

Local Government Restructuring has Long History In Allen County

The history of restructuring of local government in Allen County has a colorful past in our community and continues to be a work in progress today. The root of this effort dates back to the suburbanization of Allen County following World War II. In 1950 the census reported 4,371 urban residents not living in a municipality in Allen County as compared to 66,294 urban residents not living in a municipality in 1990, or 22% of the total Allen County population.

As the number of urban residents not living in a municipality in Allen County continues to grow, residents look to Allen County Government to provide urban services like police services, planning and economic development and transportation. These needs and expectations continue to change the face of Allen County Government for the 65,000 plus urban residents living outside a municipality.

This continuing trend is, in part, the root cause of the strong opposition to annexation in the 1990 's that lead to duplication of public services and debates over taxation, spending strategies, economic development, capital improvement priorities, land development polices, downtown revitalization and public safety.

Forty years of attempting to modify the structure of local government has yielded little change. The restructuring debate has consumed time and energy. The following timeline provides a chronology of the efforts to restructure local government.

The 1960's

- **1967** - William (Bill) Latz introduces House Joint Resolution #12 in the Indiana General Assembly to permit City and/or County to adopt Home Rule Charter. This was defeated in part by the strong opposition of the 3,693 members of the Allen County Farm Bureau.
- **1969** - The Fort Wayne Chamber of Commerce initiates Local Government Modernization effort.
- **1969** - Legislation introduced to alter Township's role in local government.

The 1970's

- **1970** - Local Government Study Commission Report Released. The Commission was charged with recommending ways to create greater financial and administrative freedoms for local government; devise ways to allow local government to consolidate; decide type and size of municipal corporations in need of additional revenue sources and broader administrative discretion and concentrate efforts on jurisdictions that should receive high priority; determine future financial requirements of local governments for providing employee pensions and ensuring that these financial obligations are met.
 - **The Commission made 14 Proposals - among them were:** Permit Counties, Cities and Towns to create a county-wide highway service authority (Municipal Corporation) with exclusive highway jurisdiction within the county; Permit Counties, Cities and Towns to create a county-wide police protection authority with exclusive police jurisdiction within a city.
 - General Assembly enacts Public Law 173, "The Consolidated Cities and Town Act" applicable to first class cities (population over 250,000). Requires no local referendum for implementation. Applicable only to Indianapolis and Marion County at this time.
- Indiana Code 36-3-1 Regarding First Class Cities**

- Before July 1 of the year that a city becomes a 1st class city, it will be governed as a 2nd class city.
- After June 30 of the year that the change occurs, an interim government will govern as indicated under Section 3 of the Indiana Code.
- January 1 following the year of change the City becomes a consolidated city (Fort Wayne's current population 220,486)
- **1973 - Indiana General Assembly Adopts Significant Measures related to Governance in the State and Allen County:** **Public Law 163** authorizes St. Joseph County to shift legislative functions from the Board of Commissioners to the County Council. **Public Law 164** authorizes the creation off a Joint Building and Minimum Housing Department. **Public Law 177** authorizes the merger of the City of Evansville and Vanderburgh County if approved by local referendum. (The referendum was defeated.)
- **1973-'74 - Allen County Republican Business and Professional Club Undertook Reorganization Study and Mayor Ivan Lebamoff sought and received City Council financial support to study city/county consolidation.** Both studies were commissioned to study how to eliminate government duplication but had different findings and therefore did not result in concurrence on appropriate changes to be sought from the Legislature.
- **May 1976 - Director of Community Development & Planning for the City of Fort Wayne addresses the Downtown Rotary Club on the issue of UNIGOV -** *"I don't think the Indianapolis Unigov experience is for Fort Wayne and Allen County at three-quarters of the way through the 20th Century."* He noted that Allen County has twice the land area but half the population of Marion County. Fort Wayne's urban problems had not reached the intensity of Indianapolis.
- **September 1978 - City of Fort Wayne Updates the Comprehensive Plan -** The Plan Commission begins looking at the "urban service area" concept as utilized in Louisville, Kentucky.
- **May 1979 - Fort Wayne Future,** a local civic group actively supports local government consolidation with a News Sentinel insert and by lobbying through the Mayoral election. Their recommendations included:
 1. One tax for urban areas and one tax for rural locations.
 2. County Commissioners, the Mayor and City Council should create a joint "City-County Commission" to make consolidation happen.
 3. Fort Wayne Futures recommended public hearings to determine how the new government would work, to enact special legislation to allow Fort Wayne to do it and to conduct a referendum, bringing the recommendation for consolidation before the people.

The 1980's

- **1980 - Indiana General Assembly** enacts, as part of House Enrolled Act 1001 , a New Home Rule Chapter of the Indiana Code.
- **September 1981 - Home Rule Provision of House Enrolled Act 1001** becomes effective and applies to Cities, Towns, Counties and the consolidated City of Indianapolis and Marion County but is limited in scope.
 - **Indiana Code 36-1-3-6 (a) States: "If there is a constitutional or statutory provision requiring a specific manner for exercising a power, a unit wanting to exercise the power must do so in that manner."**
- **1982 - City of Fort Wayne** adopts Comprehensive Plan and includes "Urban Service Area" concept.
- **1984-'85 - Greater Fort Wayne Chamber of Commerce:** Community Visioning Project results in "Vision 1985-2000" document . One of the goals of the document suggests government consolidation of urbanized portions of Allen County.

- **1986 - Sheriff Dan Figel** calls for a commission to study the pros and cons of merging the Allen County and Fort Wayne Police Departments.
 - Later the same year Police Chief David Rieman proposes merging the Emergency Communications Departments of the City and County (neither moved forward).
- **1988 - City Council members propose, with the support of the Allen County Commissioners and Mayor Paul Helmke, to institute the County Option Income Tax.** That failed; the counter effort was to take steps to eliminate the local Wheel Tax, which illustrates the closeness of City and County finances.
- **1989 - Hudson Institute** engages local foundations to examine the sustainability of the community's economic, social and civic vitality. Chapter Two of "Fort Wayne: Toward 2000 and Beyond" examined local government and endorsed the consolidation of City and County Government.

Quote from Chapter Two: "Early in this chapter we noted that we had another reason for our local belief that reorganization of local government in the Fort Wayne/Allen County municipal complex was necessary, a reason that goes beyond the standard arguments based on equity and efficiency considerations. Simply put, we believe that a series of problems threatens the existence of the Civil City of Fort Wayne, as we know it. These problems are already serious and are worsening. The City does not have the resources to cope with these problems successfully in a way that will allow it to retain its character, its quality of life and even its physical integrity. If these problems are allowed to fester in a perfunctory fashion because of limited resources the City is virtually certain to change dramatically. In the process it will lose much of what makes it attractive to business and residents. **It is likely to experience economic and social decline that will, in turn, affect the living standards and quality of life of everyone in the area, not just those who live within the City itself.**"

The 1990's

- **September 12, 1990** - From News Sentinel Editorial: "*Structured and explained properly it could be shown to be in everyone's best interest. City or County we are all in this together and we better start acting like it.*"
- **October 1990** - Community leaders representing Business, Government, Media Labor and Civic Sectors visit Lexington, Kentucky to learn about merged government as implemented.
- **Winter 1990** - IPFW School of Public and Environmental Affairs conducts a symposium on local government structure. The workshop on Metropolitan Government Strategies was designed to serve as a public forum where critical issues of government structure featured in the Hudson Study could be discussed. This effort never went anywhere. The reasons were cited as no political will; too much turfdom; conflict and fear of change.
- **1990** - Park supporters propose creating a special taxing district for the entire urban population excluding New Haven, Adams Township Park District.
- **1991** - Senator Tom Wyss requests the preparation of draft legislation creating the Allen County - Fort Wayne Park District for potential introduction to the General Assembly. This was not introduced to the General Assembly due to concerns over the property tax ramification.
- **May 1991** - Community Foundation publishes special supplement to encourage discussion of the issues identified in the Hudson Institute Study.
- **August 25, 1991 - Journal Gazette** debates Government proposal, wants local government to decide what is right for Fort Wayne.
- **September 25, 1991 - News Sentinel quotes Mayor Paul Helmke:**
"Our research showed that no one person or group could come up with a plan which will be accepted by the entire community. Restructuring must be developed with widespread community input before it will receive widespread community support. The support is

important because the public should have the chance to vote on any reorganization or merger plan.”

- **October 6, 1991 Journal Gazette** article reports disdain of local farmers for merged local government.
- **1992 Senator Tom Wyss introduces Bill 107 into the General Assembly.** The features of the bill include:
 1. Changing the population parameters for 1st and 2nd class cities.
 2. Give counties with 2nd class cities the option to reorganize into a charter county government that consolidates its 2nd class cities, certain 3rd class cities and towns.
 3. Provide a method for establishing a Commission for Charter County Government.
 4. The Commission is to develop a plan for Charter Government.
 5. Requires a referendum on the establishment of a Charter County Government.
 6. Requires, upon voter approval, the election of an executives and Legislative body for Charter Government.
 7. Provided for the dissolution of the reorganized units.
- **February 22, 1992** - Senate Bill 107 is not heard in time in the Senate Government Relations Subcommittee in time to move forward in the 1992 session of the General Assembly. The Bill is dead for the year.
- **January 1993** - The language of Senate Bill 107 is reintroduced as Senate Bill 190 and also fails to get out of committee.
- **1993** - Before the Legislative Session begins the Board of Commissioners register their opposition.
- **February 1993** - Mayor Paul Helmke proposes the formation of a Citizens Commission to Review Local Government.
- **March 11, 1993** - First meeting of the Citizens Commission.
- **September 25, 1995** - The formal work of the Citizens Commission concludes with a retreat outlining their findings and recommendations.
- **December 1, 1996** - An article in the Journal Gazette explores City -County relations.
- **1999 - C.O.M.P.E.T.E. (Coalition on Monitoring Public Efficiency and Tax Expenditures) Project Wraps up:** The study focused on the State’s structure of local government and identify duplicate or overlapping government functions among townships, cities, and counties.

2000, the 21st Century

- **October 2000 - Invent Tomorrow** releases community based strategic plan.
- **February 5, 2003** - Preparation of a joint City -County Comprehensive Plan is announced.
- **February 19, 2003 – City / County Councils** plan joint meetings. City and County agree to cooperate on Zoning.
- **August 2003** - Mayor Richard proposes offering select City government services on a contractual basis to the County government.
- **September 2003** - Public discussion of local government restructuring re-emerges.
- **January 2, 2004** - Discussions move forward the New Sentinel reports 2004 as “The Watershed Year”.
- **January 2004**
 - **SB223** to create a statewide Local Government Efficiency and Financing Study Commission to examine issues of local government structure and financial support for a two-year period successfully moves out of the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs.
 - **SB225**, allowing for the creation of Government Reorganization Commissions in counties with 2nd class cities. Recommends local referendum for approval/rejection,

stalls on a 5-5 vote initially but passes 6-3 on reconsideration. Second reading amended to apply to Allen County only.

- **January 2004** – City / County Councils meet to pass a joint resolution to support the establishment of a formal process involving elected officials and the private sector to evaluate the concept of local government restructuring in anticipation of passage of SB225 by General Assembly.
- **January 21, 2004** - Local opposition from smaller towns and township officials begins to emerge.
- **January 2004 - Invent Tomorrow** hosts Louisville Kentucky in a public forum to discuss their process in becoming a consolidated government.
- **February 2004** - State Legislation is introduced in the 2004 Session of the General Assembly.
 - **SB223** is to create a statewide Local Government Efficiency and Financing Study Commission to examine issues of local government structure and financial support for a two-year period.
 - **SB225** allows for the creation of Government Reorganization Commissions in counties with 2nd class cities. Commission recommendations would require local referendum for approval / rejection.
- **February 2004** -City County endorses legislative effort.
- **February 2004** - Second generation of **C.O.M.P.E.T.E.** study suggests a review of Township level government in Indiana. A bill to examine Township Government dies in committee.
- **February 2004** - General Assembly raises the population threshold to become a 1st Class city from 250,000 to 600,000 population.
- **February 2004** - Local Government Efficiency and Financing Study Commission established. Members will be appointed. Commission is charged with studying local government finance, structure and service methods, the merger and consolidation of municipal corporations, creation of Local Charter Government Study Group to look at restructuring efforts in Fort Wayne and Allen County, the ongoing Vanderburgh restructuring study efforts, government consolidation efforts in other states , and other issues as determined.
- **February 4, 2004**
 - **SB225** in amended form passes the senate with a 36-11 vote. Moves to the House.
 - **SB223** passes the Senate on a 47-2 vote.
- **February 17, 2004**- Senator David Long pulls SB225 Merger Bill.
- **March 2004**- Invent Tomorrow establishes Local Government Action Committee to work with the Charter Government Study Project, Inc. Invent Tomorrow hires John Stafford and Andy Downs of IPFW to prepare and present a Local Government 101 presentation to be presented in the fall of 2004.