



**Indiana Commission on Local Government Reform
Summary of Ft. Wayne Public Forum: October 9, 2007**

The compiled responses below were provided to the Indiana Commission on Local Government Reform by approximately 60 citizens at the public forum held in Ft. Wayne at the Allen County Public Library on October 9, 2007. Comments were recorded by a member of each table (small group). In cases when similar responses were recorded by multiple tables, these responses are marked with the number of tables providing the response. Written comments submitted at the event have been recorded with other individual submissions taken by web, e-mail, and regular mail.

Please talk briefly about the local governments and local government services or functions you have accessed or interacted with over the last year.

- Library (6 tables)
- School system (4 tables)
- Parks and recreation programs, bicycle trails (2 tables)
- County Auditor (2 tables)
- Assessors (2 tables)
- Police department (2 tables)
- County Treasurer
- Township trustees
- Town clerk
- Town council
- City government

What local government services are most critical to the success of your community and your family? To maintaining a healthy local economy and good quality of life?

- Infrastructure (streets, water, sewer) (8 tables)
- Public safety (7 tables)
- Libraries (7 tables)
- Schools (6 tables)
- Parks and recreation (4 tables)
- Township assistance (3 tables)
- Fire protection, fire department (3 tables)
- Joint city/county zoning, planning (2 tables)
- Poverty relief, make them known and accessible, food banks (nonprofit/churches) (2 tables)
- Economic base
- Broadband service
- Greening of cities
- Health and safety
- Arts
- County and township assessor, land values (know the market), fair property taxes. They take pride in what they do.
- Economic development
- Judicial services



- Child protective services
- Social services
- City planning department
- Emergency medical service
- County functions
- Poor relief
- Courts
- Availability of fiber optics
- LaGrange has consolidated library system. A book mobile is used in rural areas.
- Indiana has the highest number of Carnegie libraries in the nation and one of the highest used/capita

What can be done to modernize and streamline local governments and the services they provide?

- Trustees (combine, eliminate) (6 tables)
 - Townships should be absorbed into the county (2 tables)
- Work together to minimize duplication and fraud (4 tables)
- Educate the community on what are the duties of the trustee, etc. (3 tables)
- No one size fits all; need for local decisionmaking regarding options (3 tables)
 - Different people have different issues, so different options must be provided
 - Local control issue – Who makes decisions? Uniformity is important, but you have to look at individual counties.
 - You cannot create the character of a place through legislation. That is up to local government to choose this, not the state.
 - Let stakeholders make decisions, not lawmakers
- Consistence—government first, then go to private agencies. Need to have plan and a way to make it work across multiple counties (Allen, Adams, etc.) (2 tables)
- Some roles are appropriate for townships (fire) some are not (poverty). One size doesn't fit all. (2 tables)
- For the long term, think strategically. No quick answers. Proactive, reactive. Take the time to do the right thing. (2 tables)
- Share data, don't reinvent the wheel (2 tables)
- Consolidate public safety services within counties (2 tables)
- Consolidate smaller school districts (2 tables)
- Freeze additional programs (2 tables)
- Make some elected positions appointed, appoint those who don't make laws or taxes (recorders, surveyors, judges) (2 tables)
- Look at joint services for city/county, joint purchasing/cooperative purchasing, dispatch (2 tables)
- Statewide database, statewide library card (serve local, be available statewide) (2)
- Add professionalism: set qualifications, provide training (2 tables)
- Combined services have been positive where it has been done (2 tables)
- Study approaches used by other states
- Balance money and services
- Government accountability
- Educated, informed government workers and job opportunities
- Trustees are necessary because they are the first contact people have, and that person should have control of the welfare
- Poor relief should be private sector

- Elect law and tax makers, school board, library board
- Hold city and county elections at the same time
- Restructure county executive
- Mayor/council model works. Apply this to county: County Commissioner/County Council
- Who will do what duties if consolidation happens?
- Consolidation is dependent on population (libraries, fire services)
- Community needs to understand the role of government
- Continue small government
- Local service is important
- Look at other ways to fund things rather than just property taxes
- Consolidate library districts within counties
- Saving school money is more efficient than consolidation
- Streamline the criminal justice system: One manager over circuit and superior courts, use faith-based intervention programs
- Update technology
- Coordination among local governments, libraries, schools, county offices
- Privatize the food stamp program
- Privatize unemployment compensation
- Be sure to consider quantity vs. quality
- Require more Commissioners and stagger their terms
- Investigate how or when to cap spending for design building, especially in the schools
- Merge building and planning departments
- Better public access to government information including taxes and not only on the internet
- County-wide park system should address the parks and the numbers
- Consider centralization vs. consolidation
- Unify rules for building projects
- Consolidating libraries could provide more stability for smaller units
- Computer access for everyone, great, but also for assistance for food stamps, divorce, unemployment
- Epicard debit cards for unemployed people
- Cross training (saves staff, serves better)
- Need less red tape
- Streamlining takes away from local government doing its own function
- Consolidating libraries may not save money
- City and County have same entities, what does each do if they do the same thing?
- Consider centralization vs. consolidation
- There are still areas unserved by libraries
- Trim fat, keep budget down
- Excess money in township funds should roll-over
- Local government caps are elastic
- Remove state functions from property taxes (State Fair, State Forestry, etc.)
- Children's services should be state tax, not local
- When you privatize who is accountable?
- State library and state archiving system are worst in industry
- There should be more local/neighborhood schools
- In LaGrange, they have the option of assessing real property or not

What do you think has the biggest impact — negative or positive — on the ability of local governments to deliver services efficiently and effectively?

- Service, employees go the extra mile (3 tables)
- Too many hands in a process can reduce efficiency
- Duplication of services; not sharing information
- Too many review panels on public budgets
- Libraries doing major cooperation already
- Local governments are respectful of customers (2 tables)
- Most library systems are doing a good job, immediate access, technology, information prioritized, collection of our history, reading readiness (2 tables)
- There is too much competition between township trustees; they should be working together and for each other (2 tables)
- State mandates particularly for schools have a negative effect (2 tables)
- Laws change before locals can make changes, e.g., HB 1478 (2 tables)
- When communication is good in government, services are improved
- There is a problem with how we run elections in Indiana
- The way we finance services has had a negative impact. A blend of financing is needed. Every unit of government that has “regions” is a different region.
- Focus on human services is lacking
- Some school systems are doing a good job of teaching and doing more than what is required
- Competency in local government has positive effect
- Technology for everyone, but brings greater responsibilities
- Township government is the government that is closest to the people providing efficiency
- Township trustees are not disparaging, not discriminating
- Voter apathy and disconnection
- The way government is structured
- People are unwilling to take a stand.
- Multiple leaders with equal power and differing opinions
- School system has too much politics and public cannot get anyone to address issues
- Schools are not accountable
- City council members listen to what everyone has to say and then do what they want anyway
- Assessors who don't intend to get Level 2
- County assessor challenged by property value acquisition
- Impact of tax distribution on local institutions
- How trustees administer poor relief. Access to trustees is a problem. Some are open only two days a week. Some work from home, etc.
- Fixed property tax levy
- Politics
- County vs. City Council power struggle
- Unqualified government personnel
- State controlled entities financed through county taxes and their limitations
- Department of Local Government Finance is adverse to locally supported projects
- County surveyor's office is not friendly. Too many regulations.
- Treasurer refused mail services
- The state controls too much of what we do; cities and counties should be able to do some of these things without state approval

- Subsidizing use-fire services, library services outside of district(s)
- There needs to be more transparency in how government is run. There is no vehicle for people to know how to separate state programs.
- Lack of state function
- Turf battle between localities and state
- We rely on computers too much. Survey personally vs. computer use.
- Automation vs. talking to people, people needing service want face-to-face communication.
- Legislators are out of touch
- Locals are taking the blame of state action
- Late tax draws
- It takes time to get assessors to levels 1/2 certification

Considering the discussion this evening, what are your top three recommendations for reforming the structure and/or function of local government?

- Consider streamlining state government as well as local government (3 tables)
- Streamline/eliminate trustees. Reorganize duties. Consolidate townships into counties (3 tables)
- Discontinue unfunded mandates from state government (2 tables)
- Initiate referendums at local, county, and state levels. Government closest to the people, governs best (2 tables)
- Do not consolidate smaller units-we'll lose identities
- Establish a blend of financing options for localities
- Consolidate schools and districts; we need fewer school administrators
- Consolidate fire departments
- Reduce number of taxing districts
- Reduce number of elected officials
- Consolidate counties and standardize regions
- Shared information
- Proactive-not reactive band-aid approach
- Take the time to do things right. We want to think long term and strategically; and things need to be researched and evaluated in depth.
- Legislators need to be in touch with the public they serve
- Concentrate on local situations and what issues mean locally
- Stop closed door meetings to build more sense of trust and openness among community
- Use a model that is working well as an example
- Our county libraries are not consolidated and may not need to be. City libraries are offering great services but may not benefit or meet the need of local populations.
- Need 911 system
- Consolidate 911 system
- Streamline communications
- End duplication of services
- Library and airport boards should be elected
- Equalization of funding
- User fees for libraries
- Provide library service to all residents, eliminate unserved townships
- Reinstate inventory tax
- Provide accountability (elected officials, ombudsman for local government)

- More cooperation between different branches and levels of government
- Joint purchasing (buying consortiums)
- Provide more education on government, make it transparent
- Reduce expansion of programs that go into debt

Are there any other important issues that we have not discussed yet?

- City government required business owners to spend thousands of dollars to enclose smoking areas, and then banned smoking
- Major Moves impacted the way work is distributed. There are many major firms getting the business and not many small firms.
- People are not interested in Indianapolis dictating to us what we should do
- We get Federal dollars that all goes to the Indiana prison system and Indianapolis police
- Class action lawsuit should be filed against city for the way property taxes were handled
- Many townships do not pay taxes to libraries
- The problems are in Marion and Lake Counties, why are we considering this?
- HR 1478 doesn't decrease taxes, just shifts them
- Indiana does not have high property taxes
- Forums need better publicity