark County Attorney  
William Dykeman, City of Winchester Attorney  
Greater Clark Foundation Trustees

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