

Executive Summary: St. Francis–Bethel Fire Joint Powers Agreement (JPA)

The City of St. Francis and the City of Bethel are considering entering into a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) to form a unified fire district. This partnership consolidates fire services, shares costs fairly, and provides a stronger, more sustainable framework for protecting both communities.

Why a Joint Powers Agreement?

- Ensures long-term sustainability of fire/EMS services.
- Provides stronger legal authority than mutual aid agreements.
- Improves efficiency by reducing duplication of facilities, equipment, and administration.
- Enhances service quality through unified staffing, training, and resource deployment.
- Protects cities from liability by creating a separate legal entity.

Key Features of the JPA

- **Effective Dates:** Transition begins November 2026; full operations commence January 2027.
- **Governance:** A five-member Joint Powers Fire Board (two council members from each city, plus one At-Large member for outside perspective).
- **Funding Formula:** Costs shared using population and tax capacity to ensure fairness (see Exhibit B).
- **Facilities & Equipment:** Each city donates its fire station and equipment to the District for joint use and management.
- **Employees:** St. Francis firefighters become District employees January 2027; the District becomes the sole employer for fire staff.
- **Accountability:** Annual budgets approved by both city councils, quarterly financial reports, independent annual audits, and yearly service reports.
- **Legal & Insurance Protections:** The District carries full insurance, indemnifies the cities, and operates under Minnesota liability statutes.

Benefits to the Community

- **Improved Response and Reliability:** Unified staffing and training improve service delivery.

- Financial Fairness: Equitable cost-sharing ensures each city pays its fair share.
- Expanded Capability: Shared resources provide stronger capacity for large incidents, mutual aid, and regional growth.
- Future Growth: Additional cities can join, creating opportunities for regionalization.
- Transparency: Built-in governance checks, reporting, and public accountability.

The St. Francis–Bethel JPA is a forward-looking approach to ensure efficient, reliable, and accountable fire and emergency services for residents today and into the future.