

**Board of Allen County Commissioners  
Efficiency and Effectiveness Task Force**

Tuesday, July 28 2 p.m. – 4 p.m.

Location: Main Library, Meeting Room C, 900 Library Plaza, Fort Wayne

Task Force Members Present: Roger Hadley, Kent Castleman, Ben Eisbart, Michael Eikenberry, Ellen Cutterm (facilitator)  
Commissioners Present: Nelson Peters  
Others Present: Fred Gilbert, Harold Kleine, Melissa Beber, Pone Vongphachanh, Clara Sarajanic, Kathy Bacon, Betty Lomont, Norbert Sarajinic, Roy Buskirk, Chris Cloud, Ashley Wierzbinski, Tom Harris

**MEETING MINUTES**

**Welcome**

Ellen Cutter called the meeting to order at 2:07p.m.

The committee reviewed the minutes from the prior meeting. It was noted that Tom Harris was not listed as an attendee; as such the minutes will be amended and submitted for approval at the next meeting.

Ms. Cutter noted that due to a staffing change at IPFW, she had less administrative support and the minutes were now being handled by her. It would likely take a few days longer than usual to post them online, but if there were any questions people could call her. Ms. Cutter also provided the dates and times for the next three meetings, which were printed on the meeting agenda.

Ms. Cutter then walked through the meeting’s materials, including the budget allocation process documents and the pre-allocation summary (all of which are posted on Allen County’s website for the public).

**Budget Allocation Process**

After Councilman Harris provided an update on the budget process Mike Eikenberry stressed the need for standards across all county government units.

**Structure and Accountability**

Ms. Cutter reviewed the summary of options to improve functionality of county government, as collected thus far. Those were detailed in the meeting agenda as follows:

Structure and accountability

*Improve functionality of current county structure, alter the structure, explore both options, do nothing*

#### Commissioners

- Part- time commissioners and County Administrator (Administrative)
- Oversight of Strategic Plan, creation of Internal Audit, and recommendation of budget (tied to Strategic Plan) to County Council (Administrative and Legislative)
- Enhance accountability standards for executive and legislative officers (Administrative)

#### Council

- Requiring more stringent strategic planning as part of budget process (Administrative)
- Implementation of program-based budgeting and/or zero-based budgeting (Administrative)

#### Additional

- Change legislation requiring distinct offices for certain functions to combine or transition to experienced practitioner, rather than elected office (Legislative)
- Transition to Board of Supervisors model (Legislative)

Commissioner Peters noted that there could be tweaks made to rules that mandate a department's existence or how they operate. For example, the Department of Building, Department of Health, and Department of Planning all have state statutory requirements – some of which are burdensome and seemingly unnecessary to the core function of county government. These issues could be collected across departments as part of the ongoing strategic planning effort.

Councilman Harris noted that, for example, there are hundreds of funds that exist across departments and they are set up according to how funds must be used. However, this creates extremely limited flexibility when responding to the unforeseen budget issues (e.g. extreme weather impacts). If there was more flexibility here, county government could be more responsive and effective. Moving funds from accounts would no longer require service/action takes an act of the General Assembly.

Ben Eisbart noted that the more we learn about the functions of county government, the more complex it gets. We are limited in our structure, and effectiveness hinges on the goodwill of department chairs and elected officials. He noted that he wished he had this information before the single county executive vote last fall.

Roger Hadley noted that in any other industry, performance and one's ability to do their job effectively is tied to funding. Kent Castleman asked if there are any service based measurements for departments like the surveyor's office or the recorder's office. Are customer service or performance metrics measured?

Mike Eikenberry asked if we can get around the parameters the State Legislature sets. Commissioner Peters noted that if our community sends a message to the legislators, they will consider our request. The Commissioners oversee 1/3 of the budget and 1/3 of employers. Single county executive would not have fixed all of our issues with one stroke of the pen. He noted that until there is daily oversight of a budget and planning, we will not get the accountability we are looking for. He particularly likes the potential option pertaining to strategic planning, internal audit, and recommendation of a budget.

Mr. Castleman noted that this could create an awkward dynamic with County Council. Can County Commissioners just work more closely with Council? Again, it gets back to getting the silos to show goodwill and to coordinate. Councilman Harris noted that many departments do not do performance appraisals of any kind. Others do their

own, separate from what Human Resources offers. County Council can put pressure on them to participate, but there is really no way to force participation.

Commissioner Peters noted that some within county government will come before County Council and say they are participating in Strategic Planning or performance appraisals, but when you really dig deeper you find out they are not. The Commissioners do not have the authority to tell other departments what to do.

Mike Eikenberry noted that perhaps there was the need for an independent department that listens to customers/citizens and advocates for them. Why are some departments chronic underperformers? What's causing it and what's the fix?

Commissioner Peters noted that this would not get to the root of the issue because there is still not way to ensure follow through. Mr. Eikenberry agreed that there must be a mechanism for enforcement.

Mr. Eisbart noted that the elected officials at least are subject (or should be) to scrutiny every four years via the election process. What about the employees? Most people want to do a good job, but bad attitudes that create major inefficiencies need to be spotlighted.

Commissioner Peters asked how a County Councilman or a Commissioner would affect change.

Councilman Harris noted that the Council does have the ability to adjust the budget. However, individual salaries are not adjusted for performance. Merit/performance pay is a structure he'd like to see implemented in county government, with controls in place to guard against cronyism. Commissioner Peters disagrees on this approach, based on his previous experience with implementing such a system in the public sector.

Mike Eikenberry noted that all County units should be utilizing County HR services, and that would allow for consistency to measure employee performance.

Councilman Harris noted that 80 percent of costs in county government are personnel. Because of this, merit pay is critically important. He agrees that for a merit pay system to work there need to be a mechanism in place to ensure favoritism is not an issue.

Ellen Cutter asked if this gets back at the issue of an internal auditor. Roger Hadley agreed. Kent Castleman also agreed – efforts must be linked with the Strategic Plan. Performance metrics must come from internal audit and not thru a department itself, which may track things differently and inconsistent with other county units. Ellen Cutter noted that for this to work, a vibrant Strategic Plan was needed. Kent Castleman asked that if the Commissioners oversee 1/3 of the budget, but County Council approves all, how can we ensure continuous improvement?

Tom Harris noted that many offices have unique circumstances though. Judicial performance – how can that be measured?

Mike Eikenberry noted that, difficult as it may be, we need to make suggestions that make the county more effective. The task force agreed to hone in on three specific potential actions:

- Oversight of Strategic Plan, creation of Internal Audit, and recommendation of budget (tied to Strategic Plan) to County Council (Administrative and Legislative)
- Enhance accountability standards for executive and legislative officers (Administrative)
- Requiring more stringent strategic planning as part of budget process (Administrative)

### **Comments from the Floor**

Roy Buskirk appreciates the discussion and plans to bring some of this back to County Council. He updated the group on strides the County has made to improve its permitting process, including a new ombudsman who works directly with contractors to expedite processes. Fred Gilbert noted that he was disappointed at the lack of media coverage, noting that this story of the task force's constructive and open dialog needed to be told. He also urged the task force to strongly consider Commissioner Peters' and Councilman Harris' recommendations. He noted that these meetings affirm the good that came from the November referendum. Two additional comments noted a desire for improved roads and that outcome-based strategies resulted in school closures.

### **Adjourn**

Ellen Cutter adjourned the meeting at 4:05pm.