

Economic Development

I believe the concept of Economies of Scale is the viable solution we should pursue rather than the specific outcome of consolidation, elimination or privatization. As a member of the Council of Governments (COG), I arranged for Dr. Lynn Harvey, MSU professor, to share his insights on this topic. Dr. Harvey emphasized that "Collaboration, contracting and consolidation seem to be the current "buzz" words." We must remember that if given a choice, a local unit of government would prefer to be a self-producer and self-provider of community services. Whenever the option to contract, consolidate or eliminate is proposed, I believe we need to take a step back and make sure that the proposed re-organization fits the need.

Places to begin would be with smaller governmental units like the City of Galesburg, who struggle to meet new environmental requirements for storm water regulations. Water safety and usage has consequences far beyond the local district. Rather than each entity creating an individual plan, drafting and passing ordinances and then imposing additional taxes to cover the costs, dramatic efficiencies could be achieved with assistance and technical oversight from the County Drain Department.

Brownfield development, too, would benefit from County assistance. Portage and Kalamazoo City staff members focus on this important facet of economic development, but many times smaller units of government lose out on opportunities due to the lack of expertise, time, staffing, and funding. The County Planning Department could provide expertise and assistance while working with Portage and Kalamazoo to ensure appropriate, regional development.

Environmental and Public Health Threats

With increasing environmental and public health threats, citizens need to understand the risks facing their community. As an Emergency Planning Specialist, I facilitated community discussions to weigh the cost of emergency preparedness against expectations for response and recovery. Kalamazoo County Commissioners face the same challenge. The question we must address is: Can we afford not to be prepared? We must remember that the best of plans depends upon the people who implement the process. I have first-hand involvement with the Kalamazoo County oil spill and appreciate the Sheriff and his staff's quick response and continued work to protect our community.

Arena Project

I support voter-driven government – representing the wishes of my district accurately and fairly has been a cornerstone of my first two years on the Kalamazoo County Commission. My constituents and I agree that county government should not be in the business of owning or operating an arena/event center.

County government must be financially responsible in tough times and not place county general funds in jeopardy. Increasing taxes for an unproven venture is risky business. The constituents of District 15 and I are in support of redeveloping the proposed area but not at the expense of taxpayers. I discuss this issue on a regular basis with my constituents. I believe their voice is heard through my actions. The residents of District 15 have not indicated any interest in pursuing this project. I see no reason at this time to place the arena/event center tax question on the ballot. I will continue to listen to my constituents to ensure that their voices are heard.

Citizen Participation in Local Government

We need a stronger research-driven citizens' agenda of priorities. To accomplish that goal, County Commissioners need to place a higher value on civic leadership and the amount of involvement of our citizens from voting to volunteering. We can begin the process by reviewing our current format for citizen time and renew our efforts to teach citizens the roles and responsibilities of County government. I know that with frequent interaction with our residents, a commissioner learns what people need and want and what residents are willing to support. Together we can identify ways to increase a citizen's personal engagement in government.

Jail Expansion

I am a strong advocate for funding programs that intervene and prevent crime within our communities. I would prefer to direct additional monies to these important programs rather than increasing expenditures on inmate incarceration.

I do understand the safety needs for the jail renovation; however, I would prefer to see the structural safety deficiencies addressed rather than have the construction emphasis focused on increased jail inmate capacity. More beds require more personnel and I do not foresee the County general fund being able to support the additional staff expenses.