

**Ad-Hoc Committee on Consolidation of Departments, Committees and the  
Number of Supervisory Districts for Oneida County  
September 16, 2010  
Minutes**

**Committee members present:** Chair David Hintz, Jack Young, Carol Pederson, Denny Thompson, and Tom Rudolph.

**Others present:** Gary Baier, Peter Wolk, John Potters, Joe VanDerLaarschot (Daily News) and Kerri Ison.

**Call to order:** The meeting was called to order by Chairman Hintz at 9:30 a.m. noting the meeting has been properly posted and the facility is handicap accessible.

**Approve agenda:** Motion by Rudolph/Pederson to approve today's agenda with approval to change the order of items at the Chair's discretion. All ayes; motion carried.

**Approve minutes:** Motion by Pederson/Rudolph to approve the minutes of August 30, 2010 as presented. Rudolph noted the minutes are very complete and detailed. All ayes; motion carried.

**Public comments:**

Gary Baier reminded all to attend MDA Fall Harley Rally.

**Committee Team Updates:** This team has been assigned to investigate the potential consolidation of county committees. Young has been out of town recently and has been unable to meet formally. However, he spoke with the team by telephone and exchanged ideas. Work continues on the issue.

Pederson indicated she is in favor of reducing the number of county board supervisors on each committee. She understands the sense of having an odd number on a committee but believes three is sufficient. Young noted this issue needs to wait until the number of county supervisors is decided upon and workload is assessed. He also noted some towns have changed the makeup of their committee structure to fewer members as they indicated they accomplish more.

Hintz asked the Committee Team if additional help is needed. Young and Pederson both felt they can complete the task in a timely manner. Young hopes to have several different plans for discussion at the next meeting.

**Supervisors Team update:** Young and Rudolph have collected material but haven't formally met. Rudolph compared data of other counties similar in population noting some information suggests smaller county boards spend more than larger boards per year.

Hintz looked at similar data and referenced a recent article from the Lakeland Times which mentioned a study done by the Wisconsin Taxpayer's Alliance (WTA). He also spoke with two people from WTA regarding the study. The study was completed in 2003 and found that larger county boards (similar to Oneida County) spent less money per capita than smaller boards per resident. The study did not conclude the reasons why but hints that larger boards may keep a closer eye on spending. He was also told some county boards are using this particular study to justify larger boards. Hintz noted WTA tries to stay out of discussion and provides statistics only giving no solid reasons why data is the way it is. Young wondered if the study took into account the reduction of departments and/or the consolidation of committees.

Young noted the last time redistricting was done Oneida County went from 20 to 21 members to make board representation an odd number and to give Minocqua additional representation. The County was taken to court because a certain supervisor did not want Woodruff represented by an additional representative, even though this gave the area greater representation. Young indicated the same supervisor does not favor plan of fewer supervisors.

Thompson noted that statutorily 31 supervisors are allowed and noted Oneida County seems to be in line with other counties. He noted people in the towns want to be adequately represented.

Hintz feels an odd number is good and doesn't believe it is logical to increase the number of supervisors at this time. No matter what number is decided upon it, the rationale for the decision must be justifiable, logical and explained sufficiently. He would prefer an explanation that people would understand and agree upon. It is a delicate situation which needs logic behind the proposal.

Pederson thinks Oneida County should be looked upon as a unit and work together instead of pulling in different directions -- addressing what's best for the county as a whole. Hintz believes representatives are needed from all communities that make up the county. Supervisors represent a group of people that make up the districts and all look out for the good of Oneida County.

Young believes if the number of county board supervisors is increased the public will petition for a referendum asking for fewer supervisors—the county can do nothing to stop that request. Rudolph agrees this could happen if the decision is not justifiable. It was noted the number of supervisors can be changed only once every ten years.

Rudolph noted the WTA study states a relationship between size and spending but there are views that larger boards should be more accountable because they represent fewer constituents. It also indicates increasing a board by one member decreases per capita spending by \$8-10. Thompson agrees as representatives could respond quicker to issue with fewer constituents. Hintz noted this information was also included in the Lakeland Times articles. Rudolph believes public opinion at this point in time is such that it behooves this Committee to find the ways and means to propose a reduction in

the number of supervisors rather than force a referendum which would not be based on facts, figures and data but primarily on emotions. This is a reality of the times.

Hintz feels taxes are too high at the county level. People feel government is too large -- a national trend that is growing in popularity. The goal/direction is to reduce size of county government and county board is a major component of county government.

Young believes Oneida County has held county taxes relatively steady over the last number of years. Constituents think that because Oneida County collects the tax bills that the money is used by the county when, in fact, it goes to the school districts and technical college. Rudolph agrees with that assessment.

Pederson had a constituent ask what benefits are available from the various county departments besides tax bills and passports. Thompson noted he always begins with security/protection, land identification/land records, and road maintenance.

Hintz believes the county can be more efficient. The County has good employees and has been run well but believes it can be more efficient.

Rudolph met with Potters to discuss tasks and thinks more information is needed. Comparisons must be made with other counties with similar structure (number of supervisors, population, committee makeup, etc.) focusing on how they operate to avoid reinventing the wheel. Rudolph hopes Potters can assist with that process.

Hintz began developing a matrix of surrounding counties but most had more supervisors than Oneida County. Potters supplied a matrix using comparable counties used in a 1999-2000 study (mostly based on population, equalized value, demographics) done by a contracted consulting firm. He shared the following information and reviewed in detail. Counties considered comparable at the time included: Door, Douglas, Langlade, Lincoln, Marinette, Oconto, Rusk, Shawano, Taylor and Vilas. He noted Door County is continually considered related due to tourism and equalized value; FTEs are approximately 25 more than Oneida County. He spoke with county administrator who said they've done a study and feel it's an appropriate number of FTEs for the county departments the last time a study was done. Douglas is similar and they've reduced staff by approximately seven FTEs through attrition (due to retirements); some positions may be refilled. Langlade County administrator noted a reduction of 10 FTEs through the development of Family Care. Lincoln County has appropriate amount of FTEs considering their size, but they have a county-owned nursing home facility. Marinette County Administrator noted a reduction of approximately seven FTEs through attrition. Marinette has also done self-imposed consolidations when sensible. Oconto County is considered Oneida County's sister county in most comparisons. They have approximately 30 less FTEs, however their law enforcement center is 1/3 the size with only a 50-60 inmate capacity (Oneida County's capacity is 185). Shawano County has decreased FTEs but recently sold the nursing home. Vilas has increased by .50 FTE with the hiring of an AIS coordinator and other hiring. Rusk and Taylor Counties have not responded thus far. Oneida County has been looking at not filling positions through

the vacancy review process and has decreased nine FTEs. Potters believes the process is being done properly as service levels have not diminished.

**Department Team update:** Thompson indicated this is a daunting task as supervisors do not know the intricacies of individual department functions and don't delve into the day-to-day operations. Seems like help is needed to get a better handle on it and need to be careful of what and how things are said.

Young felt there are a few departments that could be consolidated but a majority could stand alone if the number of supervisors does not change. Committee needs to discover if there is any duplication of services.

Hintz felt this is the most challenging aspect of consolidation. He spoke with a few committee members and Potters about how to study this properly to come up with the best answer. He believes the December goal is unattainable the way the issue is currently being approached, with a two-member team. Other alternatives were discussed including hiring a consulting firm and/or appointing employees to assist with a study.

Potters feels the first step is contacting other counties to see how they addressed the issue. He emailed his listserv of county contacts and received about 12 responses out of 72. Responses showed about five counties who hired outside firms to do a study. Many hours and days were spent on the study and sharing of the information. At the end, most county boards chose not to follow the study's recommendations. If they did follow through with the recommendations, they were only marginally successful at reaching the desired goal. Potters also looked at counties that studied the issue on their own and looked at opportunities through attrition. We have looked at departments similar in services, those that may have redundancy or have worked together on service projects – this has worked well thus far. He doesn't want department heads to get panicky. He thinks there are more opportunities to be discovered and feels there are ways to combine the services of a consulting firm (to get an outside objective) and county staff to help with project. Potter's has spent a lot of time with several departments, but normally it is when issues arrive. Typically, department heads will give biased opinions for the good of their own department which has been shown during the vacancy review process. He requested additional time to brainstorm ideas to begin the review process.

Rudolph agrees with Thompson that this is a huge task and it is impossible for two people to do the job properly and to determine what is needed. He felt that it may also be uncomfortable for committee members as department heads could look upon the process as micro-management. He believes there would be some benefit to get an outside perspective rather than to work on it internally.

Thompson recently served on the Human Services Board who hired a consulting firm. He feels they did a very good job and their recommendations were very helpful to Oneida County. It is costly but worthwhile.

During research, Hintz was unable to find another county who recently completed a similar task but did find that consulting firms Baker-Tilly and WTA have studied similar issues.

Rudolph noted some department heads are elected officials which may put another dimension to consolidation. Young reminded the Clerk of Courts, District Attorney, and Judges are already under the Law Enforcement Committee. Potters noted when he looked at departments who have elected officials as department heads in smaller counties, the elected official may take on a role as personnel director, etc. but in larger counties it is generally not feasible.

Pederson noted some departments do not operate totally on county monies but on grant funding. Hintz agreed making the county more efficient is a complex issue with many aspects to be considered (i.e. unions, elected officials, etc.) He believes committee members agree that consolidation of departments is a complex issue and all are still struggling with how to proceed. Potters is still working on recommendations on how to proceed so and committee is unsure of approach to be taken.

Young would like to focus on one aspect of consolidation at the next meeting so it can be discussed at length and all can work together. Redistricting can happen once census figures are received and it is hoped to have a decision of supervisory numbers by the time that information is received. Discussion followed. Hintz is agreeable with addressing one topic followed by brief updates on other topics at the next meeting. Discussion continued. It was agreed that department consolidation is most the complex issue and requires the most work. There is a great need to look at an approach to accomplish that task. Hintz recommended the number of supervisors be the primary topic of discussion for the next meeting and follow with brief discussion on other topics.

Rudolph requested Potters provide information from comparable counties regarding number of supervisors and include per capita costs and county demographics.

Baier believes downsizing government isn't changing the number of supervisors but controlling the amount of employees. Oneida County has good employees and departments -- many who work well together. He believes the County needs to keep control of spending -- not borrow money but preserve it. The County also needs to cross train employees to help with coverage and if someone retires leave the six month waiting period stand. He suggested utilizing the seniors or volunteers of the county as there are many with great backgrounds to pull from. Baier believes a referendum should not be recommended as county supervisors have been elected to make decisions. This is an opportunity to start to take control.

Rudolph felt one objective of this committee should be to provide information to the county and constituents that would preclude needing referendum so it is understood why and what is being done. Discussion followed. Some members felt this is a real concern and the conclusion must be justified.

Hintz believes many feel taxes are too high. Recommendations must be based on logic and we want to move ahead and anticipate what the public wants. The task is not easy and will take time but he is confident it can be accomplished.

When faced with the high tax issue, Rudolph tells constituents the county budget has been cut to the “bare bones” and asks what services should be cut. It takes money to operate the county. Thompson noted seasonal residents have no problem voicing opinions on what to cut. Most young residents need the services the county provides. Rudolph noted the average age of demographics continues to increase which in turn requires an increase in services.

**Future meeting dates:**

October 7, 2010                      9:30 a.m.                      Room to be determined

**Future agenda items:**

Primary topic will be number of county board supervisors followed by updates from other two teams.

Young and Rudolph plan to meet with Potters prior to the next meeting. Hintz would appreciate opinions of other county board supervisors the issue of number of supervisors.

**Adjourn:** Motion by Rudolph/Thompson at to adjourn 11:07 a.m. All ayes; motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

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Kerri Ison, Recording Secretary

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David Hintz, Chairman