

State officials praise Toledo, Ottawa Hills fire merger

BLADE STAFF

State officials in Ottawa Hills on Wednesday touted the village's merger with the City of Toledo to provide fire services as a shining example of how other municipalities can work together to save money.

The Toledo and Ottawa Hills fire merger was completed 18 months ago, a move that village Mayor Kevin Gilmore said saves the village \$400,000 a year.

And, despite some contentious meetings during the planning stages, Mayor Gilmore said surveys that village residents have filled out have been "very, very positive."

The agreement involved the hiring of Ottawa Hills firefighters by the city under a 20-year contract, and in exchange, Toledo took over fire service in the village.

As part of the deal, Ottawa Hills pays Toledo about \$430,000 a year; the city previously reported that the move also saves the city about \$400,000 in overtime costs.

Randy Cole, president of the state's controlling board, said the shared services agreement is "exciting. ... I have goose bumps," he said during a news conference at fire Station 15 in Ottawa Hills.

A state report released in June by the Governor's Office of 21st Century Education and the Office of Budget and Management, "Beyond Boundaries: A Shared Services Action Plan for Ohio Schools and Governments," recommends more partnerships across the state to improve efficiency and the delivery of services.

"It is the time for state and local leaders to think creatively, challenge status quo, and find new ways to deliver services at the same or reduced costs," the report states.

As an example, Mr. Cole said the city of Talmadge, an Akron suburb, from 2008 to 2012 was able to double its general fund balance to more than \$4 million after creating a dispatch partnership with nearby Stow, Ohio, and joining the Regional Income Tax Agency, an organization that collects taxes for Ohio municipalities.