



**Indiana Commission on Local Government Reform
Summary of New Albany Public Forum: October 15, 2007**

The compiled responses below were provided to the Indiana Commission on Local Government Reform by approximately 100 citizens at the public forum held in New Albany at the campus of Indiana University Southeast on October 15, 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.

- City council (3 tables)
- Zoning (3 tables)
- Public schools/Education (3 tables)
- Parks board/parks (3 tables)
- Planning (2 tables)
- Sewer/Storm water (2 tables)
- Water (2 tables)
- Practically everything (2 tables)
- Garbage (2 tables)
- Library (2 tables)
- Township trustee/assessor(2 tables)
- Fire (2 tables)
- Police (2 tables)
- County auditor, treasurer, etc. (2 tables)
- Town council
- County commissioners
- County council
- Mayors
- School boards
- Appointed boards
- Educational programs
- Transportation
- Health care organizations
- Sheriff
- Redevelopment commission
- State government
- Cemeteries
- Hospital guild
- Judges
- County clerk
- Roads



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?

- Fire (6 tables)
- Water and sewer (4 tables)
- Schools (4 tables)
- Streets/highways (5 tables)
- Police (5 tables)
- EMT (3 tables)
- Parks and recreation (3 tables)
- Planning and zoning (3 tables)
- Code enforcement (3 tables)
- Sanitation/garbage (4 tables)
- Bridges (2 tables)
- Storm drains (2 tables)
- Sidewalks (2 tables)
- Transportation (2 tables)
- Healthcare (2 tables)
- Welfare (3 tables)
- Libraries (2 tables)
- Poor relief (2 tables)
- Public safety (2 tables)
- Public housing
- Job training
- Cemeteries (Township trustee)
- Recreational facilities
- Public transportation
- Educational programs
- Educational investment
- Educated workforce
- Servicing city citizens needs
- Economy
- Skilled workforce
- County auditor
- Trying to keep young people local—avoiding brain drain
- Courts
- Environmental issues
- Cable TV
- Good customer service
- Unsafe properties trash: Building Commission
- Health
- Township assessors

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

- Consolidation/coordination of services/eliminate duplication/combine and streamline service delivery/unigovernment (7 tables)
 - e.g., Police, fire, schools



- Centralize administration (3 tables)
 - Purchasing, core leadership, etc.
 - However, maintain municipal autonomy
- Maximize use of technology (2 tables)
 - Make services available online when possible
 - Computer services
- Form a county government with a county administrator (professional background) accountable to an elected council (2 tables)
- Remove inefficiencies (2 tables)
- Consider demographics when delivering services (2 tables)
- Communication between government entities (2 tables)
- Need uniform technology amongst government offices (auditor, treasurer, assessors should all have same systems) (2 tables)
- Township-county consolidation
- Consolidate multiple counties
- Consolidate school corporations in every county, to hold school corporations accountable
 - School consolidation does not necessarily mean “big”; school district w/multiple smaller high schools
 - Singular school district as an administrator (Superintendent)
- Planning, zoning, and building – several overlapping jurisdictions—accommodate diversity
- More professionals on planning commission
- Need qualified paid people in local government; require resumé, education, training
- Better guidance from the state; help with software and hardware (w/tax bills)/technology; standardize services and technology
- Reform state government to make it accountable to the people; standardize
- Make units of government similar in structure
- Multiple school districts within single county
- Privatization
- Organization
- Need more public information
- Should have benchmarks for measured performances—maybe a state-level office to oversee county-to-county rankings
- Reconsider appointed vs. elected positions
- Volunteer services
- Move expenses that the state has control of to income tax instead of property tax
- Planning and zoning done by county could be done locally
- There is still a need for representation of the community
- Reform structure of county government to include a county judge executive to mitigate the difficulty in managing the current structure of county government
- Transform municipalities to a level of government as population and building grows
- Funding formulas need to be simplified
- Need checks and balances, open door laws, and balance of power between a legislature and executive bodies
- Local government cannot run effectively because state is not uniform from county to county
- There is no relationship between school and county governments—have to vote for school and county capital improvements. Schools need to be looked at.



- Move welfare to the state
- Efficiency in smaller units
- Poor management of government revenues
- Adopt fire districts
- Address disequities in state funding to schools by funding by relative enrollment rather than by relative assessed value
- Use technology to break down the barriers between offices in the same local government
- Address overlap in property records (auditor and surveyor) both are required to maintain complete records
- Don't trust state government to run local communities
- State needs reform
- When the city grows to dominate the county, it makes sense to consolidate
- No one size fits all
- Maintain local decisionmaking
- Making reform a condition for funding is not local control
- Consider rural needs
- Streamline local government
- There must be a Local government needs to be able to express the good things that are done.
- Services are more caring when done by the local people.
- Accountability about the way Sheriffs get paid

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

Positive

- Face to face contact is effective (2 tables)
- Ability to have interlocal agreements at local level (2 tables)
- Transportation system—positioning for interstate transportation and commerce
- Ungovernment models are effective for economic development efforts
- Volunteerism
- Ability to use home rule
- Small things mean a lot in rural community

Negative

- County leadership structure not suited to increasing demands/responsibilities; Commission-County Council structure vs. Mayor-council; Counties have no CEO function (4 tables)
- Fragmented elected bodies (multiple small jurisdictions) (2 tables)
- Lack of resources/high taxes (2 tables)
- Political vs. professional staffing (2 tables)
 - Administration, treasurer and planning should be staff positions (not elected)
 - Council could be appointed
- State government interferes with local tax collection: changes on top of changes, state mandates (2 tables)
- Lack of leadership; Politics, politicians, mindset (2 tables)
- Accountability is the most important thing for both effectiveness and efficiency (2 tables)
- Cost of rebate checks (2 tables)



- Froze property taxes for years; haven't caught up from tax controls over time (2 tables)
- Dysfunctional, small staffs
- Overlap/duplication of services; need to be streamlined and overhauled
- Need annexation; county is less agrarian more civilian
- Ineffective property assessments and collections; get local assessors more involved
- State government tells local communities how much they can tax themselves; local communities can make these decisions
- Lack of centralized county leadership; we need a central administration so people know who to go to within the county
- Public awareness about local government is lacking
- County government offices operate autonomously, need to work together
- Need benchmarks to measure performance
- Assessment process is too complicated
- State level does not make suggestions to better reorganize
- Tax bond issues
- High taxes force people away
- County uses services but doesn't pay the taxes to support them, and refuses annexation
- Sales tax is better than property tax
- Without property tax it is hard to keep properties from going fallow
- Unigovernment is more expensive
- State legislature
- Had to understand the systems at the state level
- "Moving the goal post," changing or not standardizing the rules
- Communication between levels of government
- Impossible for the average citizen to have a voice in government
- Hard for citizens to access services
- State mandates hardware and software that aren't designed to communicate
- Customer service is lacking in local government
- Consolidation of services/departments/units of government would lose human touch
- One size does not fit all
- The State Board of Accounts needs to be more accountable
- Unfunded mandates
- School corporation
- Trending not working
- Elimination of inventory taxes caused county to lose millions of dollars
- PTRC- frozen-needs to be re-evaluated
- DLGF is always changing thing and doesn't have a lot of direct knowledge
- Poor customer service from DLGF
- Cost of health insurance is rising
- Timing in getting to property tax receipts
- School funding formula is broken: disequities in state funding per student; disequity of assessed valuation
- New capital board comes with a cost
- Last year and a half has been rough
- Disagreements between council and boards of commissioners
- Crisis is from an Indianapolis perspective
- Blame shifting



- Removed ceiling for old age deduction
- Cuts in road funding/ keeping more MVH/LRS monies for the state
- State mandates

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

- Better coordination of services (Consolidation) (2 tables)
- Too much local government: eliminate duplication of both offices and services (2 tables)
- More local control over destiny/taxes (2 tables)
- Need benchmarks and rankings of each county to monitor and improve efficiency; should be done by the state
- Computerize services: voters; tax payments
- Move funding of state equalized services from property tax to state tax: schools, welfare, child services, courts
- Need centralized authority but maintaining local control
 - Qualified county executive who is accountable to local council
 - One superintendent for all county schools
- State government accountability and standardization of technology, services, and rules (specifically at the Department of Local Government Finance and State Board of Accounts)
 - More guidance for local governments
 - Communication
 - Clear concise rules
- Need to fix the assessing problem; revamp the assessment process to simplify the system and make it easier for counties to implement and property owners to understand
- Eliminate townships
- Re-draw county boundaries to a formula of population per area (in square miles)
- Direct the unification of service delivery (city/county 911, planning and zoning, parks and recreation)
- Improve accountability of local leaders
- Fairness should be considered, have to figure out who decides what is fair
- Qualified elected people
- Consider demographics and the differences between urban, suburban, and rural needs
- Use interlocal agreements
- Maintain the voice of the people through the use of referenda
- Public awareness of the process for remonstrance, petition, etc.
- Eliminate state controls on what a local community can set as a maximum levy allowing the local community to decide what it is willing to pay for the facilities and services it wants
- Simplify the funding formula for the distribution of funds from the state to local units of governments and school corporations
- School Corporation is 53 percent of cost to taxpayers. They need to be held accountable. Merge school corporations.
- In some areas look at merging city-county government
- Problem started in Marion and Lake County: property taxes in most counties have not had these problems. Trending does not work.
- Use technologies to gain efficiencies
- Eliminating trustees won't save money; it will cost more to provide the same level of service



- Local control over reorganization
- Provide grant monies to incentivize the evaluations of options for streamlining and collaboration
- Create a comprehensive multi-government, county-wide plan for services and spending, including information about the money that will be generated.
- Need less state government

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

- Question number 3 assumes things are not already modern and streamlined
- State needs to address illegal immigrants and business background checks