

**ALLEN COUNTY COUNCIL REORGANIZATION
MEETING MINUTES
JANUARY 5 2006
8:30 AM**

The Allen County Council met on Thursday, January 5, 2006 at 8:30 am in the County Council/Commissioners Courtroom. The purpose of the meeting was for election of officers, reorganization, appointments to boards and commissions and liaison assignments. Also any other business to come before Council.

Attending: Darren E. Vogt, President; Paula S. Hughes, Vice President; Michael W. Cunegin II, Paula A. Hughes, Calvert S. Miller, Roy Buskirk, Paul G. Moss and Paulette L. Kite.

Also Attending: Lisa Blosser, Auditor; Tera Klutz, Chief Deputy Auditor; Jackie Scheuman, Financial Manager; Susan Whetstone, Administrative Assistant and Commissioners, Linda Bloom, Marla Irving and Nelson Peters.

The meeting was called to order at 8:30 am by President, Darren Vogt.

Darren Vogt: The first order of business is Election of Officers and I will turn the meeting over to Auditor, Lisa Blosser.

Cal Miller: As we are approaching the changing of the guard I would like to thank Darren and Paula for doing a fine job. I would just like to say to Darren Vogt for doing what I think over the last two years was a commendable job as President of County Council. His level of activity in terms of dealing with all of the elected officials and department heads and being on top of the matter was impressive. It is an effort that I don't think I would be able to match; the bar has been set high for the new officers. I think the new officers will strive to achieve what he has and if they do they will have succeeded. I want to thank him for his two years of service.

Lisa Blosser: Good Morning, I will entertain nominations for President of the Allen County Council for 2006.

Darren Vogt: I would publicly like to thank Councilman Miller for those comments and the 6 of you and the Auditor and her staff for allowing me to lead you and I think we have gelled together and our debate and discussion has been very good and lively at times.

With that I would like to nominate Paula Hughes for President of Allen County Council for 2006. Paul Moss seconded it.

Mike Cunegin made a motion to close the nominations for President 2006. Cal Miller seconded it. Motion to close nominations passed.

Lisa Blosser: All in favor of Paula Hughes as President of Allen County Council for 2006 say aye. Motion passed 7-0.

I will now accept nominations for Vice President of Allen County council for 2006.

Roy Buskirk: I would like to nominate Paul Moss for Vice President of Allen County Council for 2006. Paul Moss seconded it.

Mike Cunegin made a motion to close the nominations for Vice President for 2006. Darren Vogt seconded it. Motion to close nominations passed.

Lisa Blosser: All in favor of Paul Moss as Vice President of Allen County Council for 2006 say aye. Motion passed 7-0.

Paula Hughes: I believe that I have talked to each of you regarding the interest in liaison and board appointments for this year. A couple of you I just talked to this morning so the list is not ready yet but I will either e-mail it to you by the end of today or at least by the end of this week.

We do have a little bit of other business at this time. I have talked to two of the members and they wish to serve again. Jesse Rios is our appointment to the Child Care Facilities Board and he is willing to serve again. I would recommend that we reappoint Jesse Rios to this board.

Mike Cunegin: I am the liaison to that group and I can tell you that he comes to all of the meetings and is a very active member on several service boards.

Cal Miller made a motion to reappoint Jesse Rios to the Allen County Child Facilities Board for 2006. Darren Vogt seconded it. Motion passed 7-0.

Don Niemeyer has been serving on the Allen County Regional Sewer Board and has expressed an interest in continuing to serve on that board.

Mike Cunegin: I had coffee with Mr. Niemeyer before Christmas and he indicated to me he wished to be reappointed.

Darren Vogt: I have had several conversations with him and also indicated to me that he would like to continue service the Regional Sewer Board.

Cal Miller: I too have had conversations with him he is an impressive individual and is dedicated to doing a good job. He has been responsive to the calls I made to him over the last year.

Mike Cunegin made a motion to reappoint Don Niemeyer to the Allen County Regional Sewer Board. Roy Buskirk seconded it. Motion passed 7-0.

Paula Hughes: We also have two appointments to the PTABOA Board; these are annual appointments. I was going to suggest that the current liaison contact Stacey Lopshire and Judy Macon and see if they are willing to serve.

Cal Miller: I will contact them and give you a report at the next meeting.

Paula Hughes: Clarence Reichart our appointment to the Woodburn Economic Development Commission; he would like to be reappointed as he really has a passion for serving on this Commission.

Darren Vogt made a motion to reappoint Clarence Reichart to the Woodburn Economic Development Commission. Mike Cunegin seconded it. Motion passed 7-0.

Paula Hughes: We also have an annual appointment of Gerald Neu to the Alcoholic Beverage Commission and he is interested in continuing to serve on the ABC Board.

Cal Miller made a motion to reappoint Gerald Neu to the Alcoholic Beverage Commission. Mike Cunegin seconded it. Motion passed 7-0.

Paula Hughes: Thank you for your faith and trust in me to carry this Council into the future. Darren Vogt has done an excellent job and I will try and strive to follow in his footsteps.

One of the things nagging at my consciousness is that we spend a lot of time with the internal affairs of County Government and we have been fairly successful in instigating or investigating change and efficiency that is needed within County Government. Certainly there is a ways to go in that but I think we have started down that path.

I would like for us to pay that same sort of attention to the matter of efficiencies between City and County Governments. That has been a topic at this Council table in the past. We have not met with the City Council during that last year and a half and I would like to re-start those meetings. I have not talked to John Crawford the new City Council President but will call him

today. I would like to reinstitute the joint meetings of City and County Council with a focus on efficiency and consolidation.

From a more immediate point I would like this Council to start to investigate with each of our departments; we will all be liaison to a balanced amount of departments. I would like us to talk to our departments about areas they see for consolidation with City government, if there are none that is fine but I think there will be a lot of areas that we can start with and facilitate some change. I charge each of you to carry that out over the next month and be prepared to come back at our February meeting with discussion of how the departments you are liaison to could start to enact some change and some efficiency in consolidation with City Government.

I would also like to challenge and discuss with this Council in becoming more active in collecting information regarding government consolidation. There has been discussion at the State level, the Corporate Council has facilitated conversation, Darren Vogt has served on the State Study Group, there is the group chaired by Don McArdle and Ben Eisbart the Charter Government Study Project. I feel out of touch with what their activity has been; there has been work done behind the scenes and some in front but it hasn't been consolidated and brought together. I would look for volunteers among this group to go out and start to research and investigate the activity of these groups.

Darren Vogt: The Local Charter Government Study Project, Inc has not done anything within the last 6-8 months. There are on going meetings and discussions among a small handful of those involved but right now there is nothing on the forefront that says there is anything pressing. The last discussion we had were regarding hiring an outside firm to come in and look at City and County and find out which areas could be consolidated without legislation from the State and gain some efficiency. I have attempted to have conversation with City Council President Smith regarding it but his agenda has not been that for the City side of things.

President Hughes, with your blessing and your help, I would like to have a cooperation summit, with the individuals who signed the resolution stating we supported consolidation, to sit around a table in an informal setting perhaps in the Omni Room, to discuss what areas would work to best utilize the resources we have in the most efficient manner. I would like to be actively involved in that; get together with those folks and have open discussion regarding the raw and figure out where we go from here.

Cal Miller: I think those are excellent ideas and to give a little more structure to the charge of President Hughes perhaps we should consider assigning

specific task to the Council members. There is universe of information out there that we need to draw together if we are going to be a participant in the continued advancement in the idea of consolidation; whether it is departments or the City and the County as a whole; or whether we pursue both goals at the same time. That universe of information includes, what is the Corporate Council doing? Recently both papers stated that they had an agenda of their own and that they are going to be pursuing legislation. I think that one of us should be in contact with them if not attend their meetings to find out what they have in mind. After we met with the Commissioners and Senator Long in Grabill his bill was withdrawn because it was felt that there wasn't enough public inclusiveness and the project got going before everyone was included. That is what spawned the Local Charter Government Inc. and as discouraging as Senator Long withdrawing his bill was there was at least an inkling of hope that the work would be continued. Let's get a copy of Senator Long's bill and all of the other paperwork and also a copy of the resolution. There are many questions that need to be asked so this can continue. I would be willing to do whatever I can to help.

Paula Hughes: Councilman Vogt has expressed an interest in pursuing a reunification of cooperation and I think it is an excellent idea.

Darren Vogt: The only way change is going to happen is with the people who can make the change. The Charter Government Group is not going to make the change are local elected officials. Before we go down the path of getting the minutia together, which I agree we need to do we need to decide as a group what we need to do and renew the commitment and decide how to proceed. We can't do it alone we need everyone to cooperate so we can get something done with this situation.

Paula Hughes: Councilman Miller you and Councilman Vogt has expressed a strong interest in this issue and Councilman Vogt has said he will take up the coordination of gathering the local elected officials. Possibly you could follow up and gather the information from Andy Downs and John Stafford and I have an existing conversation with the Corporate Council and I can follow up with them and see what is happening in that area. I think it is an effort to bring all of the information to the table, weed through it, consolidate it and get us all on the same page as we move forward. I think that gathering all of the information and presenting it to the gathering of local elected officials.

Mike Cunegin: There is some information that is coming out from the legislature this year and I will get the information to you as soon as I can. Maybe the City and County Council members should take a road trip to Indianapolis and see just how consolidated government works.

Paula Hughes: I think it is a good topic of conversation to bring back to the table.

Roy Buskirk: There is a lot of work that can be done without state legislation and I think we need to take baby steps first. It is sad that county taxpayers have to pay for duplication of services and there is no reason at all that some of the departments can't be combined to save everyone money. I think that the liaisons to each department should be talking and getting ideas that they all can share.

Cal Miller: I have always maintained that we ought to pursue the overall consolidation issue and the department by department consolidation. There is no reason we can't advance both ideas at the same time. One will require a change of state law and one will not. Where do we go from here?

Darren Vogt: I have all of the information that we will need.

Paula Hughes: Perhaps we could ask the Auditor's office to assist us in creating binders for each County Council member plus all of the City Council members and start to build the research. Understanding is the foundation of what we need to pursue. As I understand it the task is that each council member is going to pursue conversations with their liaison departments discussing potential areas of consolidation with both with other county departments and city departments. We will regroup with that idea at our February meeting. In the mean time I will actively pursue scheduling a joint meeting with the City Council. We will try to get that on the agenda for March.

Paul Moss: Quite frankly, I don't get the same twinkle in my eye when consolidated government is mentioned and I am not opposed to it at all, but I think we should have the mind set of looking for a more efficient way of running county government. I think it is a great idea to look at it department by department in terms of are there opportunities for efficiency and if part of that is in consolidating with the city it would be great. It appears to me that there is not a whole lot of overlap if you just strictly look at it from a budgetary standpoint. I would like for someone to tell me what department in the City is going to merge with the Superior and Circuit Courts. I took a little bit of offence to the Corporate Council's letter to the editor; I know several of them that are on that Council and expressed my opinions to them. The end result and goal is trying to become more efficient. I hope everybody remains focused on what the goal should be.

Quite frankly; I am not a fan of bigger government it doesn't excite me at a local level and in my opinion it doesn't excite the average Joe taxpayer as

well. Legislatively that should tie into our discussions with the Commissioners about what our legislative agenda should be so that we can expend more energy to focus on the things the Corporate Council is probably not even aware of like simple things that can save us money.

Darren Vogt: City residents are also County residents and we need to keep that at the fore front. I have made a list of several of the different department could combine some of their tasks and be done without legislation to represent the taxpayer in a more efficient manner.

Cal Miller: I don't view consolidation as a buzz word; within the word consolidation there are greater efficiencies and the ability to react more swiftly to changing economic times; to make a better environment to exist and businesses to want to come here. I can't image that this Council couldn't sit down and conceive a way to have less elected officials, fewer councils and I would be happy to give up my position if we eliminated and found an equally effective way or a better way to operate the budgetary function of county government. We have a slew of elected officials that do important work for the county but the fact they are all elected officials and have their own political agendas; you can't tell me that those positions couldn't be directed in a better fashion and a structure that has fewer executives at the top. That was the beauty of Senator Long's bill. I want to get back to the opportunity to see that happen but address all of the other items at the same time.

Paul Moss: I absolutely agree with you. These other groups have made it very clear what they think should be done but haven't come to a conclusion yet. I am happy to talk to anybody regarding these issues and am readily available.

Paula Hughes: I know that there is frustration among many of the Council members and it is my intention to channel that frustration and to instigate and investigate change for the operation of government whether it is at local level or state level we can instigate change from our seats and that is our task for this year.

There are three reasons to look at consolidation: 1. Efficiency from a financial perspective; 2. Effectiveness in the services delivered to the constituents and 3. Unification of leadership. All three of them need to be addressed in equal measure because they are vital to the operation of our government.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 9:26 am on a motion by Mike Cunegin and seconded by Cal Miller. Motion passed.